

One of our favorite authors, Anne Lamott, tells this story: "*There is a lovely Hassidic story of a rabbi who always told his people that if they studied the Torah, it would put scripture on their hearts. One of them asked, 'Why ON our hearts and not IN them?' The rabbi answered, 'Only God can put Scripture inside. But reading sacred text can put it on your hearts, and then when your hearts break, the holy words will fall inside.'*"

Let us be in prayer: Indwelling God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Here, smack in the middle of Lent, with only one more candle to extinguish before we get to Easter...you would think we would be trudging along with Jesus about to carry the burden of his cross...and what do we find but a passage about hope, transformation, pardon...and a new covenant written on our hearts!

If we only knew...how God is at work in our midst!

Molly shared the other day, a cartoon about a physicist drawing on a blackboard with all his calculations and numerical jargon filling one whole arc and expanding to the other end...but in the middle of this jumble of mathematical equations...was a big space. And in this space was one word...*"mystery"*. In the midst of all our understanding of life itself...is a good portion of mystery...if we only knew how God is at work in our midst!

Jeremiah, was a prophet of 600-something BCE... The Hebrew people had been divided into two kingdoms, the Northern was Israel and the southern, where Jeremiah was a prophet, was called Judah. Jeremiah had warned the people of Judah, while they were caught between Babylon to the north and Egypt to the south...they would be overtaken by the Babylonians and should not resist them. They resented the insinuation that they would be defeated...and yet this prophecy came to pass. It was said that their idolatry and turning away from God, got the better of them. But when they were devastated by captivity and exile, God lifts their spirits through the words of Jeremiah.

He tells them that something new is about to happen. Different from contracts with the people like the arrangement with Moses where laws were laid down from above and beyond... this time God was going to write these Holy Intentions, on the very hearts of humankind.....and ALL people, men, women, children, from the least to the greatest...perhaps all of creation...would know....There would be no need to ask

because all of humankind *would know* this source of infinite love and light...that lies within our very beings... a truth that is at the very center of our souls!

Walter Brueggemann talks about "core memory" that the Hebrew people of long ago and even all of us right now....have the potential to remember the Source of all Being...a Holiness that is Love.

It is a story of relationship...God with us...working within and through us in very real ways! It is a story about Holy Presence with us now and forever. Do we know it---yet? Are we just beginning to know it? Have we known it all along?

In an effort to use more "I" statements than "we" statements....I should ask if I know it...in my heart? Most of the time, yes...it is mystery but also beauty and an indwelling love....and it is worth remembering. Perhaps it is not about believing or not believing but about choosing to know...if only we knew!

Thomas Merton says that it *is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. It is a way of knowing....this Holy love.*

Kathryn Matthews urges us to expand our notion of "heart." It is not just about feelings, she writes, but about core experience and identity...it is about courageously living this way of forgiveness, compassion and love for one another.

Brueggemann reminds us that the Hebrew people, through the wisdom of Jeremiah, were given the chance to begin again..."completely unburdened by its past!" How refreshing is that? Unburdened by our pasts...as individuals, as communities, as a nation...as the world? Unburdened and *always* with the possibility of beginning again! Beginning again with a new kind of covenant that we know in our hearts! How we need this kind of hope in these days!

Now the words from John remind us that we are moving quickly towards Holy Week. Jesus was preparing the people for what was to come...that all things must die to bear fruit...that indeed, as his own body would be lifted up, all people would be drawn to him...to God's truth of uncompromising love and forgiveness.

Henri Nouwen wrote: *Knowing the heart of Jesus and loving him are the same thing... The mystery is....how we make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God.*

In our own limited humanity, how might we begin to be gateways, for God's larger love? This is the beauty, the challenge and the exciting adventure that is living in faith...

I went to an assembly at Hawlemont the other day...and they were talking about kindness. Now I happen to agree that schools should not teach a *particular* religion, that should happen within families and churches, but I was so delighted to see how this school is teaching kindness, compassion, and respect. Sue Mead led the assembly of school children in singing "This Little Light of Mine"...and she described the light within us as being...*kindness*. She told the children to remember that they cannot hide their kindness but need to share it....This little light of mine, I am going to let it shine! Without naming it as such, she was teaching the children a very holy song! She was telling the children to give their kindness away....

People have puzzled over the words of Jesus when he said that in order to really live, we need to lose our lives....let go of our attachments....and then we will gain this thing called holy love. Perhaps it takes losing something in order to really know what kindness is...

I will close with a poem I heard in an interview with the amazing poet, Naomi Shihab Nye just recently on *On Being*. She described how she and her husband were on their honeymoon in Colombia, South America in 1952. And they were robbed on a bus...everything...gone...money, passports, bags, everything...and one indigenous man who had been riding on the bus with them, was killed.

She and her husband got off and must have looked totally distraught when a Colombian man came to them, listened to them, and helped them find some direction for what they would do next.

Naomi Shihab Nye sat down in the square while her husband went off to find help, and from across the square, she said she *heard* this poem being spoken to her...so she took out her notebook and wrote it down. It is called simply, *Kindness*, by Naomi Shihab Nye:

Before you know what kindness really is
You must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,

all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread.
Only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

May the kindness of God, the love of God, the forgiveness of God, be always written
on your hearts and my hearts...if only we knew...this. Amen.