

Our Journey
Listening Week Two Curriculum

January 13, 2008

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9

What do you hear?

Once again, this Scripture comes to us from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and it's the overarching Scripture for us during this first 5 week phase of *Our Journey*. It was known by God's People as the she-*ma*—which literally means *hear*. Last week I talked about v. 4—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One." There are no competing voices who can effectively deny what the Lord our God says. And God says that we are loved. Not just any kind of love, but Our Lord is emotionally attached to us and this love drives God to choose us.

This week, I want us to focus on verse 6—"These commandments that I give you today are to be *on your hearts*." Another translation says, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today *in your heart*." What does that mean—for God's commands to be *on* our hearts or *in* our hearts? I think most of us, when we think of God's commands, usually think of the dos and the don'ts. The rules we follow. But God isn't asking us to follow rules. God is asking us to meditate on his teachings in our hearts—so that our obedience is a response that flows out of our hearts—or out of our understanding. In fact obedience is not the emphasis of the shema. The shema is all about meditating on, and teaching, and understanding God's teachings—because God knew that if we understand the words of God—we will hear God's love for us—and our obedience is a natural response. Obedience is an expression of our love for God.

Our relationship with God is like a conversation. God calls us and we respond. God's first word to us is when he calls isn't "hello", but it is always "love"—and if we hear it, we can respond in loving obedience. And the conversation goes on like that—God reaffirming love—and our response.

But tell me this ... if God's love is the key to our faith—what do we do with all of this talk about **sin**? Isn't the Christian faith all about dealing with the problem of sin? Doesn't sinfulness and guilt dominate the Christian landscape? Wouldn't a lot of Christians make the story of our faith all about how God has dealt with our sin? You know—the Garden of Eden, the cross, heaven and hell? Don't we need to focus on the problem of sin? Well yes ... and no.

The Old Testament is very clear. This is **not** a story about sin—it the story of God and God's love. That's hard for us to hear, because we all hear the sin part pretty clearly. And believe me, sin is to be taken seriously. Sin destroys, it mangles, it causes us pain, and it saps us our life. Sin is all over the Old Testament story, but not before the story of God's love. The Old Testament consistently focuses on God so that sin at best is talked about in light of God. But God and God's love are taken far more seriously than the problem of sin. If I could give you an image it would be that in God's world, Love always overshadows sin. Even when it seems that sin is dominating us—and towering over God's love, we only need to confess our sin and invite God's overpowering love to

surround us and we will realize the truth about our world: God's love *always* overshadows our sin.

Some of you listen better with your eyes. So let's take a look at Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son. What do you see when you look at this painting?

I suppose there are two ways you could look at the painting. You *could* say that this is a picture of a son who has endured great sin. Look at his shoes and how torn up they are. All the glamour he once possessed has been lost. He is weak, tired, all but dead. You *could* say that this is a picture of what sin can do—a picture of the prodigal.

Or, maybe this picture isn't really focused on the prodigal. Maybe it's a picture of the Father—a father with open arms to embrace, forgive, and love. A father filled with an all-consuming love who had been waiting for his son to return from the world consumed by sin's lies back into the true reality of the father's love.

Read *Psalm 32*

The ball is always in our court. Will we decide that sin should overshadow love in our lives and keep silent—or will we confess and be surrounded by God's love? How we answer that question will affect a lot of Our Journey together.

Small Group:

1. Do names again.
2. Did anyone listen for God's love in his or her world this week? Are there any stories we could share of ways we received God's love or witnessed God's love this week?
3. Read *Psalm 32*
 - What do you hear when you listen to this verse?
 - What would it look like to "keep this verse in your heart" (to meditate on it and understand it)?
 - Is it true that in confession God's love overshadows our sin? Would anyone have any stories to share of times they have witnessed or experienced God's love overshadowing our sin?

Homework:

1. Breathing practice:
 - Find a quiet place and a comfortable position to focus on your breathing. Take comfortable even breaths.
 - Begin saying, "I love you." to God as you exhale. You are releasing your breath as a gift to God. Inhale---"I love you"---inhale---"I love you."
 - Listen for God's word to you as in inhale ... "I love you"---exhale---"I love you"---exhale---"I love you."
2. Practice praying or reading the **32nd Psalm** as a prayer of both confession and invitation for God to surround you with God's unfailing love.