

Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-23, 27-28, 31:31-34

Today, we fast-forward to the reign of Jehoiakim during the early sixth century BCE. Many of the warnings and fears have befallen on Judah, though partially delayed in time, and executed through the Babylonians and not the Assyrians who had captured the northern kingdom.

The prophets of the Hebrew Bible were not telling the future, although that is an understandable misconception given the way later Christian writers interpreted prophetic books as pointing to Jesus Christ. Rather, the prophets were ancient social and political commentators, figures who paid attention to what was going on politically and socially in their own contexts, and interpreted current events in terms of the people's relationship with God. The basic essence of biblical prophecy was critique.

Understanding themselves as having a call from God to speak out against injustice and other societal issues, sometimes to the king or other political leaders and sometimes to the population at large, prophets would proclaim "the word of the LORD," often calling for changes in behaviour and attitude. In order to understand the messages of the prophets, understanding their contexts is important.

Once again, God addresses this crisis through a prophet. Jeremiah is commanded to write the words onto a scroll, to preserve these texts for future generations to look back at the calamity, as an impetus to their

repentance and divine forgiveness. Obediently, Jeremiah calls on his scribe Baruch to record the words of the Lord.

This passage models a major transition of revelation. Archaeological evidence suggests that ancient Judah is witnessing a growing literacy, so it is natural that God would utilize newer forms of communication. Two centuries earlier, in Isaiah, an angelic being touches the lips of Isaiah with a hot coal. Now, the command is to write the prophetic word. One can consider the differences between the preservation of national narratives through oral tradition versus written practices. Jeremiah understands that these very words can have value beyond the present generation.

Because of Jeremiah's banishment from the temple, he sends Baruch to read the words of the scroll in the midst of a fasting ceremony. Both the space and time are set for a redemptive reading of the words of the Lord.

But when the scroll is read to the court, this time by Jehudi, the response to the word of God is obtrusive. The king is perhaps too consumed with his own luxuries to understand the precariousness of the situation. Jeremiah expresses a particularly biting indictment of those of us who enjoy privilege: *"The king in a winterized part of the palace, sitting in front of a fire to keep warm."* If we enjoy positions of power in regards to our gender, ethnicity, class, marital status, etc., we must take care that such

privilege does not overshadow our own ability to listen to God's Word.

King Jehoiakim's response, though deplorable, is not surprising in that the destruction of the prophetic words is natural for a ruler who is both paranoid and massively self-absorbed. This is one of the earliest recorded narratives of "book burning" to suppress an ideology. But as in most cases, this book burning is not a terribly effective strategy for ideological control. Instead of eliminating the word of God, Jeremiah shows that it is more powerful and lasting than the actions of a narcissistic king. The words of Jeremiah continue to find power two millennia later. King Jehoiakim is merely a footnote as a disobedient king. But the destruction is not total. Before the fall, Jeremiah has prophesied about a new covenant - a new covenant, a new way of directing how we live with each other and with God.

The story of Scripture is inextricably bound with the idea of covenant. After the flood God makes a covenant with Noah. Later God makes a covenant with Abram/Abraham. In the Exodus and at Sinai, God makes a covenant with the people of Israel. Each covenant involves promises and expectations from both sides.

The life of faith is full of covenant imagery. We not only tell the story of faith and the covenants within that, we ourselves, make covenants. When we are baptized, and when we re-affirm our baptism, we enter into and renew a covenant. When we dedicate our lives to one special

partner we enter into a covenant. When a new minister is called to serve with a faith community, there is a service of covenanting to begin that relationship. And again there are promises and expectations between all parties.

I don't know if this took place in the BC Synod, but in the Eastern Synod, every congregation was expected to sign a covenant between the congregation and the Synod. The congregation made certain promises as did the Synod. They formed a new relationship between the congregations and the Synod.

God is always faithful to the covenants. God's people on the other hand...Well ... Within Israel and Judah, the work of the prophets was to call people back to living out the covenant. They are less than successful. What is a God to do? Oral reminders have not worked. The written reminder is subject to destruction. What if the covenant is written into the very beings of the people? Will that work? Could it work?

So, what is a covenant? Testament is Latin for Covenant. The Old and New Testaments are really Old and New Covenants. The people of the Bible understood covenants well. They made covenants daily to define and describe their relationship with one another. The fundamental difference between covenants and other agreements, is the relationship established between the covenant makers. This relationship went far beyond legal concepts. Covenanted parties viewed each other as friends

who were bound together permanently. To be in covenant was to be in relationship.

