

*The Fifth Sunday in Lent*  
March 29, 2009  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Jeremiah 31:31-34

***"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (NIV)***

"It's out with the old and in with the new." We hear about the "new and improved" all of the time. In our consumer driven world we are constantly bombarded with the new, new, new. But for many of us we are more comfortable with the old. We just figured out how to use about every feature on our computer or cell phone and now we need a new one? We like our old driver and set of golf clubs, but everyone is telling us we need new ones. We know the time is coming to search for a new car, but we hate to let go of old reliable. For some of us we like to hold onto the old instead of always going after the new.

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, I pray that this is not the case with the covenants God makes with His people. For the new covenant is far superior. It would be foolish to hold onto the old, for in this new covenant there is forgiveness for all of our sins. This morning as we look to God's Word and His covenant of grace we find without a doubt that in this case: **Newer Really Is Better!**

We read here from Jeremiah: ***"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.*** The Lord says He will make a new covenant with His people. This new covenant is necessary. Why? Not because the old covenant itself was a bad one. God graciously chose Israel to be his people. God promised to bless them and keep them and provide for them. He even told them what to do in every aspect of their life. He told them what to eat, how and when to worship, and exactly how they were to live with one another. He also gave them the ten commandments. Now all God asked was that they listen to Him. All God asked was for them to do what He commands and be faithful to Him. It was like God entered into a marriage with Israel and the Israelites made their promises. *"We will love you God. We will be faithful to You, O Lord. We will do everything You command."*

But Israel was like a wife who cheats on her husband not just once, but again and again and again. While God was faithful, they were unfaithful again and again and again. Before the ink even dried on that contract God's people had failed terribly. Before

Moses gets down the mountain the people were already breaking God's first commandment as they bowed before a golden calf. The Lord led them out of Egypt, gave them a great land and provided for them, but they turned from Him to idols. So God sent Jeremiah to proclaim judgment against them and tell them the Babylonians would conquer and capture them and drive them out of their land. Israel broke God's gracious covenant with them. They failed miserably to live up to their side of the agreement.

To make matter worse this covenant of Moses and Sinai became so in ground in these people that they misused it and made it a way of salvation. They forgot that this covenant was meant to point then to the new covenant. People in Jeremiah's day thought nothing bad could happen to them if they carried out some of their prescribed sacrifices and went through some of the religious motions and were God's people still in name. These laws and regulations that governed every aspect of their lives replaced true trust in God's promises and their works became the source of their comfort and hope. This covenant did not work because the people once again failed miserably!

What if God said this to us every morning? *"If you are faithful to Me today, I will protect you. If you obey all that I ask you to do today, I will bless you. If you keep all my commands, then you will be mine and I will be your God."* How would we do with such a two sided agreement? As our first wicked thought enters our head shortly after we get out of bed, as we already speak a mean word to someone even before breakfast, as go through the day and sin, how confident would we be of God's protection and blessings? Would we be sure that we are God's children and He is our God because of our faithfulness to Him? Do we want God's love for us to depend in any way or form on how we love Him?

Yet, even today some want to live this way. They want a God who loves them and forgives them based on what they do for God. They make their own works the way for salvation. We too can fall into this foolish thinking that we can earn something before God by what we do. We too can fall into having a false comfort and hope in what we have done. While God did not enter that old covenant with us, we too have broken God's commands. To think we can live with God based on what we have done leaves us to face God with our sins and places us under God's judgment.

That's why Israel and us need this new covenant that God so graciously gives His people. Please understand that this new covenant, this contract, is not new in the sense of time. This new covenant was there well before God gave Israel the two-sided covenant on Mt. Sinai. The new covenant came much earlier to Abraham. In fact, the new covenant goes way back to the promise made in the Garden of Eden. So how is this a new covenant? Because it is new in the sense that it is better. It is completely superior to the old covenant. Here we see that newer is really better. ***"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."***

Do you see why this newer covenant is really better? The old was put in effect only for a time, the new covenant is timeless. The old was given to the nation of Israel, the new covenant is for all people regardless of race, ethnic, or nationality. While Israel

was told how to live and what to do in every aspect of their lives, this new covenant has no rules, no laws, or no regulations that have to be kept. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone, this new is written on the hearts of God's people. The old came through Moses, the new is through Jesus Christ. The old was a two-sided contract, this new covenant is totally one-sided. We can't mess this one up because we are left completely out of it. The best part of this new covenant is that it provides forgiveness. Our sin, our guilt, our wickedness is taken away and God remembers it no more!

Think of the night before Jesus died and what Jesus gave to His people in that upper room as He said *"this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."* In Jesus, God removes all the ifs in our relationship with Him. He just says to us when we get up every day: *"I love you and will protect you today. I will bless you. You are my people and I am your God. You know me because I put faith into your heart. You are my child because I made you my own and gave you a new birth at your baptism. I have taught you, from the least of you to the greatest, that Jesus is your Savior. In my Son, you are righteous and all your sins are forgiven and forgotten again this day."*

This dear friends, is the new covenant. It is a covenant signed in blood, the blood your Savior poured out for your sins on the cross. It is a contract sealed by an open tomb, as Jesus proved death itself could not hold Him. It is a totally one sided covenant God makes with you. It is an agreement of grace that God made to us unconditionally when He bound us to Him through water and the word, and that He keeps us in through the gospel. This is the new covenant that we continue to eat and drink in His Holy Supper assuring us that our sins really are taken away. Our sins really are forgotten by God. He remembers them no more for they were all placed on Jesus and buried with Jesus.

The next chapter of Jeremiah is an interesting one because God tells Jeremiah to go and buy a field. Would you buy a piece of land in a country that you knew for sure was about to be taken and overthrown? Yet, so sure was God's promise to return some exiles to Judah, so sure was God's promise to send a Messiah through them, so sure was God's covenant of love and grace and forgiveness for all people, that Jeremiah was to buy that property trusting in God's promises as though they were good as done.

We too have God's promises. We have seen God fulfill His new covenant promises in Jesus. In one week from today we will watch Jesus ride into Jerusalem to sign and seal the deal. Now, like Jeremiah, we can be confident and we have every reason to trust all of God's sure promises. We are God's people, our sins are forgiven, and our mansion in heaven is already purchased because our faithful God has done it all for us. Newer really is better! Amen.

