

### **The First Reading is Psalm 119:9-16.**

How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes. With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. *[Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm with eight lines for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Lines 9 through 16 is the second stanza of this psalm and each line begins with the Hebrew letter Bet, the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet.]*

### **The Second Reading is Deuteronomy 6:1, 4-9. The translation that I am using today is from the Jewish Study Bible.**

And this is the Instruction – the laws and the rules – that Eternal your God has commanded [me] to impart to you, to be observed in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy...

Hear, O Israel! The Eternal is our God, the Eternal alone. You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### **The Message – Whole Heartedly**

“How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to God’s word.” According to the psalmist, God’s word is a map or a guide for young people. God’s word contains insights that help the young as well as those of us who have lived beyond our youth. Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of this saying, “All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching.” Not only for teaching, but also “for correction and for training in righteousness.” God’s word is wisdom for all ages, for Paul continues saying, “All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching... so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Scripture is a resource for our proficiency as people of God. It is a form of instruction. It helps us to know the will and ways of God, so that we will walk through life according to God’s will and ways.

With gratitude we gave thanks this morning for those among us who willingly impart the wisdom of God’s word to our own children. We are indeed thankful for those who give of their time as teachers. Each week our teachers reflect on God’s word and help our children and youth see the intersection of God’s word with their lives. Of course, we give thanks for those who teach those of us beyond our youth, as they help us to explore our faith ever more deeply, for God’s word is not static or stagnant, but living.

In our faith tradition, we declare that our faith is reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God. That means that we are to have a posture of learning, a posture of openness all the days of our lives, not just when we are young. Our faith is

never a finished product, but always a work in progress guided by God's word and the generations of faithful before us.

I have always appreciated Paul's words to Timothy about Timothy's faith, for he said, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you." Can you name those who were instrumental in forming the beginnings of your faith? Can you name those who are instrumental in growing your faith today? Can you bring names and faces to mind of those who remind you that God's word is active and alive?

Bringing these names and faces to mind remind us that we don't learn faith in isolation. Faith is a communal experience, whether it is around a family table or in a Sunday school class, at a group bible study and in a prayer meeting, together in worship or at a weekend retreat. Faith is a communal experience, where our understanding of God and life is challenged as well as strengthened through each other.

"Hear, O Israel." Moses was talking to the whole people of God, not just to an individual. "Hear, O Israel. The Eternal is our God, the Eternal alone." This phrase validates the Mosaic instruction we know as the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." This is a declaration of required loyalty, a required commitment to God alone. The phrase also begins what is known by our Jewish sisters and brothers as the Shema, which was our reading from Deuteronomy, verses 4-9.

During the late temple period, which was 530 BCE to 70 CE, the Shema rose to special prominence both in synagogue liturgy and in individual piety, a position that it still maintains today. A footnote in the Jewish Study Bible says, "The centrality of this text is likely the result of early rabbinic interpretation of the requirement to 'recite' [these words] when you lie down and when you get up." The Shema has been recited twice daily, in the morning and the evening, by our Jewish sisters and brothers for generations.

"Hear, O Israel." Hear, O people of the First Presbyterian Church of Redlands, "The Eternal is our God, the Eternal alone." O people of the First Presbyterian Church of Redlands, listen to a couple of other translations of this phrase, "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." "God, our God! God the one and only!" "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Notice the nuances of the end of the phrase - alone, one and only. Some translations stress the unity of God, whereas others stress that there is no other God, that God is God alone. What translation speaks to you or who is God for you?

The back drop of this passage from Deuteronomy is that Israel is encamped just east of the Promised Land. For forty years, Israel has wandered through the desert. Though at times during these forty years it did not seem God that was with them, like a faithful mother, God indeed was. God never left them nor did God forsake them. The same holds true for us. God is with us, as Jesus said to his disciples, "Lo, I am always with you, to the end of the age."

And so, we here are to hear this next instruction from this context of an ever-present God, who is God alone: "You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Here is how the Jewish Study Bible translates each of these: your heart means your intellect; your soul means your life; and your might means your physical strength. What does heart, soul and might mean to you? Or heart, soul, mind, and strength mean to you?

I don't think it matters how many different descriptors we were to add, the question is simply, "Do we love God whole heartedly?" Do we love God with every fiber of our being?

Do you remember the last time you did something whole heartedly? When you gave it everything you have and then some more? The first thing that came to mind for me was my rock climbing experience last October. It took every fiber of my being, my heart and soul, with the support of the belayer to scale Castle Rock. Work projects from my corporate days flooded my memory, one in particular where I was the project leader for redesigning and consolidating the usage of two corporate buildings for a major organizational restructure. I poured my heart and soul into the project that consumed my thoughts day and night, as I led a team of talented individuals to accomplish this monumental task within the given time constraints. A youth mission trip came to mind, for I poured my heart and soul into planning and executing a meaningful and relevant week-long experience for 35 young people and 5 adult leaders. I worked with five youths who studied Proverbs with me and together we selected our daily themes from Proverbs, which were supported by contemporary music from the radio stations they listened to! As of yesterday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, I have put my whole heart and soul into the ministry of word and sacrament for sixteen years, serving first in Garden Grove and now here in Redlands. How have you put your whole heart, your heart and soul into something? How have you put your whole heart into someone?

To give yourself completely to a task at hand or to another human being is a risk. A risk fraught with uncertainties as to whether or not it will be worth it. I risked failure, stopping short of the summit, as I attempted to scale Castle Rock. I risked my corporate career when I voluntarily quit to become a pastor. Whole heartedness is risky. Yet, think about half-hearted attempts in your life. Think about the times when you only gave part of yourself or part of your time or part of your talent. Think about the times when you held back. What was the outcome? Was your life fuller and richer or more meaningful because you half-heartedly committed to something? I doubt it.

God doesn't desire part or half of our heart, God desires our whole-hearted response. God desires a relationship with us with every fiber of our being and every aspect of our lives, not to control us, but to offer us life that is deep and meaningful, and certainly full of adventure.

Loving God wholeheartedly simply means living with a posture of openness to God's living word, for God is still speaking today. The question is, "Are we still listening?" Are we willing to give God all of who we are and everything we have – wholeheartedly serving God with our very lives? I pray, so. Amen.