

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT: "WRITTEN ON OUR HEARTS"

OPENING PRAYER

The leader prays out loud:

Compassionate God, you know our wandering hearts. You know how, even though we want to follow your will, we keep falling short or making mistakes. Let your grace tie us more closely to you, so that whenever we wander, we might still depend on your nearness to bring us home. Amen.

GATHERING TIME

Each person responds to one of the following:

- Describe a letter or card from a loved one that you chose to save for a long time.
- Do you have a word tattoo? If so, what does it say, and why did you get it?
- Share a phrase you've learned "by heart:" a memory verse, favorite song lyrics, a daily mantra or affirmation, a certain prayer, a favorite poem.

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

The leader reads the following:

The prophet Jeremiah writes these words during a time of crisis. The Babylonian Empire has overrun the kingdom of Judah, exiling many of its inhabitants to Babylon. Jeremiah is one of those left behind. While many of Jeremiah's prophecies concern the Israelites' failings and God's grief, here, he offers words of comfort. A time is coming when the exiles will return, and when the Israelites will no longer fear breaking or forgetting God's law, because it will be written on their very hearts.

A member of the group reads the passage:

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
(Jeremiah 31:31-33)

The group discusses the following questions, picking and choosing the ones that work best for them:

- As we near the end of a series of Lenten readings about covenants, reflect for a moment on promises that have shaped our lives. Why do we make promises to one another?
- When do you *need* to hear a promise? What promises have changed your life?
- What is the message that God has written on the hearts of those in our community? What is the message that God is using our community to write on the world's heart?
- As we approach the end of Lent, reflect on the spiritual practices (if any) you committed to. How did you do at keeping them? What difference did they make in your daily life? Are there any that you're considering keeping into the future?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader prays aloud:

God of blessed assurance, we thank you for the promises you have made throughout many generations, and for the ways in which those promises have shaped us as people of faith. As we prepare to enter Holy Week, open us up to walk to road to the cross and the empty tomb. May the Word we encounter there inscribe itself on our hearts, erase the record of our mistakes, and mark us indelibly with your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.