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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Lent 5  
March 21, 2021

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, throughout these Sundays in Lent, we have been talking about covenants.

We have talked about the covenant God made with Noah and his descendants, where God promised never to bring a flood upon earth again.

We have talked about the covenant God made with Abraham and Sarah, that they would be become the Father and Mother of a great multitude.

And we have talked about the covenant God made with Moses and the Jewish nation, such that God would be the God of the Jewish people, provided that God's people kept the commandments of God.

PAUSE

Today then, we hear about a new covenant.

Today, we hear about the prophet Jeremiah declaring the word of the Lord.

And in that word, the Lord says, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It is 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 they broke."

So God is now forging a new covenant with God's people, because the old covenant had been broken.

PAUSE

Now, I don't know what the Jewish people today do with this text from Jeremiah, although I would be very curious.

I don't know what the Jewish people today do with Jeremiah's proclamation that the covenant God had made with God's people has been broken.

And I don't know what the Jewish people make of these words about God forging a new covenant.

I don't know if the Jewish people see this prophesy from Jeremiah...

I don't know if the Jewish people see this prophesy about some new covenant, as something still out there on the horizon, as something still waiting to be fulfilled.

Or, if they don't give much attention to this text.

I don't know how the Jewish people interpret this text, but I would be curious.

PAUSE

But, what I do know is how we Christians interpret this text.

For us as Christians, we see this new covenant as having come to fruition in Jesus Christ.

For us as Christians, we see these words of Jeremiah as having been fulfilled in our Lord and Savior.

For us as Christians, we interpret this text through the lens of the Gospel.

PAUSE

You see, sisters and brothers in Christ, we have to put on our Jesus glasses to see what our brother Jeremiah is telling us in these words.

We have to get our vision adjusted so that we can observe what God's vision is for his people.

We have to see this text through the lens of the Gospel.

PAUSE

But in all truth, Friends, it is not so much about the eyes in your heads as it is about the eyes of our hearts.

We didn't know that our hearts had eyes, did we?

We didn't know that our hearts have the capacity to see, did we?

We didn't know that our hearts can observe, can look, can perceive, can discern, can watch, can see.

We may have not known that.

Or maybe we just needed to be reminded.

Our hearts, sisters and brothers in Christ, can look upon the world and can be moved by what it sees.

Or, our hearts can be blind and leave us indifferent.

PAUSE

Now, it is interesting.

Yes, it is interesting, isn't it?

It is interesting that we talk about our hearts as though they are the seat of our emotions.

We say things like, "You will always be in my heart. I will love you forever with all my heart."

And we say things like, "You broke my heart."

And we say things like, "Home is where the heart is," and "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," and "Follow your heart."

Yes, it is peculiar that we ascribe to the heart all our emotions, our desires, our passions.

But, the heart is just a muscle that pumps blood through our body; that is its only job.

In truth, it is our brain that experiences the emotions.

It is the brain that triggers the endorphins and other chemicals in our body that make us feel the way we do.

Yes the chemical reactions that our triggered by our senses transmitted to our brains, that make us feel.

But even though this is the case, it is not so romantic to say, "I will love you forever with all my brain."

And saying to someone, “You have disrupted my endorphins,” is not as dramatic as saying, “You broke my heart.”

No, speaking of our emotional state in terms of the heart has been humanity’s pattern, not just in our contemporary world, but also in the ancient world.

The Romans, for instance, spoke of Cupid who shot an arrow into a person’s heart when an individual “fell” to love’s power.

And the ancient Jews spoke about the heart tainted by the power of sin.

Indeed, the Psalmist writes, “Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

No, we and our ancient ancestors understood our heart as the seat of our emotions.

It is our heart that perceives, that sees, that observes the world and is moved to feel, or is unmoved, and so is blind to the world.

PAUSE

So, Jeremiah proclaims God’s word about this new covenant.

And this new covenant is about having the law of God written on our hearts.

The law that was once inscribed on stone tablets will now be inscribed on our hearts.

