

PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 11, 2010

Deuteronomy 30:9-14
Psalm 25:1-10
Colossians 1:1-14
Luke 10:25-37

The Word is Near You, on Your Lips and in Your Hearts

To many Christians, these words may seem very natural. One strong current of Christian spirituality has brought the word/Word near, with hymns on our lips, Scripture in our ears through Bible reading and our liturgies, and the Word made flesh incorporated into our bodies in the communion meal. To an insider, these words sound familiar, comforting.

Yet we may miss the anxiety surrounding them, and the challenge they are spoken into.

The text presents these words as part of Moses' last testament, his charge to the people he has led out of slavery and through the wilderness. As they end their wandering and prepare to enter the Promised Land, a new commitment is needed. Many scholars have also seen this text as part of the Book of the Law discovered in the Temple walls during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22).

In each case, though, the words are addressed to a people facing major change. In each case, the people are being offered a choice, seen as the difference between righteousness and destruction, life and death. "You must decide once and for all to worship him [the Lord] with all your heart and soul and to obey everything in *The Book of God's Law*" (Deuteronomy 30:10, *CEV*).

There are moments in life when we have the chance to commit "our lives, our fortunes, our sacred honor."¹ There are some decision-points with great consequences. Think marriage vows, taking the oath of office.

Anything of consequence should give us pause. And where the ultimate is concerned, these big choices, where failure can mean suffering, isolation, death... well, perhaps it is easier to avoid the choice. Truth be told, most of us show little moment-to-moment or day-to-day awareness of the sacredness of all our choices, where this gift of life is lived *always* in God's presence – whether we notice it or not.

When we consider the weight of these choices it just may seem too heavy. Obey *all* the commandments? *All* the time?

But God's presence, God's word, God's commandments are not impossible, not impossibly hard, not impossibly far away (Deuteronomy 30:11-13).

This is a theme of Deuteronomy. Keep God's word close, and God's will becomes not just a possibility, but a living reality in your life. In the *Shema*, the great commandment of Israel (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), the people are commanded not simply to love and confess the LORD, but to recite and teach and touch God's word constantly. This is not blind obedience, but a discipline which fosters love.

With God kept close, what might seem a burden becomes a blessing. Throughout history, we have discovered that keeping faith with God is no light or easy matter. But it is the experience of faith – and in this text the very testimony of God – which reminds us that things go better when the word is near you, on your lips and in your hearts. When slaves and civil rights marchers sing spirituals and freedom songs – the word is near. When an Alzheimer's patient sparkles to the tune of "Jesus loves me, this I know" – the word is near. When trouble or death is imminent and the Lord's Prayer or 23rd Psalm comes to our lips – the word is near.

And it is not only in the extreme moments when we need this, but every day of our lives.

¹ **The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America** (Adopted by Congress on July 4, 1776)

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer, who works with religious congregations in the NJ Regional Coalition in community organizing for economic justice. To learn more about Paul Bellan-Boyer's work, visit his blog at citycalledheaven.blogspot.com

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: South Africa – with thanks to God for dynamic growth in Bible work, the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Xhosa Bible, and for peaceful elections; and with prayers for translation projects (first Southern Ndebele Bible and the new Afrikaans and Zulu translations) and opportunities at the time of the football World Cup; **Swaziland** – with thanks to God for support for the Bible for the deaf project, improved distribution among young people and adults; and with prayers for the purchase of a distribution vehicle, construction of Bible House, support from churches and schools, general fund raising, and for good relations between board members and staff; **Lesotho** – with thanks to God for three new staff members, the gift of Bibles from South Africa and Korea, good relations with partner organizations, and our 42nd anniversary; and with prayers for the newly appointed board, good relations between the board and staff, and a breakthrough in Bible distribution, especially among prisons, the disabled and the terminally ill.

Activity Corner: "God's Word in Your Heart"

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint; red and blue or black markers; red 8-1/2" by 11" construction paper; sheets of white paper; 2 heart patterns (approximately 8" x 10" and 6" x 8"); pens or pencils; scissors; glue or paste.

On a sheet of newsprint and using a blue or black marker, copy Deuteronomy 30:14 across the top; across the bottom copy Deuteronomy 6:5. Using the red marker, draw a heart (large enough to fill the remaining space on the sheet). Invite everyone to share their favorite Bible verse and why that verse is particularly meaningful. Using a blue or black marker, write the citation of each verse within the heart, followed by the person's name. Then ask everyone to trace and cut two hearts (the larger heart on red paper and the smaller heart on white paper), write the words of their favorite verse on the white heart, and affix the white heart onto the red one. Encourage everyone to keep their "hearts" as a reminder that God's Word is always near, on their lips and in their hearts. Display the newsprint throughout the week as a reminder of the nearness of God's Word when you gather for devotions. Conclude by reading together Psalm 25:1-10 as a closing prayer and singing one of your favorite hymns or praise songs about God's Word, or sing the following to the tune "God Is So Good":

1 - God's Word is near; God's Word is near; God's Word is near; it's so near to me.

2 - It's on my lips; it's on my lips; it's on my lips; it's so near to me.

3 - It's in my heart; it's in my heart; it's in my heart; it's so near to me.

4 - It comforts me; it comforts me; it comforts me; it's so near to me.

5 - God's Word is near; God's Word is near; God's Word is near; it's near me today.