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Written on Your Heart

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Written on Your Heart
A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul
Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,
The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre
A Liturgical Drama for Reformation Sunday, 2003

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 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.

Romans 3:19-28

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Characters:

Dad
Annika
Paul
Kathleen
Campus Pastor
Sean
A family visiting campus

Scene One

DAD:

(on the phone) Anni. Sit down. Are you sitting down? Your mother's coming home.

ANNIKA:

When?

DAD:

Next month. The week before Thanksgiving. She's going to be free, Anni.

ANNIKA:

You're... kidding. You're serious? How could that happen? What about twenty-five years minimum? What changed - ?

DAD:

She's been pardoned.

ANNIKA:

By who?

DAD:

Well, it happens sometimes. Governors get a chance to pardon people before they leave office. Mom was on a list with about twenty other people and – I don't know – the Governor – what difference does it make? She'll be home again. Part of the family. For Thanksgiving!

ANNIKA:

Are you just going to forgive her? Just like that?

DAD:

What do you mean? I already have.

ANNIKA:

Well, let's just leave aside the fact that she was responsible for the deaths of two innocent people. Let's start with she lied to you about who she was. She led a double life that was bound to come out and hurt you and me and Sean. You're just going to give her a free pass?

DAD:

Anni... She's been inside for thirteen years. That's not exactly a "free pass."

ANNIKA:

Dad, she broke the law and now she's out before she's served her sentence. That's not right.

DAD:

I thought you'd be happy.

ANNIKA:

You know me, Dad. I'm never happy. I'm happy for you. How's Sean?

DAD:

I haven't seen him lately.

ANNIKA:

I have to go, Dad.

DAD:

I'll see you in about a month. At least the three of us will be together again.

ANNIKA:

Uh, yeah. Probably.

DAD:

What do you mean "probably"?

ANNIKA:

I have a chance to go on a service trip on Thanksgiving Break... to... Mexico.

DAD:

You can go another time.

ANNIKA:

I suppose. I'll let you know.

DAD:

Anni?

ANNIKA:

Dad, I have to go. I love *you*, Dad.

DAD:

It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

ANNIKA:

(directly to the audience) This is why I like Accounting: it's so much more... accountable!

Scene Two

Enter PAUL.

ANNIKA:

Where've you been? I've been waiting.

PAUL:

Can't wait to get even, huh? Can't live with the agony of defeat?

ANNIKA:

Whatever. Let's just go.

PAUL:

I can't. Haven't got a racquet.

ANNIKA:

What?

PAUL:

I took it to get it restrung and they're not finished.

ANNIKA:

What happened? It was fine last week.

PAUL:

I left it on Billy's side of the room. A shelf came loose from the wall and about fifteen of his books fell right on the strings and busted 'em. The racquet will be ready tomorrow.

ANNIKA:

Great! What are we going to do now?

PAUL:

Let's just sit here and talk.

ANNIKA:

No talk; anything but talk.

PAUL:

Hey, are you okay?

ANNIKA:

Oh, I don't know. I just hung up the phone with my dad.

PAUL:

Bad news?

ANNIKA:

My mother's coming home.

PAUL:

You know, I've known you since last year and I've never heard you even mention your mother. Where's she been?

ANNIKA:

In prison.

PAUL:

Oh. (*What to say next?*) I...

ANNIKA:

Yeah.

PAUL:

Has it been a long time?

ANNIKA:

Thirteen years. It was supposed to be longer. (*quiet*) Do you still want to talk?

PAUL:

I think that should be my question.

ANNIKA:

(*ANNIKA chooses her words carefully*) Forty years ago, my mother was....involved... in a murder. Two murders. She was living with a group of people who opposed the system.

PAUL:

The system?

ANNIKA:

They thought it was wrong that some people were very rich and some people were poor. They wanted to change it. Fast. They got some guns and robbed a bank. In the robbery, they killed two

people. A security guard and a customer. My mother drove the car that got them away. She was twenty.

PAUL:

So they got caught.

ANNIKA:

Some of them. But not my mom. She got away; disappeared into the countryside. She hid out for about ten years and then she started to live a “normal life.” She met my dad and they got married. She was thirty-three. Two years later, they had me. Four years after that, my brother Sean was born.

PAUL:

This was in Minneapolis?

ANNIKA:

Yeah. We had a nice life. Nice house. There was always enough money. A dog and cat. Good schools. Church *every* Sunday. Friends. My mom was my best friend.

PAUL:

You guys did a lot of stuff together?

ANNIKA:

We were starting to. We were even in some plays at church together. She was a really good actress... (*thinking*) it figures. She'd been acting the whole time I knew her.

PAUL:

So?

ANNIKA:

One Sunday morning, two men came to the door. I was thirteen. They took her away. They'd found out about her. And we found out about her. My dad found out about her.

PAUL:

Just then?

ANNIKA:

Yup. I'm surprised he didn't have a stroke. There was a long trial, but they had the evidence. She was convicted of conspiracy and sentenced to twenty-five years to life in prison. All of a sudden there were three of us at home where there had always been four.

PAUL:

How was it?

