

## **“A New Covenant”**

Salado UMC—18 March 2018

Lent 5

Preaching Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

“You can’t say that civilization don’t advance,  
however, for in every war they kill you in a new way”—

(Will Rogers, *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 1929).

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Hear the day’s lesson:

**31 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. 32 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.**

**33 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. 34 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 (Jeremiah 31:31-34—NRSV).**

In Israel of Jeremiah’s day, the nation undeniably needed a word of hope. Israel, like us, had broken covenant with God and each other. In fact, broken covenant so often that they and God might as well have nullified the covenant. The people that Jeremiah addressed were either in exile or in despair—or both. Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant. Let’s look at this newness in four distinctive ways.

1) This new covenant will be an internal covenant—God will put his law within them—written on the heart. No need for experts—everyone one has this new covenant inscribed (tattooed) on his or her heart.

In both Hebrew and Greek culture, the heart symbolized ultimate intent and inspiration. Emotional notions, like fondness or displeasure, the ancients associated with digestive organs. Often the Hebrews used parts of the human body as representative of a whole person. In ancient culture people did not easily divide thought, emotion, and volition as we moderns do. The heart is the organ more at the core of the body. Ancient culture understood the heart as a sign of the inner human being, the deepest thoughts, the deepest feelings, the deepest intentions. So deep at times they were incomprehensible, and in some ways, unknowable and difficult to observe—known only by God.

So, the heart is, in that ancient understanding, a word that represents the core or ultimate intention, ultimate value, ultimate motivation of a human being. We can compare these human attributes or characteristics to concentric circles. The inner person is center-most. The heart represents this notion. Surrounding the heart is a larger circle called the mind. The mind includes all conscience thoughts, decisions, and feelings. The outermost circle was the body where all the behavior took place. Spirituality starts at the center and works its way out. Consequently, we can better understand the

biblical directive to love God with all your heart (the very core of your being), all your mind (the most accessible part of your conscious life) and all your strength (the behavior that flows from the heart and mind).

2) Jeremiah's described new covenant will be one of mutuality—"I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Mutuality simply describes "the quality of a contract or covenant under which both parties are bound by obligations (*Webster's*). And as Dr. King said, "All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality."

Think of a few people for whom you have respect. Do they return your respect? Or, if they are individuals you do not know in person, would you guess that they would treat you with respect if you were to meet them? If you answered "yes", then I want you to think about it again. It's easy to confuse respect with admiration, envy, or even fear. If the respect isn't mutual . . . then it's one of them in disguise. God created humans with which to be in relationship. "Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you" (Augustine of Hippo—354–430, paraphrase from *Confessions*).

3) The new covenant community will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. " 'They shall all know me,' from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord." Everyone is privy. No one is excluded from the covenant because included are all people. The opposite of inclusion is exclusion. Hear an unattributed story about Groucho Marx and an unnamed Country Club:

**The daughter of comedian Groucho Marx was once denied admittance to an exclusive country club swimming pool with her friends because she and her family were not members. Realizing what had happened, embarrassed officials sent the Marx family an apology and an application to join. Groucho declined the invitation with the comment, "I wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have me as a member."**

**Someone still tried to smooth over the incident by persuading the comedian to allow an application to be submitted for membership. The country club was embarrassed further when the application was denied. The reason? The Marx family was Jewish and the club was "restricted."**

**True to form, Groucho wrote back: "My wife is not Jewish. Can she go swimming and let our daughter wade up to her waist?" (Source: unknown).**

Following God's lead, Jesus was all about inclusion. It doesn't get more inclusive than, "For God so loved the world . . ." They shall all know me . . .

4) All this goodness from the new covenant comes from God's unilateral action: "I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." Our part of this covenant simply is to accept God's acceptance of us. For us to be loyal to the new covenant means fundamentally to live as redeemed people. Not only this but we live as if we knew God had redeemed us. Sometimes all we must do is live into God's grace, mercy, and love.

**Former University of Texas swimmer, Kim Linehan, held the world record in the Women's 1500-meter freestyle. According to her coach, Paul Bergen, the 18-year-old was at one time the leading amateur woman distance swimmer in the world. Kim when training does endless exercises and swims seven to twelve miles a day. Some media folks ask her, "What is the hardest part of her regimen?"**

**“Getting in the water,” she says.**

Also, may we remember what Jeremiah prophesies to us this Lent 2018: and here is a quick review, replete with numbers:

**1) This new covenant will be an internal covenant—God will put his law within them—written on the heart. No need for experts—all will have this covenant inscribed (tattooed) on their hearts.**

**2) This new covenant will be one of mutuality—“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”**

**3) The new covenant community will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. Everyone is privy. There is no exclusion for all are included.**

**4) All this goodness from the new covenant comes from God’s unilateral action: “I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.”**

May we get wet in a new and blessed Holy Week which starts next Sunday morning. As we enter Holy Week may we remember the God who always remembers us.

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