

I would tell you a story. It is not mine. It came to me from another. A story of hearts and heart, a story of a people and their God. “I will be their God; they shall be my people.” It is the story we have heard, told and retold of the promise God spoke. And not story only, but a journey deep within the covenant of God—a covenant for life that began before creation came to be. And there, cradled in the hands that would cradle the world—bright red, beautiful, pumping with life and love and breath—God’s heart. It is a peculiar thing—to look upon a heart. To carry it wide open for all to see. But there it was. And if ever anything more beautiful; it is that God’s heart that has always been for someone and something new. And so God speaks. And life is new. And God’s breath becomes our breath. God’s life our very own. God’s heart pressing into the life of all creation. And in the evening, in a garden, hand in hand, heart in heart, God walks with the people, with the world, with the life God has created to be.

Hand in hand, heart in heart, life, relationship, love. The people turn away. God’s heart feels the pain. Touching pain will always leave its mark. And God’s heart is marked—bruised, marked, scarred, but still pumping with life, with love, with breath. Still beautiful, some would say, in spite of the scars. Some would say even more beautiful because of the scars. It is a heart marked for the world, for life, after all.

“I will be with you.” God’s heart, giving flesh to the words, to the promise made to another generation. For we have left the garden now, for the waters. God’s promise to a man, to his family, to the animals, in an ark, on the waters. Where trust is hard. Where life buffets like flood waves against the creaking wooden boughs of a boat. Still

God is with them, journeying across flood waters, stepping onto a mountaintop, stepping into the promise and hope of new life. And they see the sign. How could they not? The sign of God's promise, beautiful and bursting in rainbow colours in a bow hung in the sky. And for a moment perhaps we see it, the beauty of the heart, of the love behind the rainbow, pumping, bursting, revealed and given—God's heart laid wide open in love, in life, in breath offered, given; breathed for the life of the world. It is the promise made, the sign and seal of the covenant. God's heart pressing into the hand of creation, as if to say, "Here. Here is my heart. It is for you. Always for life, for something brand new." It is a peculiar thing to be given another's heart, to feel it pumping and thumping and beating in your palm; even while the generations pass once more. Even when rainbows fade; when we can no longer read or understand the signs of God written upon the clouds; when we no longer know the God who marks the sky in bold colours; who marks our lives with bold promise.

"I will be with you." It is God's promise to birth something new into a barren world. God's promise of a son to an old woman and man, well beyond child bearing years; as they pack up their belongings and travel to a new land. And God is with them, journeying across desert and through rivers, to a land filled with God's promise of life. This is my covenant, says the Lord, "I will make of you a nation. You will be my people. I will be your God." And circumcision is the outward sign; they are a people whose flesh is marked with the promises of God. And within the hands that cradle the world, God's heart too, is marked. Marked with life's creation; with life's toil and life's

disbelief; with the pain of life's birthing—the heart of God carried and given, given and scarred, laid wide open in love to and for a people, to and for a world, to and for the life. Is it beautiful? Some would say no, while others might say even more beautiful because of the marks it carries. It is a heart marked for the world, for life, after all.

Hand in hand, heart in heart, life, relationship, love. The story predictable. The people turn away. A promising God yet promises. "I am the Lord your God. You will be and are my people." It's what God promises now to a leader who as child floated in a basket on the river. A child and a people buffeted and beat by the waves of genocide and hatred and fear. "I am the Lord your God. And you are my people." It is the promise made to a child pulled from the water, a child, now a man who has come face to face with God. A man who carries the words of life and promise etched into tablets of stone. Carries the covenant written like the wide-open heart of God to a wilderness people, to a complaining people who hunger and thirst for certainty in an uncertain world. They do not understand the promise, do not see the heart carried and given, given and scarred, etched and etching with life's creation and life's pain.