ANNIKA:

Well, my dad started to work super-hard and got really strict with us. I was fine, I thought. I worked hard in school. I got good grades. I tried to do everything right. No short cuts. We still went to church every Sunday. That became even more important to my dad.

PAUL:

Did you ever see your mom?

ANNIKA:

About once a month, at first. Then, not so much. I tried to forget about her. I pushed it down inside pretty far. My dad was faithful. He went every two weeks.

PAUL:

How about your brother?

ANNIKA:

Sean had a really rough time. He was only nine when she went. He's been in trouble a lot. Kicked out of school. Detention centers. Suspended sentence for a small-time drug deal. After he turned 21 he left home. I see him sometimes.

PAUL:

And how about you? You seem to be okay.

ANNIKA:

I have been. I love it here. I love accounting.

PAUL:

You moved *into* a dorm after your freshman year. This is not the traditional approach to residential life.

ANNIKA:

I'm a non-traditional student, remember? Besides, the food's a lot better than I make.

PAUL:

When's your mom coming home?

ANNIKA:

The Friday before Thanksgiving.

PAUL:

That's cool.

ANNIKA:

No, it's not. It's going to change everything.

PAUL:

You're not glad she's getting out?

ANNIKA:

Can I tell you the truth?

PAUL:

We're friends, Anni.

ANNIKA:

This is going to sound really harsh.

PAUL:

You can tell me.

ANNIKA:

It's not time for her to get out yet. It was supposed to be twenty five years, not thirteen. This is what I like about accounting. On one side of the ledger you have credits; on the other side you have debits. You don't build up debits until you have the credits to cover them. But if you do, you have to accumulate enough credits to balance out the ledger.

They killed two people, Paul. She doesn't have enough credits to be free.

PAUL:

She's your mother.

ANNIKA:

Is she? I mean, I know, biologically, but I don't know who she is. I don't know who I am. I don't know the truth about anything. (*PAUL has become quiet, thinking*) Paul - ?

PAUL:

Oh, sorry.

ANNIKA:

No strings, huh?

PAUL:

Not 'til tomorrow.

ANNIKA:

Can we play Tuesday?

PAUL:

Sure. I was just thinking though, about one thing. It's weird to try to figure out who deserves what in life. Almost impossible. It hardly ever makes sense. (*Exits.*)

DAD:

(*from off*) It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

Scene Three: Annika and Kathleen

ANNIKA:

Was he in your room or not?

KATHLEEN:

Yes.

ANNIKA:

Was it 2:30 a.m.?

KATHLEEN:

Yes.

ANNIKA:

Why –

KATHLEEN:

We were doing physics homework, okay?

ANNIKA:

That's not what I was going to ask. Why after being caught two times do you keep doing this?

KATHLEEN:

I don't know. Because he's a really good friend of mine and we were studying and we forgot what time it was. Besides, it's a stupid rule.

ANNIKA:

The rule is there to protect your privacy and the privacy of others.

KATHLEEN:

It's so you and the RLC can keep control of us. This place is like a prison. I hope you enjoy being a guard.

ANNIKA:

You don't know what you're talking about; believe me.

KATHLEEN:

It's like living at home and going to high school. Rules and curfews and scolding and punishment. I thought when I got to college I'd have some freedom. I can't wait to transfer. This place is obsessed with rules.

ANNIKA:

The rules are designed to help people succeed academically. This isn't Club Med; it's college.

KATHLEEN:

You actually think that living by the rules makes you better? They've got you brainwashed, Anni.

ANNIKA:

I think that doing what you're supposed to do is a pretty good approach to life, yeah.

KATHLEEN:

And who's to say what you're supposed to do in every situation?

ANNIKA:

You know. Your folks, your teachers, the church. You can't tell me you don't know when you're doing something wrong.

KATHLEEN:

You want to know the truth? I feel like I'm sinning all the time and I feel so guilty. I want to be free of that feeling.

ANNIKA:

You have to earn your freedom. Step by step. You don't get it all at once.

KATHLEEN:

(trying the direct approach) Anni. I'm begging you. Don't write me up. My parents are coming up to visit this weekend. They'll kill me. Please. I'll be better. I'll do some work around the dorm. Ground me. Anything.

ANNIKA:

It's your third offense.

KATHLEEN:

(earnestly) Forgive me then. You're a Christian. What would Jesus do? He'd forgive me.

ANNIKA:

(after a pause she tears up the report form) Okay, I forgive you.

KATHLEEN:

(shocked) Really? No strings attached.

ANNIKA:

No strings. But Kathleen, *(looking at her with utter seriousness)* from now on, follow the rules.

KATHLEEN:

I will. I don't know how to thank you.

ANNIKA:

Just look me in the eyes and say, "thank you."

KATHLEEN:

(looking at ANNIKA now) Thank you.

ANNIKA:

And, Kathleen. Don't transfer. Stay with us.

KATHLEEN:

I don't want to transfer. *(She exits.)*

Dad:

(from off, after a pause) It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

Scene Four: The Campus Tour

The chapel. Enter PAUL and a group of visitors to the campus. The chapel is the last stop on the tour. ANNIKA is at the altar rail praying.

