

**Weekend of Sunday, March 21, 2021**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**  
**Second Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10**  
**Gospel Reading: Luke 22:14-23**  
**Sermon Title: "New Covenant"**

**Theme**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

<sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>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.

**Luke 22:14-23**

<sup>14</sup>When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup>He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup>for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup>for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup>Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup>And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup>But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. <sup>22</sup>For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" <sup>23</sup>Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

## Sermon

As you well know by now, most mainline Christian denominations recognize five major covenants that God made with humankind. And four of the five show up in the readings prescribed for Lent and so I have been preaching a five-week series on those five major covenants. The New Covenant is the fifth of those five major covenants and it shows up in the Old Testament Reading from Jeremiah. I imported the Gospel Reading to suit our series needs.

Also as you know, there are symbols given by God that represent each covenant.

- The Noahic Covenant is symbolized by the rainbow
- The Abrahamic Covenant is symbolized by circumcision
- The Mosaic Covenant is symbolized by the two stone tablets
- The Davidic Covenant is symbolized by a throne.
- And the New Covenant is symbolized by a cup, a chalice, or whatever the vessel was that Jesus held up when he said on the night of his betrayal,  
<sup>20</sup>"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

But, as has been my pattern, before we get to Jesus and his cup of the new covenant, allow me to complete the history lesson that I started four weeks ago because it is important to know that these five covenants are not independent unrelated actions of God, but parts of the ongoing story of God with God's creation, and more specifically, with humankind.

Last week we had God making a covenant with David. God said, through the prophet Samuel,

<sup>2 Samuel 7:16</sup>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established *forever*.

So, you might ask, if God's covenant with David is established *forever*, does it exist today? Or has it ended? Yes, to both, and while I acknowledge that that is a confusing answer, that is why we need to talk about it today.

Remember that I also told you that the Davidic Covenant continues the trajectory of both the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. God's plans for David and Israel are

clearly intertwined. Those previous covenants lead to David and now more narrowly focus on the lineage of his “offspring” to fulfill the blessing of a great nation that was promised to Abraham.

One might think that now that Israel is down to just one line, that life for Israel would be better, smoother. (Map 1) Nope, after David died, the kingdom split into the northern tribe of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah. Because of their disobedience to God, lived out through their arrogance resulting in their division, God punished them by allowing them to be overrun by one occupying nation after another.

This might have spelled the end for all Israel except that, as I've repeated every week, the God of Israel is a covenant-keeping God. God's covenant to Israel is *not* dependent on their obedience, no matter how much God desires it and even commands it, and is *not* dependent on foreign occupying nations. God promised even David, that God would punish for his and the nation's failure at obedience, and God meted that punishment out through the foreign occupying nations.

(Map 2) At the end of the Old Testament period, the northern tribe of Israel exists no more except as the nation known as Samaria, their people being the Samaritans. The southern tribe of Judah became known as the Judahites, and then more simply as the Jews. (Map 3) And the Romans occupy it all, and all the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

The situation looked grim and it was, had it not been for the faithfulness of God.

<sup>1 John 4:8</sup> God is *love*.

Fortunately for us, God is defined by one word, and that one word is *love*. So you see, it is impossible for God to give up on humankind. God created humankind out of love, and up to this point in this series, God had made four covenants with humankind, so God is all in. God cannot do anything less. It is not in God's character to give up on humankind. So God must do something *new*.

Although there is evidence of relief coming in the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, it is the prophet Jeremiah that used the language. From the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, Jeremiah prophesied on behalf of the LORD,

Jeremiah 31:31<sup>31</sup>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.

:34<sup>b</sup>I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

In the Old Testament Reading for today, Jeremiah prophesied that God would make a *new covenant*, unlike the ones made before that humankind broke. This one will be written on the hearts of humankind. I take that to mean that God will break the hearts of humankind with the action that will come as a result of this new covenant. Indeed, I intend to break your hearts during Holy Week. You and I need that annual confrontation with the consequence of our sin. Furthermore, God will forgive and forget the sin of humankind once and for all. How is that going to happen? I'm so glad you asked. It's the most beautiful story, and I feel honored to get to tell it to you again.

I concluded last week with a reading from Luke chapter 1, in which the angel Gabriel told Mary,

Luke 1:30<sup>30</sup>"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end

Though we Lutherans don't celebrate it much, the event of Gabriel's visit to Mary is called *the Annunciation* and is celebrated on March 25, this Thursday, about nine months before *the Nativity*.

Jesus ->Yeshua~"God Saves"~"YHWH is salvation" ~ Jesus is "God who saves"

The name **Jesus**, that God gave to this special baby that will be the heir to the throne of David, is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, **Yeshua** which means **God saves**, or in the Hebrew, **YHWH is salvation**. YHWH, also known as the tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God, is so holy that good observant Jews are forbidden to say it. So Jesus is God who saves.

So in this passage, what we have is the proclamation that Mary will have a divine baby, and although Joseph had nothing to do with the baby biologically, God chose

Joseph to be Jesus' father, because Joseph was an ancestor of David, a Benjaminite. By the way, the Feast Day of St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus, was last Friday, March 19<sup>th</sup>. And for the record, Mary was a Levite.

So then, let us begin today. As you know, Jesus came on the scene, and as the Jews were inclined to do, some identified him as the Messiah of God and hoped that he would be the one to return Judah to the glory of the golden age of David. You will hear this more clearly in the shouts of Hosanna next week, on Palm Sunday.

Isaiah 43:19 I am about to do a *new thing*

However, in Isaiah's prophetic ministry, we hear that God is about to do a *new thing*. God is tired of making covenants that humankind cannot honor. As we know by now, humankind has proven to be incapable of loving God back through obedience. So that new thing will have to be extraordinary. That new thing will have to take into account the human incapability of godliness and holiness. And that new thing has to be everlasting. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied,

Ezekiel 37:26 I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an *everlasting covenant* with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore.

God revealed in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, "God with us" came in human form and revealed the true loving nature of his Heavenly Father through his own life's example of preaching and teaching and performing signs and miracles. And when that wasn't enough, Jesus made himself the once and everlasting sacrifice for humankind's sin of disobedience. In just a few moments we will re-enact this:

In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

### In Christ Jesus

- the promised “seed” of Abraham,
- the anticipated prophet like Moses,
- the greater son of King David,
- and the mediator of the *new covenant*,

all God’s covenant promises for both Israel and all humankind have come to fruition. He, Jesus Christ, the ultimate expression of God’s creative and redemptive goal, has come near and inaugurated the Kingdom of God. And the gate to the Garden of Eden, closed by the sin of humankind, is opened by the blood of Jesus, the blood of the new covenant.

Finally, on this Fifth Week of Lent, we have completed the long and troubled story of God and humankind. And it *is* complete though we are still living it because the *new covenant* of our Lord Jesus Christ has taken away the guilt of human sin, past, present, and future. Next week we will gather for Palm Sunday and *mouth* our Hosanna's (after all, we are still in a pandemic) because he alone is worthy. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

### Prayer

Covenant-keeping God, we thank you that you have never given up on us, even though we have been unloveable at times. Every day, but especially today, we praise and thank you for Jesus, your Son, whose very life-blood became your new covenant for us. We bless you in his name. Amen