In the midst of the Babylonian takeover of Judah, Jeremiah's consolation culminates in a new covenant with the following characteristics: It is Inclusive, not divisive. It includes both the northern and southern kingdoms. This is a remarkable break from the tensions and outright animosity between the two kingdoms, which continued through the life of Christ; the participants explicitly include the "least to the greatest." *'For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will already know me,' says the Lord.*

It is Lawful, not lawless. The new covenant will build on the Torah of God. Now, the people have a new strategy for staying faithful to God. It will centre on the written word. It is better to think of a Torah in the sense of God's "teaching," rather than New Testament constructs of Torah as legalism. Torah was an expression of how the community could maintain covenantal fidelity.

The covenant is Divine, not human. Whereas the older covenant was broken by the people, God pre-empted this possibility by making Himself the primary agent of the new covenant. Note the first person emphasis, *"But this is the new covenant that I will make with the people on that day," says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts; I will be their God.*"

When it comes to the word heart, it has even more meaning in Hebrew than it does in English. In English heart can mean emotion as it can in Hebrew. But it also includes will or intent. So when God talks about having the covenant written on the people's hearts, it means that they will **intentionally** enter into a relationship with God. The Israelites are "all in." The word "know" just like the word heart, means much more in Hebrew than in English. In Hebrew it also refers to knowing someone more intimately, something that happens through the sharing of experiences and commitment. This is why in the Bible the word **know** can be used as a euphemism for sex, as any giggling confirmand can tell you. Here the word is obviously not talking about sex. It is saying that the relationship God seeks is one that is intimate and not distant.

A covenant is relational, not distant. The earlier covenant was intimate in that it involved a God who "takes by the hand," as well as the metaphor of marriage. The new covenant incorporates these features: they will fully know the Lord in intellectual acknowledgement; it will be inclusive in the intimate ideals as they will know the Lord and be known by Him.

The covenant is not simply an agreement between two parties. What God is describing is a relationship, more like a marriage than the signing of a contract. This means that when the covenant between God and the Israelites was broken, it was not the breaking of a contract, but more like

a breakup between lovers or friends. This was an example of what Israel had done to God over and over again. Seeing the covenant as a relationship is also the reason why a new one is necessary. Just as a marriage can be ended by divorce, and if the two want to get back together, there has to be a new marriage - a renewal, a new covenant. The Mosaic covenant/relationship was broken by Israel's sin. A new covenant meant a new beginning.

God remains faithful to the covenants. God's people....well sometimes and even often we struggle, we miss the mark at times - our aim seems 180 degrees off. Most significantly, the new covenant is indeed new! The cloud of sin no longer hangs above the community. For God declares, *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."* With the freedom from sin, the people can now move forward in their relationship with God.

This new covenant is much more protective and lasting. In the midst of the Babylonian sufferings, it enables the faithful to be grateful to God. Although politically oppressed, with little economic hope and an unknown future, the covenant of God brings rise to thanksgiving to all.

For many years Christians have looked at those verses in Jeremiah and have seen Christ. Jesus is said to have instituted **the** -or at least **a** - new covenant, the one that would be written on our hearts. And so we are people of the New Covenant.

Using covenants is God's way of communicating with us, redeeming us, and assuring us eternal life in Jesus. The Bible is a covenant document. God's covenant relationship with his people highlights the degree of his love for us. Not only does the great sovereign Creator of heaven and earth descend to be in relationship with sinful human beings, but he offers his own life to provide escape for covenant breakers.

The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of God's covenant with his people. God had come to redeem his people, raise up the horn of salvation and fulfill his holy covenant with Abraham.

Our relationship with Christ is based on a covenant. His body – the Lamb of God himself – was torn and broken, and we eat the covenant meal as we partake of communion and we remember that God has bound himself to us in covenant love. At the Last Supper, Jesus proclaimed that the wine-cup represented his own blood, which would be the “new covenant in my blood.” Just as the covenant with Moses was sealed with blood – the new covenant was satisfied when Jesus' blood was poured out on the cross. We renew that covenant and reaffirm our commitment to it, whenever we drink the wine and eat the bread, remembering the Lord's death, until he returns. The Lord's Supper is a visible and tangible reminder of the covenant.

Jesus is the Messenger and the Mediator of the new covenant. It is an

eternal covenant, guaranteed by Jesus. It is a covenant that is renewed every time we partake of the Lord's Supper. It is not a static covenant but a changing and renewable one – like marriage vows that are renewed or a baptism that is remembered and affirmed.

What makes the covenant so powerful is that it is based on love and compassion – not law. After all we were made to be covenant people – meant to live in relationship with God and with one another. Our world is changing, our church needs to change with it – to be constantly reforming in order to remain relevant. We need to continually renew our relationships and covenants. We need to ask God for a new vision - for a new covenant: between God and God's people, between God and the church, between congregations and pastors, between congregations and synods, and between congregations themselves. Covenants – like the Lord's Supper need regular renewal.