This section may be improvised up to the point where the CAMPUS PASTOR enters and PAUL invites him to address the group.

PAUL:

There's Pastor Wetzstam now. Pastor, would you like to say a few words to our guests?

PASTOR:

(Surprised to be asked. He was thinking about something else.) If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. *(Continues on his way and exits.)*

VISITOR:

What did he mean, "make us free"? We're Americans! This is the freest and the greatest country in the world.

PAUL:

I guess he was thinking about his sermon for Sunday. He's a great preacher. Now, where were we?

The improvisation continues until the group exits. PAUL remains.

Then, ANNIKA comes down from the altar area where she has been praying. She has heard what the PASTOR said to the visitors.

ANNIKA:

I've been hearing a lot about freedom today.

PAUL:

From who?

ANNIKA:

Well, first from a girl on my wing who I should've busted for a third visitation violation. Then from the Pastor.

PAUL:

I caught him at a bad moment.

ANNIKA:

No, you caught him at a good moment. That's exactly what he should have said to them.

PAUL:

Yeah, I suppose, but I don't think they knew what kind of freedom he was talking about. They thought he was talking about political freedom, or something.

ANNIKA:

He was talking about freedom from sin.

PAUL:

Who's free from sin?

ANNIKA:

Everybody who knows the truth. Everybody who continues in the word of Christ.

PAUL:

That's pretty good. Did you remember that from Sunday school?

ANNIKA:

No, I just know it. I'm not sure from where. It's like it's written on my heart. I've got to go, Paul. *(as she exits)* Breakfast tomorrow?

PAUL:

Sure. Waffles. Hey, Anni. Why didn't you bust her? *(but she's gone)* You would have before.

DAD:

(from off) It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

Scene Five: Annika and Sean

A month later. The Friday before Thanksgiving.

ANNIKA is packing her backpack with textbooks. This would normally be the day to leave campus for Thanksgiving Break. She hasn't made up her mind to go, but at least, if she does go, she'll have her backpack packed.

SEAN enters. ANNIKA doesn't see him at first.

SEAN:

Anni?

ANNIKA:

(looking up) Sean!

There is the briefest awkward pause; then ANNIKA runs to embrace SEAN. He returns the embrace, lightly.

I've been thinking about you so hard for the last week, I was afraid you might be a mirage or something.

SEAN:

Nope, it's really me. I see you're packing. Are you going home today?

ANNIKA:

I don't know yet.

SEAN:

Mom's there.

ANNIKA:

You've been home? You've seen her?

SEAN:

Uh-huh.

ANNIKA:

How does she... look?

SEAN:

Oh, I don't know. The same. She looks old.

ANNIKA:

How's Dad?

SEAN:

He's happy. It's weird.

ANNIKA:

Are you happy?

SEAN:

Not yet.

ANNIKA:

What would it take?

SEAN:

For you to be home. For the picture to have four people in it again.

ANNIKA:

The picture?

SEAN:

I know it sounds really dumb, like a kid talking. But it's like there's this picture and it has four people in it sitting at the table: Dad and Mom and me and you. I haven't had that picture to look at for a long time. I'm back home now, but there's only three of us –

ANNIKA:

Sean. I'm twenty-five years old now and you're almost twenty-two. We're not children anymore. Things change, *pictures* change.

SEAN:

I know that. But I can't stand it. That's why I left. I didn't think they wanted me back.

ANNIKA:

You can always come home to a place at the table, Sean.

SEAN:

I'm tired of looking at nothing. Come home and sit across from me. *(he turns to leave)* I promise I won't put strings in your spaghetti anymore.

ANNIKA:

No more strings?

SEAN:

No more strings.

ANNIKA:

So you've got this picture on your mind, huh?

SEAN:

It's not on my mind, Anni. It's on my heart. It's like it's drawn right on my heart.

SEAN exits.

DAD:

(from off) It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

Scene Six: Paul and Annika at the Chapel

PAUL:

What are you doing *here*?

ANNIKA:

I had to pray about this one more time. I'm nervous.

PAUL:

You'll calm down when you get home. Can you forgive her? Your mom?

ANNIKA:

It's what Jesus would do.

PAUL:

(Thinks about it. Remembers.) It's what Jesus has done. *(beat)* We'd better get going. The day before Thanksgiving is always the worst day for airport traffic. Where are your bags?

ANNIKA:

They're out there by the pastor's office.

PAUL:

What about that? *(points to the backpack)* Can I carry it for you?

ANNIKA:

You know what? I'm going to leave it here. No books on this trip.

PAUL:

Are you caught up?

ANNIKA:

Are you kidding? Never. Still. No accounting books this time.

PAUL:

Let's go then.

ANNIKA:

Go ahead. I'll be right out. I'm going to hide this by the altar. *(PAUL exits.)*

DAD:

(from off) It's a gift, Anni. Accept it.

ANNIKA:

Okay, okay. I accept. *(pause)* Dad?

DAD:

Yes?

ANNIKA:

Who do I... *how* do I... thank?

DAD:

Turn around.

ANNIKA turns toward the altar, looks at the cross and, after a moment, bows her head.

END