

The Law of Love
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"Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned."

[Jeremiah 36:28]

"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. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." [Jeremiah 31:33-34]

"Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned." And when that one is burned, "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned." And when THAT one is burned, "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned."

The overarching message of our scripture passage from Jeremiah is this: Don't ever give up. Keep the faith. Trust in the promises of

God, the Eternal, the Everlasting, the Divine Source & Order. And above all, allow the covenant of Love that God carved on your heart to shine brighter than any fires of destruction or despair.

But in order for that Love in our hearts to shine bright, we have to make sure that it doesn't get buried in the muck of the human way of doing things. Greed, vengeance, jealousy, co-dependency – these things cover over that carving so that it's not only impossible for *others* to see, but we've successfully hidden it from ourselves also.

One of the strongest cleaners and clearers of the muck, is the sacramental act of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not a one day holiday. It isn't even a weekend long holiday – it's a practiced-daily sacramental act and it's vital to keeping our heart clear so that our little lights can shine.

Or at least that's what it's meant to be, and it's why God built the need to give thanks into our spiritual DNA, because the act of giving thanks has the ability to shine a powerful light in the darkness.

Even in the darkest of times, be they physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual – there is always something to be grateful for, like: Thank you for my beating heart and my breathing lungs, Creator God.

Thank you for this simple meal, thank you for the clothing that keeps me warm, thank you for the home that keeps me dry, Gracious God.

Thank you for loving me, even when I can't feel it or understand it, Loving God.

When we are trapped in a moment, or a season, of anger or anxiety or fear or despair and feel ourselves getting lost in the darkness – when the law of love on our hearts has been buried – pause. Then ask yourself, “what am I grateful for in this moment?” The air to breath. The shoes on my feet. The way the sun is shining through the window. It doesn't need to be grand or flashy. It only needs to be honest and true.

Part of the reason we might have a hard time remembering to practice the sacrament of Thanksgiving, is because we refuse to ask for what we need, therefore we have “less reason” to say “thank you.” But that's because we were taught by our white puritan

ancestors that to ask for help or aid of any kind is weak and/or selfish. To say – out loud – what we need in a particular moment is to be deemed not self-sufficient and therefore unworthy.

Sadly, this is why we don't ask God to provide, we try to live life, even life in a church, all by ourselves. This is also why we don't turn to the ancestors otherwise known as the Saints, even though they are so eager to come to our aid and to help us. It's also why we refuse to ask our fellow living humans for help, but at the same time we demand that other people read our minds and guess what we need and then give it to us.

Asking for what we need is one of the healthiest and, in our society, bravest things any of us can do. When we ask for what we need, the law of love shines bright from our hearts because we are doing the courageous act of loving ourselves first. Once we learn how to do THAT, then we can learn to love our neighbors and offer what we can when someone else expresses a need.

The more we ask for what we need, even in the smallest things of life,

even if it feels silly, we give ourselves so many more opportunities for the words, "thank you" to roll out of our mouths. And every time we use those magic words, the Love carved into our hearts shines brighter and brighter.

That's why all our mother's called them the magic words you know, "please" and "thank you." Not because it "gets someone else to do something" for us, but because of what it does in our own hearts.

I have daily been asking the ancestors of First Church to come to our aid in this process of selling our current building and finding our next right sized home, especially during this time of pandemic. I've asked Richard Edmunds and Rodney Huntoon, to give their magic touch to numbers and figures and finances. I've ask Marjorie Cary to open our hearts with her gentle guiding spirit. I've ask Jeanne Cate and Alice Coleman to sing peace into our hearts. I've asked Peg Daniels, and Dot & Ed Reilly to keep our minds open for new learnings. I've asked Ruth Jordan to nourish our spirits as she once loved to nourish our bellies. I've asked Janet Smith to give us the courage to keep walking, but also remind us stop and smell the roses. And so many

more.

We are the spiritual descendants of First Congregational Church of Concord and as such we have in our DNA, as a congregation, the strength, courage, and imagination that our ancestors had. We also are beloved children of our God. A God who is seeking to guide us to resurrection. A God who is eager to have us continue in ministry, asking us to trust that even though it will look differently, that we are to take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which was burned.

There will come a moment in the next 10 years, when we will look around and suddenly see the new Garden that First Church has become that God has re-planted and, with the ancestors by our side, that we have learned to tend. And in that moment we will practice, once again, the Sacrament of Thanksgiving. Amen.