

INI - SDG

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2009

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34 *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 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 in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Theme: TIME FOR SOMETHING NEW

- The fault of the Old Covenant
- The promise of the New Covenant

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Every so often we feel the urge to get something new. You’ve been doing the same thing the same way for so long, that doing something new is very exciting. Life seems a little boring and monotonous, so you try something new to liven things up. Maybe it is painting the walls of your kitchen a new color. Maybe it is trying a new recipe for dinner. The old seems boring and worn out, the new seems exciting and fresh.

Pastors are often given the advice to not try anything drastically new at a congregation until you have been there for at least three years. The fear is that a pastor will come into a new congregation and try new things not because the congregation is asking for it, but because he has decided that this is the way things should be. After about three years, the pastor and the congregation have developed a relationship and know each other pretty well.

Having been your pastor for almost four years now I think it is time to liven things up here at Prince of Peace and try some new things. We’ve been doing much of the same things we did when this congregation started 45 years ago. This is exciting and I’ve been waiting quite a while for this. I hope this new policy injects life, energy, and excitement into our congregation. The new thing I have to announce this morning is: FORGIVENESS.

Now, before you begin to think that I have lost my mind and don’t realize that the message of forgiveness has been a part of this congregation since it’s inception, allow me to elaborate. In our text for this morning the LORD makes known that it is time for something new for our salvation. He explains the faults of the old covenant and gives the promises of the new covenant. May this new thing which God has done for us in Christ Jesus, refresh and excite us as we consider what great things God has done for us!

## - THE FAULT OF THE OLD COVENANT

In our text, the LORD mentions a covenant made with the Children of Israel, ***“in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”*** This is what we refer to as the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was a two-sided agreement made between God and the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai. There were conditions to this covenant. God gave His requirements of things which the Children of Israel could and could not do. We are most familiar with the conditions found in the 10 Commandments. If they kept their end of the covenant God promised to be their God and all the blessings that come with being His people.

Their end of the covenant required that the Children of Israel worship and serve only the LORD God. They were not use His name in vain and remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. They were to honor their father and mother and not kill their neighbor. They were not commit adultery with their neighbor’s spouse and nor steal his possessions. They were not to ruin the good name and reputation of their neighbor by bearing false witness against him. And they were not even to sinfully desire their neighbor’s living and non-living possessions, whether it be their house, their wife, or their livestock. Along the 10 Commandments, the covenant had requirements for how they would worship the LORD God and governmental laws for the nation of Israel. The requirements of the covenant were written in stone and could not be changed or altered in any. It was a non-negotiable covenant.

As for God, His part of the covenant was to lead them, protect them, and be their God. He would give them the Promised Land of Canaan as an inheritance. He would give them victory over their enemies and make sure that all their needs were provided for. These were the terms of that two-sided covenant.

At Mount Sinai, Moses brought the people the terms of the covenant and read them to the people. Upon hearing them the Children of Israel agreed to their end of the covenant. They said with one voice, ***“All the words which the LORD has said we will do.”*** (Ex 24:3) Right then and there they signed their name to this covenant. To seal the people to the covenant, Moses built an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai and had oxen offered on the altar. Half of the blood of the oxen was put in a basin and the other half was sprinkled on the altar. Moses then took the blood in the basin and sprinkled it on the people and proclaimed, ***“Behold, the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to these words.”*** (Ex 24:8) The blood of the sacrifice sealed this two sided covenant between the Children of Israel and the LORD God. He would be their God and they would be His own special people. Thus the Old Covenant was a sealed deal.

As He always does, the LORD God was faithful in keeping up His end of the covenant. From Mount Sinai the LORD lead the Children of Israel through the wilderness. He provided for all their bodily needs. He protected them from countless enemies that were larger in number and better armed. He brought them to the Promised Land of Canaan. He cleared out some of the other nations in Canaan Himself, others nations God gave the Children of Israel the ability to defeat and drive out. God was faithful in keeping His end of the covenant.

