

Today's scripture reading is one that we don't usually read. It's not in either series. It doesn't get spoken about a lot and it's understanding because it's kind of confusing. You're saying a lot of the same things over in different ways, but the reason I chose this scripture this week is because I've had a number of conversations that have been weighing on me. I've been trying to figure out what they mean, how to handle them, what to do and everything else. And this scripture reminded me of a few things, so it helped me work through the process. It's very vague, but it does help quite a lot.

One of the problems, one of the discussions I had last week was with Karen Georgia Thompson, the president and the general Minister for the UCC. And I'm sure most of you don't know much about her. She's from Jamaica and she started her ministry at a rural church in Florida, a very rural church in Florida. Like they had 20 active members with where she was at. And so she and I were talking a couple weeks ago about different ways that small churches, like us, feel that the national setting and the conferences are going more to the big churches. They're going more to the Plymouths, and actually Plymouth is a small church in some of their minds. But to us it's huge and we were talking about that and we're just talking about different ways that we really forget about the small churches. You forget about what our needs are in comparison to everybody else's.

And while I was saying this, somebody stops me and they called me a Christian Nationalist. Now that sounds like something I should be proud of right. Christian nationalists. It sounds like something that's grand like you know, you're fighting for the church, you're fighting for America. You're doing all these things. What they were calling me was a white supremacist. They were telling me that everything that I'm trying to do and accomplish for the small churches is racist because most small churches are all white. And we went back and forth. And that really bothered me. That bothered me because I don't think that's necessarily right.

So what do you do in a situation like that? What do you do? Somebody clearly has already made their mind up about you, about what you do, what you represent and no matter what you do or say it's going to change anything. That person, he's like the beginning of today's scripture reading. They've already got focused. They've already got an idea ingrained in their minds of what church is supposed to be, of what small churches are supposed to be. They've got an idea without even thinking about the different prospects of what's possible. Without thinking about the different ways that we can accomplish the same thing. They've got an idea set and that's what they go with. That's what we're talking about.

In the beginning of Paul's letter, he's talking about the letter of the law. He's talking about what the Jews have been studying all their lives. The first five books of the Bible, they've been studying the Torah, The written laws that God gave Moses for all people.

But since it's the letter of the law, what he's talking about is if they don't abide by these. At that time, they were stoned a lot. They were put to death if they didn't abide by the laws of the written Torah. And that's what his image is. He's trying to portray that this rock comes from the Commandments? The covenants, the tablets Are all inside of us. Like a rock on our heart. They can't be changed. Just in there and he's telling us but that's not real anymore. That's not what's important. Not having these Ideas that are set in stone within ourselves isn't what's

important, because Jesus came. God gave us Jesus. He gave his life for us. And when he did that, He erased the old Covenants.

He didn't say that we shouldn't still pay attention to them. What he said was that he died for us so we don't need to have those old ideas set in stone. We have a new system and it's written on our hearts. We have God's love inside each and every one of us. That's the New Covenant that Jesus made with us when he died, when he was resurrected.

I had a discussion this week about what it means to be a Triune God. It's kind of confusing. We know God. We know Jesus and we kind of know the Holy Spirit, Right? We talked about the Holy Spirit with Pentecost Sunday every year. The flame that came through all of us and baptized us with Jesus is death and resurrection and ascension. We know that that's in us. We know that it's a part of us, but it's confusing.

You know, when you're taught as a kid, you have, God, God is above all else. God is everything and then you're told that Jesus is God. But Jesus is also the son of God, and Jesus is like us and like God. I'm 50 and that's still confusing, sometimes. But we know Jesus is a part of God, and then you throw the Holy Spirit in there. And that just makes everything more confusing because if God is God, why does God need the Holy Spirit? Isn't God, just the Holy Spirit. So why is the Holy Spirit something different?

Well, that's what today's message is. It's the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit is that part in our hearts, That part that God gave us when Jesus died. The part that sits there and lets us be a part of the old and the new. It lets us be a part of God and God be a part of us. At the same time, we know we're fallible. We know that we have sin; we know that we do things that we regret. We know that we do things that God doesn't always look favorably upon, but we also know God still loves us. We know that he's giving us that commandment to love no one above me and treat everyone as you want to be treated. That's easy to remember. That's easy to keep within our hearts where the Holy Spirit resides.

It's that Covenant. That's a part of us. It's a covenant that's part of every one of us and all of us did share it. It's written within our hearts, Which is an easy way to remember because love is by your heart. It's fresh. It's alive. It's an ever-changing thing. Like all of our times every day. Something new happens to us. Something new; Something different. Something that's not set in stone, We can change it, we can forgive people, we can move past our differences. And that's what Paul's trying to tell us. The old ways worked for a while. We shouldn't forget about the old ways. We should be open to changing and adapting. God changed how he reached out to us. He changed how he approached us, how he saved us.

Everything that he did prior to Jesus didn't work. It was constantly having new profits. And he's constantly having to do different things. He had Noah; he had the flood. You did all of these different things and then finally, he said, okay, I'm going to become you. I'm going to see what it's like and have a better understanding of what this is, what this means. Am I doing that? He felt more in love with us and that's what Paul is trying to tell us. That day he loved so much that he even put it within us. And if we have a hard time with that, we have a hard time sharing that love. Then we're no different than the rocks. We're no different than the original covenants. We're no different than the tablets. We're there. We're hard. We're rigid and we create more problems than we solve. But by being the living, loving the living essence of the Holy Spirit within us, we can make the world a much better place.