God has taken hammer and chisel in hand, and God has etched onto our hearts his law.

No longer will we as God’s people teach one another and say to each other, “Know the Lord.”

Instead, knowledge of God and of God’s law will already be written on people’s hearts.

In other words, the heart will see and be moved to respond according to God’s law, according to God’s will.

PAUSE

Now it appears that the apostle Paul embraced this concept of a new covenant, which is written on our hearts.

Paul embraced Jeremiah's prophecy, and he understood that how God writes God's law on our hearts, Friends, is by none other than the Holy Spirit who is at work in each of our Christian lives.

Indeed, Paul says things like, "The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death."

Paul also speaks of the Spirit of the living God writing not on tablets of stone but on human hearts.

Paul also talks about God making us to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

It is the Spirit then that writes God's Law on our hearts.

It is the Spirit that teaches us the will of God.

And perhaps, how Paul came to this conclusion, that it is the Spirit that writes God's law on our hearts.

How Paul may have arrived at this conclusion is from verse 10 in Psalm 51.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Make my heart to see, God, your will.

Make my heart to see, God, your will.

God's will was for his Son Jesus Christ to be born into this world.

God's will was for his Son to suffer and die on the cross.

God's will was for his Son to be raised again.

The mystery of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection is nothing short of God's will.

Pure and simple.

And we can either see it for what it is...

The eyes are our heart can observe it and be moved by it...

Or the eyes of our heart can chose to be blind to it, to be indifferent to it.

But, make no mistake about it...the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ is God's will in its most stark expression.

It is the law of the Spirit, to couch it another way.

It is the law of the Spirit, in that, it is God's expression of love for God's people.

The death and resurrection of God's Son is God's law, it is God's Gospel for God's people, it is God's new covenant.

And it is this that is written on our hearts, written with indelible ink, written with a Sharpie.

It is this message of Christ's death and resurrection that is tattooed on our hearts.

This message that is embossed on our hearts.

This message that is carved, inscribed, etched, incised, chiseled, and otherwise branded on our hearts.

And as Jesus says, to do the will of God as that which is written on our hearts, means that we must follow Jesus.

We must serve as Jesus served, love as Jesus loved, forgive as Jesus forgave, and bestow grace as Jesus bestowed grace on us.

In short, to do the law of the Spirit, to do God's will, to be like Jesus, is to die to our love of self, and rise to express extravagant love toward our neighbor.

We must die to our love of self and rise to express extravagant love toward our neighbor. We must die and rise again.

PAUSE

And maybe, just maybe the best way to walk this path of dying to our love of self, so that may rise to express extravagant love toward our neighbor...

Maybe the best way to walk this path of Jesus is to call upon the Spirit of Christ regularly...to call upon the Spirit of Christ over and over again...to call upon the Spirit of Christ that already abides in us.

PAUSE

I wonder, how many of us actually call out to the Spirit of God inside us.

We may pray to God whom we understand to be out there somewhere.

We pray to God who is up in heaven. We pray to God whom we may understand to be near us.

But how many of us actually pray to the Spirit of God that is at home inside us.

We need to do this, Friends, to remind ourselves that Spirit of Christ has written God's law on our hearts.

PAUSE

Pray with me now, if you would.

Powerful Spirit, stir within each one of us, who is within hearing of my voice right now. Stir in us because you abide in us.

Powerful Spirit, we call to you, for we know that you empower us with life at this very moment.

We know that you make us to breathe and to have consciousness, and you make us to discern God's will.

Powerful Spirit, you have written on our hearts God's law, the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

...the message of redemption...the message of death and resurrection...

...the message of dying to love of self, and rising to love our neighbor.

Powerful Spirit, cleanse our hearts, renew a right spirit within us.

Powerful Spirit, we praise you for making us ministers of your new covenant, not of the letter but of your life-giving power.

Powerful Spirit, we praise you, and we call on you to be sustain us now and always. Amen.