But the Children of Israel were another story all together. Though the terms of the covenant were not overly burdensome, the Children of Israel broke their covenant agreement again and again. Their violation of the Old Covenant was so great that they actually brought idols into the Temple of the LORD God and there worshiped false gods! Through out the Old Testament we hear of one prophet after another being sent to the Children of Israel to remind them of the terms of the covenant that their fathers had agreed to. While they did repent, they would go on to break the covenant again and again.

That brings us to the words of our text here in Jeremiah 31. The words of the LORD in our text are heartbreaking to hear. The LORD speaks of the covenant which He made at Mount Sinai ***“when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.”*** He speaks of this covenant with Israel as being like a marriage. The LORD was as faithful husband to them. He was faithful, loving, kind, and protective of His bride. He was faithful to His marriage vows. But Israel His bride was like a prostitute who continually was unfaithful and repeatedly committed spiritual adultery. She slept around with the false gods of this world.

These are the faults of the Old Covenant. The fault is not with God. He ever remained faithful to Israel. But men failed to keep their end of the covenant. If we are saved by a two sided covenant we will fail just as miserably. If God requires us to do something for Him to give us eternal life, this covenant will be broken. We too commit spiritual adultery every time we break God’s Law - every time we fail to love the LORD God above all else and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The fault is not with the covenant nor with God being faithful, but with man who fails to keep it.

#### THE PROMISE OF THE NEW COVENANT

Because of man’s failure to keep the conditions of the Law, God declared that it was time to do something new. The old failed, the new would not. Listen to the terms of the new covenant: ***“Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those day, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be My people.”*** Notice who is the acting party in this agreement. Since the two-sided covenant failed because of man, the requirements of the New Covenant are entirely one-sided. GOD will make the new covenant with His people. GOD will write the law not on tablets of stone, but in the minds and on the hearts of His people. The new covenant is wholly dependant on God to bless His people.

The LORD continues to explain the terms of this New Covenant in the last verse of our text. ***“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*** If you’ve ever read through the book of Leviticus, you begin to understand how detailed the Old Covenant was. There were details about what made someone ceremonially clean or unclean. There were details about what someone had to do to become ceremonially clean. There were lists of animals that were okay to eat and other animals that were unclean and could not be eaten. Because of all these details, the people needed to be taught again and again the application of these laws. But the New Covenant is different. In this one sided agreement God promises to do the teaching Himself. He will write His law in the mind and heart of His people, and they will know Him.

Has God faithfully kept His conditions of the New Covenant? To find the answer we need look no further than the cross of Christ and the empty tomb. The New Covenant was implemented when Christ was crucified. Just as Moses sacrificed oxen and sprinkled the people with the blood of the oxen when the Old Covenant was sealed, so too blood was shed to seal the New Covenant. Echoing the words of Moses at Mount Sinai, Jesus speaks of His blood when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, saying, ***“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”*** (Mt 26:28) The shed blood of Christ sealed the deal for the

New Covenant. His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead is proof that God has forgiven our iniquity and remembers our sin no more. Unlike the Old Covenant, there is no way for us to ruin the New Covenant because all the action was dependant on God and was accomplished by God when Christ was crucified.

The other terms of the New Covenant are done when a person is brought to faith in Christ. Either through baptism or through the preaching of the Gospel, God the Holy Spirit enters the heart of man and creates the new man of faith. Insofar as we have this new man of faith we do not need to be taught by any man. The Holy Spirit has written the law of God in our minds and in our hearts. Our new man of faith knows that love is the fulfillment of the Law and delights to do the will of God. The Holy Spirit teaches us Himself about God and we know Him. However, because we continue to have that corrupt Old Adam in us, that knowledge is never perfect nor is our keeping of the Law perfect. But what God has worked in us by His Spirit is evidence that God has faithfully kept His New Covenant.

So this new thing is pretty exciting, isn't it?! Unlike the Old Covenant, the new covenant isn't dependant on our doing anything. The responsibility of keeping the New Covenant is entirely dependant on God. And He has faithful kept the covenant He has made with us. Sealed in the blood of Christ crucified and verified by His resurrection from the dead, this covenant is a done deal. God has forgiven all our iniquity and He remembers our sin no more. Now through His Holy Spirit at work in you, ***you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*** (1Pt 2:9-10) Praise be to our faithful God for making this new covenant of forgiveness! Amen.