Year after year, generation upon generation, sign after sign—breath and touch; cloud and fire; temples and tabernacles; mountains and tablets; the smell of smoke and roasting flesh; the throbbing pain of circumcised flesh; bread from heaven and water from a rock; promised land and promised kings; raised poles and parted waters. Hand in hand, heart in heart, life, relationship, love. "I am the Lord your God, and you are my people. A covenant of lived relationship, the journey of life and love. A bold

coloured covenant that imagines life, that shapes it; that animates and breathes life into the lifeless. A bold coloured covenant that clothes the naked of the garden even after they turn away. A bold coloured covenant that births life in the old and barren. A bold coloured covenant that draws life out of the drowning seas of exclusion and hatred and genocide. A bold coloured covenant that is bread to the hungry and water for those who thirst; until they hunger and thirst no more. A covenant lived, sealed, raised, given, in tangible signs of taste and touch and smell and sight. A bold coloured covenant that marks all of life—that seals life in tangible signs of healing and forgiveness, in wave upon wave of God’s unrelenting love and grace. In the beating, pumping, thumping, pulsating, bruised, and marked heart of God.

It is the kind of heart God would that we would have. The kind of love. But the world, the people don’t see the heart. Don’t understand the love glimpsed behind a rainbow. Love declared in commanding tablets of stone. They don’t understand this heart of God that resides in arks and baskets on the water. And when stomachs growl and throats are parched; when skies grow dark and grey, when storm clouds form—we know. We know that rainbows fade. We know that stone tablets can be broken and mountains crumble to the ground. That temples can be desecrated and burnedⁱ and church doors close. We know the buffeting rising waves that wash away every visible, tangible sign of the hope and promise, of the covenant of God.

God knows too. And no matter how broken the world might seem, no matter how we have turned away, no matter the hunger, the thirst, the fear that buffets, “The days

are surely coming says the Lord.”ⁱⁱ “The days are surely coming,” says the Lord.

“When I will make a new covenant. Not like the covenants of old, when I walked hand and hand with you in garden and in wilderness. Not an external covenant that dwells in laws and temples; on mountain tops etched on crumbling tablets of stone. “Now,” says the Lord, “Now you will know me in a brand-new way. Now you will relate to me in a brand-new way. Now, I am writing my covenant, my love, my life, my very self—I am reaching down to touch; to write my covenant; to write on your heart like tablets of stone.” Not a surface relationship, not an outer marking of flesh, but one etched to the core, innate, God-born—our lives permanently marked, claimed, chosen by God—a people permanently marked, etched, engraved in; with God’s new covenant of love.

Yet, it is not the covenant that is new. God’s hope, God’s desire, God’s dream, God’s intent has not changed. Hand in hand, heart in heart, life, relationship, love. “I am the Lord your God; you are my people.” God’s way has always been. It is we who are changed. Our way of seeing, our way of knowing. Changed by God. Changed in heart. And no matter the circumstance—flood or storm, hunger or thirst; barrenness or pandemic or wilderness; in hatred and fear; no matter the circumstance—never again will God’s people; never again will we; never again will all people need to be reminded or remember God’s grace and love. Never again will we be blind to the heart of God, pumping, thumping, beating, bursting, with life and love and breath. Never again.

Because now everyone will know. ⁱⁱⁱ Everyone, from least to greatest. Everyone, from rich to poor. Everyone; outcast and stranger. Everyone. All nations. All peoples.

All creation will know. Will know God. Will see the hands that create and cradle the world, the hands that carry love, hands that carry life, nail-scarred hands that have reached down to touch the pain with the heart of God—marked, bruised, wide open for all the world to see. “The days are surely coming,” says the Lord. “I will make a new covenant with my people. I will write it, etch it, engrave it on your hearts; I will be your God; you shall be my people permanently marked in love, my people permanently marked for love, for life, for relationship with God; with all creation; with one another.”

It is God’s heart revealed, pressing into the heart of the world, into our heart. God’s heart pressing into the pain and fear, into the hatred, division, isolation; pressing into death, pressing into the grave; in Jesus the Son. “Here.” God says. “Here is my heart. Here is my Son who is for you. Here, I give you myself, I will write myself within your heart, you are written in mine; etched, carved into nail-scarred hands, carved in every crack and scar and wound—here I give you my beautiful, pumping, scarred, life-beating heart. Always for life, for something brand new.” And if ever anything more beautiful; it is a heart wide-open in love for someone, for something, for all things new.

Hand in hand, heart in heart, life, relationship, love. Still we do not understand. But. “But the days are surely coming,” says the Lord. “When you will know, when all will know; when everyone will understand. When all creation will come to fullness of life. But in the meantime, “Here. Here is my heart. It is for the world. It is for life.”

ⁱBased on the thoughts of Kelly Murphy, www.workingpreacher.org Oct 2016

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Terence Fretheim, www.workingpreacher.org, March 2018