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Lent 1C
Peace, Seattle
February 17, 2013
Romans 10:8b-13

FROM HEART TO MOUTH TO WORLD

You may have read it in the HERALD this last week—the story of how one man's heart brought healing to two families.[1]

It's the story of two young men—one, Kellen Roberts from West Seattle, who died in 2005 at the age of 22. The other, Conner Rabinowitz, age 17, from Minnesota, whose genetic heart condition would cause his premature death unless he received a heart transplant.

> "I would lie in bed at night and pray for a heart to come quickly," Conner recalled.
> "I would think…about the person who would have to die for me to live.
> I prayed for that family who would be receiving such a different call from that of mine."

And then the call came: Kellen died unexpectedly, and his organs were donated with his families assent, to help others. His heart turned out to be a perfect match for Conner.

Connor's transplant surgery was a success, and he woke up a few days later with a new heart beating inside his chest; forever now connected with the stranger whose healthy heart had saved his life.

Both families were open to having contact with each other, and so over the next several years, they began a pattern of meeting annually. During the visits Conner and his mother got to know Kellen's family, including his sister Erin, with whom Conner had an "instant connection." Over the next five years that connection deepened, until in 2011 the bond forged over one heart blossomed into love.

> THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, writes St. Paul, ON YOUR LIPS AND IN YOUR HEART, BECAUSE IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR LIPS THAT JESUS IS LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED.

There's a lot packed into this one sentence, and coming on the heels of Valentine's Day, St. Paul's words might easily be misunderstood.

When Paul says, "believe in your heart," he's not using "heart" the way we tend to—as the seat of EMOTION, but instead the HEART as the seat of human WILL. The place of deepest conviction.

Emotions go up and down and sideways. They're not always predictable or dependable. And often enough, our emotions can get the best of us. A faith that is based on a certain sort of emotional response is hardly the firm ground we need.

HEART in Paul's world bespeaks not something that's transient or fleeting but something that touches the core of who I am, something with clarity of purpose and direction.

[1] Excerpted from an article by Ty Swenson in the February 13, 2013 edition of the *West Seattle Herald* http://www.westseattleherald.com/2013/02/13/features/how-one-heart-healed-two-families-valentine%E2%80%99s

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Lent asks us to consider what it means for us to live out the faith that we hold in our hearts.[2]

ONE BELIEVES WITH THE HEART AND SO IS JUSTIFIED, Paul writes,
AND ONE CONFESSES WITH THE MOUTH AND SO IS SAVED.

There's a movement, says Paul, a natural flow to the life of faith that begins in our core and moves outward to meet the world. There is a trajectory to faith.

It starts with the core gift of trust, which is based on God's unconditional love for us and gives us confidence in our relationship with God, and then it springs outward until it becomes public witness. Trust in your very core—confess with your lips and you end up as one undivided whole: this whole process is what "being saved" is about—not a static state of being that's a reward for doing things the right way, but a journey of transformation. That's what Paul means here by "salvation."

Again, the context in which Paul writes helps us. At a time and in a place where the cult around the Roman emperor declared: CAESAR IS LORD; CAESAR IS SAVIOR, Paul tells the Christians in Rome there is but one LORD we confess—and his name is Jesus Christ.

In the heart of the empire, public witness to a LORD other than Caesar was sure to bring you into disfavor. Yet this is just the kind of witness that faith demands. The faith within us is meant to make its way outward into the world and into our lives. The wholeness and safety that is God's generous gift to us in Christ, is not to be hidden under a bushel basket, but to be shared.

FROM HEART – TO LIPS – TO WORLD.

When the Accuser confronts Jesus in the wilderness, questioning his identity—"If you are the son of God"—testing his heart, and inviting him to accept life on his terms (rather than God's), Jesus deflects his every move. And after 40 days and nights, Jesus is ready to take his confession public.
HEART – LIPS – WORLD.

In some ways the whole of this Lenten journey we're on is about digging down beneath the various fidelities and commitments that accrue in our lives, that overtake, overshadow, and, finally, stand in between us and our God.

Lent helps us sort through it all, purging us of lesser allegiances and helping us to locate the CORE IDENTITY, the indisputable ground where God meets us with the words YOU ARE MY BELOVED DAUGHTER, BELOVED SON, WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.

Until we stand on that ground, until we wade in that water, we'll never be able to say with confidence, JESUS, and NOT (blank), IS LORD OF MY LIFE.

What does it mean to live out the faith we hold in our hearts?

There's a personal dimension, for sure. But it doesn't stop there. Faith moves…it's a verb, right? It moves out from here to take expression in how we speak of our faith, in how we conduct ourselves in the world.

[2] P. Perkins, *Feasting on the Word*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) p. 39.

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The Holy Spirit has called us into a community faith so that we might make a common witness about what God is up to in the world.

And what is our vision?

> Grounded in God's grace, we are called to cultivate faith and trust in our life together, to discern God's challenge into unfamiliar places, and to venture beyond ourselves, so all people will experience God's love.[3]

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE…and God keeps on giving.

The gospel's message is that God has a heart for us. And God is works tirelessly and endlessly so that this passionate love, this heart, beats at the center of our community.

How do we respond to love like that?

When Conner Rabinowitz got the call saying that a heart was available for him, he was overcome with gratitude.

It meant that "a man just died, yet he thought that in his death he could save multiple lives by donating his organs," said Connor. "I was so thankful for this person I couldn't stop crying."

From heart to lips to world—with gratitude.

PRAYER:
God of love, thank you for the hearts that beat in our chests, sustaining our physical lives.
And thank you for the heart you have given to our congregation, a heart designed to move us from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from ourselves to those beyond ourselves, sharing your love in ways that make a difference. Enable us this Lent to return to the core of our lives as Christians, and to live and to act and witness to what you are doing in our lives, with gratitude. Amen.

[3] Vision Statement, Peace Lutheran Church, circa 2006, 2012.