

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 31:31–34

Sermon: “God is Love; God is Faithful”

This Fifth Sunday in Lent begins a period in the Church Year historically and liturgically understood to be the Passiontide. This Sunday can be seen as a transition or shift from the period of repentance, which has been observed during the first four weeks of the Lenten season, into the observance of the Passion of Christ on Palm Sunday, which is next Sunday.

God’s prophecy through Jeremiah also shifts or transitions from a message of repentance to a message of the salvific promise, of future hope and blessing. Jeremiah 30 and 31 are the tipping point of this transition. In Jeremiah 1–29, the prophet speaks to God’s people warnings and exhortations from the Lord regarding the breaking of the Sinai covenant and the disastrous events leading to the exile and captivity of God’s people in Babylon.

Then we have Jeremiah's prophecy that transitions to a message of hope and joy, a message of God's vindication and rescue, and a message of God's love and forgiveness for all people throughout all time. In Jeremiah 31:25, the Lord declares, ***"For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish."***

Now Jeremiah again declares these hopeful and promising words of the Lord: ***"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."*** Here God is revealing that he is about to do something "new." God does not end or replace the old covenant; he builds anew the nation and makes his promise again to his people. He promises to bring his people back to the "land" and again ***"be their God, and they shall be my people"*** (31:33). The restoration of God's people is tied fully to the making of the new covenant.

All of us know in our heads what it means to suffer a broken heart . . . and most of us probably know in our hearts as well. Sometimes a broken heart is a result of unrealistic hopes or expectations—as when many a young man sets his heart on a young lady who never returns the affection. Sometimes a heart is broken by death—losing a loved one. But the most deeply broken heart may be a result of broken promises or as in our text from Jeremiah broken covenant promises.

Some of us have surely suffered that kind of broken heart, that kind of pain. So has the Lord but His love is still certain. His love can repair our broken hearts, even enable us to love again when we don't think we can. He declares to us today through Jeremiah the prophet, he pours his own love into our hearts. By the promises of his Word, the love of God is written upon our hearts.

God's people had broken the covenant God made with them . . . and consequently had broken the very heart of the Lord himself. In our text, Jeremiah proclaims to God's people,

“The days are coming” when God will ***“make a new covenant”***

with his people. Why? What was wrong with the old covenant?

Certainly nothing on God’s end. The Lord had established the covenant with his people and always been faithful to them. He had brought them out of slavery, out of the land of Egypt. He had freed them from the hand of Pharaoh. In the wilderness and then in the Promised Land that he gave them, God had been a “faithful husband” to his people—providing for them freedom, providence (manna, quail, and water), and protection from their enemies (victory).

Yet the people refused to acknowledge God with faithfulness to him. They had broken the covenant. They had been unfaithful in keeping the Law—by empty sacrifices to him, by worshiping other gods, by cruel and evil dealings with each other. Their breaking of the covenant broke the very heart of God, who loved them so dearly and poured his whole self into caring for them.

And for these sins God's people now found themselves suffering. The Lord had cast them far from his love, into exile and captivity in Babylon. It broke God's heart to do this too!

God's heart breaks over each one of us as well. He aches when we suffer broken hearts. But we also break his heart when we break his covenant—perhaps even when we break others' hearts by our sins. Every time we sin, we take God out of first place and insert ourselves and our sins thus breaking God's heart. We do the same thing to those we love when we neglect them or put our own needs and wants ahead of theirs.

Still, God promises to “remake” his covenant with his people and to be their God by having his “law” written upon their hearts forever. Jeremiah's prophecy and the gracious promise of God was that the exile apart from the land would end. God would ultimately return his people to the Promised Land and bring them new and complete blessings.

The new covenant (promise) will come *“after those days,”* after the days of suffering, in other words—after seventy years. After the time of exile in Babylon, the “new” covenant will take hold, and a transition for God’s people will occur. They will be allowed to return to the Promised Land, to resume life and begin again to live as the faithful people of God. The normal life would be restored, a life of worship, sacrifice, service, and prayer.

The new covenant includes a new relationship with God, in which the “law” of God, the willingness to live as God’s people, will be instilled in their hearts. This reality comes not immediately but finally in the incarnation of God’s Son in the person of Jesus Christ. By his presence in the flesh (nativity), he enters our world, and by the Holy Spirit he lives in the hearts of his people, the Church.

Ultimately, the fulfillment of God’s new covenant is completed only in the eternal kingdom of God’s glory (heaven).

Christians today may see this time of Lenten reflection on sin and repentance as the captivity of sin, which will ultimately give way to the Passiontide of reflection on Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the forces of evil in the world.

The heart upon which God's "law" is written is a heart filled with God's love and again able to love. The "law" written upon our hearts as Christians is the Good News and saving message that Jesus has become our victorious Lord and has broken the chains of sin, death, and the power of the devil so that we may live in a "new" relationship with God our Father one of freedom (liberty), providence (blessing), and protection (eternal grace).

This "law" may then also be seen as Luther's third use of the Law, in which the believer desires to live life guided and directed in all thoughts and deeds by the love of God in Jesus Christ and his sacrificial act upon the cross. Having been so loved by God after our hearts have been broken and after we have broken others' hearts we do love again!

This “new” covenant through Jesus Christ and his cross, his forgiveness, and his love motivates the Christian to live in faith and trust, acting according to the “law” written upon our hearts and displayed in daily living.

God has made a “new” covenant promise with his people through Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord. The promise is one of forgiveness and love. Through the atoning sacrifice made upon the cross (the Passion of Christ), our broken hearts have been remade and restored to a right relationship with God. We live now and will live forever with the message of his love written upon our hearts.

Amen