

Sermon – 5th Sunday in Lent 2021

I wonder how many of you promised yourself to take up Bob's challenge of reading the Bible in a year and finished it! I started but confess I didn't get as far as Jeremiah! But now, I *have* read Jeremiah for today's sermon prep, I can see that there is a vast difference between a promise and a covenant. If I had promised Bob I would stick with it, I would have broken that promise – a one-sided agreement. If Bob had also promised to support me in the task but hadn't, that would have been a two-party agreement – a covenant broken! The explanation is because today's sermon is about being confident in the new covenant God has made with us.

Throughout the bible God makes covenants with his people, starting with Adam, through Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Levites, King David – on they go, God making covenants with his people. But when you look at those covenants, they are all based on keeping the human side of the agreement, like don't eat the forbidden fruit, or obey the 10 commandments and Leviticus. God

promised us everything we could ever want – a garden of Eden, no more floods, the Promised Land. Poor old God never stood a chance really, because all those covenants depended on his people obeying his law, and people aren't very good at obeying law's – not even "don't eat an apple", never mind getting as far as Leviticus!

But then, we get to Jeremiah, and when this passage was written, God and Gods people were walking a difficult path and so God shares his plans for something new to happen! God tells Jeremiah he is going to make a new covenant – not one based on the written law, but one where God actually imprints his law in our hearts and minds by his spirit. He is going to put the law inside us, write it on our hearts and make us his forgiven people with no sin separation, and he will be our God. He says we will know him, all of us, from greatest to least. In addition to that, He will forgive our iniquity and remember not one single sinful thing we ever did or are going to do. Imagine that! What is our commitment? What has he asked us to do to form a partnership in covenant? Love him, love others. End of.

How God's side of that new covenant is fulfilled is brutally retold in Hebrews, where we are reminded that the basis of the deal involved sacrifice. Of God in Christ. If you ever doubt that God loves you remember the new covenant and read this passage! Jesus cries out his prayers in anguish, knowing the cross is ahead, knowing of his future suffering on earth. Even though he was God's son, *because he was God's son*, no other would do. He alone is the source of eternal salvation; he alone is the perfect sacrifice. He alone carried the cross and died a brutal death to unite us to God in a way so mysterious and wonderful that God himself can share in our lives.

In John's gospel, Jesus talks about his death and resurrection in simple terms – unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it cannot bear fruit. But his heart is troubled, he asks those around him – what should I do? Ask to be saved from the dreadful hour? No, he knows that he must go through with God's plan, it is the reason for his incarnation. Instead, he says 'Father glorify your name', and then comes divine intervention from

heaven as a voice answers 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again'. I have thought about the divine in the ordinary, and do you know, each sin that is forgiven each of us, is divine intervention. Each new Christian that comes to God is divine intervention. Each day we can witness the divine in the ordinary through the new covenant in our hearts and lives – the promise made through Jeremiah – I will know my people and they will know me.

This new covenant we live under is the sum total of all God's saving work among his people. God has given us new life; he has regenerated us with his Spirit, and he has renewed our hearts so that they obey him through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By his atoning death and resurrection, complete forgiveness of sins is accomplished, and we have a new and bold access to God through Jesus.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He ONLY could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in. God keeps his covenants, however sacrificial; will you love Him back? Amen