Christ is the new covenant of God, signed, sealed, and delivered in the blood of the Lamb. Allow God to write this on your heart, and experience this extraordinary act of forgiveness. God's intent was always to establish a new covenant. This new covenant of love is found in the life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ. I invite us all to be a part of this new covenant as it is written on our hearts as beloved children of God, and exemplified in our living.

As I watched the swearing in of New Canadian citizens on Canada Day,

I thought about covenants. The citizens made their promises as expected. But then the question arose, what about the government, the country they were swearing allegiance to? Should we not have a covenantal relationship between citizen and country or government? Rather than swearing in, the focus or emphasis should be on the relationship formed between citizens and country.

We should remember that we are all citizens of a different Kingdom, as we remind ourselves that we follow a different law. We need to give God thanks for making a new covenant with us, a new relationship, that is placed in our minds and written on our hearts.

Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE for JULY 6, 2025

Holy God, in calling forth creation from the void, revealing yourself in human flesh, and pouring forth your wisdom to guide us, you manifest your concern for your whole universe. You invite us, as your people, to gather the world's needs into our hearts and bring them before you.

Creator God, source of creation, bless the earth and all life on it with your sustaining power and open our eyes to see that all you have made is indeed good.

Loving God, source of power and authority, make our leaders humble of heart and place in them a desire to work for the common good of all people.

Creator God, source of wind and weather, be with all who are impacted by devastating flash floods, wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters; provide the needed aid and support to all whose lives are in peril and in upheaval; bring your peace to their hearts and unite humanity in supporting them in their suffering and long-term work ahead of recovery and rebuilding.

Remember the people of this world divided into many nations, religions, and tongues. Deliver us from every evil that stands in the way of your redeeming purpose and fulfill the promise of peace on earth among those with whom you are well pleased.

Deliver us from the curse of war and the human sin that causes discord, prejudice and hatred that fuels divisiveness, intolerance, conflict and war; from pride that turns its back on you; from unbelief that will not bow to you; from blind self-centredness; from self-righteousness that will not compromise, from lust for power that denigrates the value of human life and your Creation, and from selfishness that glories in the oppression of others. We pray for the people of Ukraine, Iran, Israel and Gaza as they suffer the ongoing devastating consequences of war.

Let us pray for the poor, the malnourished and hungry, those experiencing homelessness, the abused, abandoned, and neglected all over the world, that their cries for daily bread and compassion may inspire works of mercy among those to whom much has been given.

Let us pray for an end to the divisions and inequalities that cause limited access and opportunities for liberty and freedom to be experienced by God's children throughout the world because of gender identity or sexual orientation; We pray

that all persons, especially our 2SLGBTQIA+ siblings may be valued and regarded as precious because they have been formed in God's image. We pray for the day when all might be included and have equality in pursuing the blessings of creation.

Let us pray for an end to the waste and desecration of God's creation, for access to the fruits of creation to be shared equally among all people, and for communities and nations to find sustenance in the fruits of the earth and the precious waters God has given us. Help us to be good stewards of the land and waters, along with our Indigenous neighbours.

Let us pray for all nations and people who already enjoy the abundance of creation and the blessings of prosperity, that their hearts may be lifted up to the needs of the poor and afflicted, and build partnerships between rich and poor for the reconciliation of the world that all may flourish and grow.

Loving God, source of faith, strengthen your church and make us bold proclaimers of your glory and grace. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; for Bishop Susan as she retires from her position. We pray for those gathered for the national ELCIC convention happening in Winnipeg this upcoming weekend as they prayerfully discern whom you would have serve as the next national bishop. Guide the delegates in their deliberations and business matters as they consider the future of your church. We pray for Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, the newly elected Anglican Primate the Rt Rev. Shane Parker, the congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara. We pray for your blessing on the many deacons around the world gathered together in Moshi, Tanzania during these upcoming days. Bless the work and ministry of those serving on the African Mercy ship, including Doris Bieberdorf. We pray for Christ Lutheran in Kelowna – Rev. Barbara Groote; for shared ministries in BC Synod, and for Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. Bless the ministries of all pastors, priests, deacons, musicians, lay leaders and volunteers.

Creator God, source of all healing, shower with love and peace those who suffer from physical, mental or emotional challenges. We lift up before you names and situations that are on our hearts. We pray for those in long term care facilities, hospitals, and those who are home bound; for those who are facing death, for those who have died and those who are grieving. Bless all who provide support to them with compassion and wisdom in their work.

Holy God, fill us with strength and courage, with discernment and compassion, that we may be your instruments of justice and love in this world, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. We pray all this in the name of Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray ...

Our Father ...