

GOD RENEWS HIS COVENANT
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JER 31:31-34
MAR 22, 2015

³¹ “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,
³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Sometimes when things are broken, even when repaired,
and put back together, they are never as strong as before.
But sometimes, the weld or splint used to repair what is broken
is stronger than the original material
so the place that was broken ends up stronger.

This is not a reason to break anything
but it is a reason that things are worth repairing.
In text Jeremiah says this is true of God’s covenant
which he pictures as being like a marriage.

Covenant is relationship formed between two parties
usually sealed by certain actions and objects
like holding hands and exchanging rings.
But Jeremiah speaks of this covenant being broken
and of a new covenant.

This is the source of the language Jesus uses when
he talks about a new covenant in his blood,
and when we talk about an old and a new testament.
Rather than thinking of an old covenant being replaced
think of it as being renewed.

because the new covenant involves the same parties
and has the same purpose
but just a different cause and effect.

GOD LEADS US BY THE HAND TO KNOW HIM
GOD’S COVENANT IS BROKEN BY OUR REJECTION
GOD’S FORGIVENESS LEADS US BY THE HEART

GOD LEADS US BY THE HAND TO KNOW HIM

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God pictures his covenant with Israel as being like a marriage where he is the husband who will faithfully provide & protect. He pictures himself like ancient groom leading bride by hand from where she used to live to his own home which may be a place she has never been before.

in fact, before the wedding, ancient bride & groom may not have known each other, but they would get to. Word in v. 34 for “know” the Lord is same word as in Genesis where KJV translation says “Adam knew his wife.”

It is an intimate knowledge, not just an acquaintance. This is kind of faithful relationship God wanted with Israel. But how would they know a God who was unseen?

God had ways he led them by the hand to himself, that is, things he had them do. He had them build a tabernacle, later a temple, which showed, even though they didn’t see him, he was always with them. He had priests, described in today’s epistle reading, to show that this relationship required an intermediary. They performed sacrifices to show that shedding of blood was necessary to remove the uncleanness of sin. Each of these things pointed ultimately to Jesus, and the new covenant in his blood just like the things we do here in this place, washing in Holy Baptism, receiving Holy Communion, are ways God leads us by the hand to know him because he wants to have a personal relationship with him. Ancient covenants were usually made mutually by two parties who joined hands & agreed on what each would do. But God’s covenant was one sided. God alone made promises about what he would do and then told Israel what they would do in response. then they trusted and relied on his promises.

GOD'S COVENANT IS BROKEN BY OUR REJECTION

God laments my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,

Purpose of God's covenant in which he led them by the hand was not just that they go through the motions but that they were led to an intimate knowledge of God and what his great love for them was like.

But the people weren't interested in knowing God.

They weren't interested in hearing what he had to say or in spending time with him.

And maybe it was because they didn't really want him to have an intimate knowledge of them and what they were like inside.

They wanted to hide the shame of their sinful desires and their selfishness and laziness and mean hearts.

The intimacy God intends in marriage & relationship with him requires openness, which means vulnerability, being able to be hurt.

It means risking being hurt by what the other might think of me if I was open

But without this kind of openness, there is no real love.

Israel was not ready to take the risk of trusting & loving God.

Instead, they took God's gifts and turned their backs on him and followed their feelings to other lords, other gods that seemed to be fine with multiple partners.

So the covenant of God's promises to them was broken not by God who made them and always faithfully does exactly what he says

but by the people who didn't receive what was promised because they didn't believe what God said.

The reason the old covenant was broken was not because there was something wrong with the covenant and the things God led the people by the hand to do but because there was something wrong with the people who refused the intimacy God wanted to lead them to.

Let us recognize how the same things can be true of us.

God has promised us also that he will always be with us and that he is leading us to his eternal home for us.

This gives us hope, peace, comfort and joy but it doesn't come from just going through the motions of church ceremonies without genuine faith,

without being open with God about our sins
and sincerely desiring to know him and his love.
But the good news is that God is still faithful to his covenant
and to us, and so...

GOD'S FORGIVENESS LEADS US BY THE HEART

³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

What creates the new covenant is God's forgiveness
because in this covenant what leads us is seeing that
in spite of our brokenness and unfaithfulness,
God still loves us and forgives us.

This happens because God was willing to love us openly
and take the risk of making himself vulnerable to us.
And so Jesus came, as God planned & promised all along
to be God with us in a tabernacle of mortal flesh,
to be the mediating priest who experiences our sufferings
to accept the rejection of those who refused to know God
and allow himself to be hurt, to die
and so to be the once and for all sacrifice
whose blood signs and seals the new covenant
in which God gives us the forgiveness of our sins.

This is what grips us not just by the hand but by the heart
and leads us to where God wants us to go.

This covenant too is one sided, all depends on what God does.
He says, This is the covenant I will make.. I will put my law..
I will be their God...for I will forgive.

This covenant too still involves actions of God that lead us
through the water of Holy Baptism
to the altar to receive Jesus' body and blood
and words of God spoken by brothers & other mediators.

But this covenant too calls for the trusting openness of faith
through which we believe what he writes on our hearts
and receive his forgiveness and live as his people

So that we do the things God wants us to do not just because
his law says we have to but because our hearts want to

and we come to know the Lord not just second hand
because of what a neighbor or brother says
but because we have a first hand knowledge of him.
It is when we are open about our sins and cling to his grace
that we know personally the peace of his forgiveness.
It is when we are open about our weakness and needs
and rely on his wisdom and will that we know personally
the comfort of his powerful help.
It is when we believe in his truth
that we know personally the hope of what he promises.
This is new God's covenant, an intimate personal relationship
in which he knows us and we know him.

GOD LEADS US BY THE HAND TO KNOW HIM
by the things he has done for us and things he has us do.
GOD'S COVENANT IS BROKEN BY OUR REJECTION
when we refuse to go beyond superficial actions
to opening ourselves up to being known by God
and fully knowing him.
GOD'S FORGIVENESS LEADS US BY THE HEART
when Jesus opens himself to hurt and death
I order to forgive our sins
and so renew the covenant in which we know God by faith
and so live as his dear people.