

## **Jeremiah 33:14-28; 31:31-34**

Let's review what has happened so far ... Jeremiah's call occurs in the "thirteenth year" of King Josiah's reign, approximately 627 BCE, and he is active through the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BCE.

Jeremiah went on to prophesy during the darkest times of Judah's history as he lives through one of the most turbulent and catastrophic moments in ancient Israel's history. Israel sat on a trade route between two massive empires, Egypt and Babylon/Assyria (roughly modern-day Iraq). Consequently, it was in constant danger of being conquered, subjected, even destroyed. And that's exactly what happened. After centuries of idolatry and oppressive practices of Judean kings and elite, God withdrew the divine protective power, and the unrelenting armies of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem.

For over a year the Babylonians besieged the city. Ultimately, it fell, and its king and elites were exiled to Babylon. But until its fall, the citizens of Jerusalem were trapped, suffocating in a city that was rapidly running out of food and water and even more rapidly acquiring sickness and disease. In our text for today, Jeremiah is languishing in a prison attached to the palace of the besieged king. Imprisoned for angering the king by speaking God's truth to royal power, Jeremiah has been lamenting to the Lord that the city will fall, and that God will do nothing to help. God responds to this lament with a promise of redemption and healing for Israel.

The scene is total desolation. Or at least this is what Jeremiah saw through his limited human vision — just a devastated and colonized Judean kingdom. And yet, this was not the only reality to be seen by the immobilized prophet. Like the first message, a revelatory word of the Lord comes again to Jeremiah in his confinement. However, the divine prophetic word does not negate Jerusalem's destruction, but rather acknowledges its messy existence.

Jeremiah records God's promises for the future restoration of the community. But careful listeners will hear that when God promises to raise up a true ruler, the ultimate actions of this king are justice and righteousness for the whole land, not just the people. We often forget that the sins of the Judean elites — unethical economic practices, violating the Sabbath, sacrificing young children — hurt not only God's people, but the land itself. The stunning reversal of fortune that God promises is not only for Israel's benefit, but for the land itself.

Our text continues with Chapter 31, which follows Chapter 33, which appears out of sequence. As previously explained, the scrolls were not written following a particular order. The text is part of "The Book of Comfort," encompassing Chapters 30 to 32, and its theme is restoration. The restoration of the covenant between God and the people is an essential element of the people's restoration. With the covenant broken, Jerusalem is in ruins and some of the population in exile. The relationship between the people and their God was understood to have prerogatives — divine protection and blessing — and responsibilities — the people were to follow God's instruction, the torah. The people's failure has led to a terrible breach, and God has punished the people according to the terms of the covenant. The only way forward is for the covenant to be remade somehow.

The prophet recalls the making of the old one "the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," and its breaking, and contrasts that to the making of the new one: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

The key distinction between the old, broken covenant and the new one is not content. The use of the word torah to describe that which will be written on the people's hearts indicates that the terms of the agreement, the expected behaviours, will not change. The torah is the torah, and Jeremiah's loyalty to

the law has been unwavering throughout these writings. What is changing is that this new covenant will be inscribed on their hearts rather than on some external object. It won't be material to be taught by the old to the young for "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." It won't need to be taught at all. The law will be part of each person's internal makeup. With this new covenant, God has forged a way for the bond between Israel and God to be renewed and to deepen.

Both the old and the new covenants had the grace of God as their foundation. In the first covenant that grace was expressed in their miraculous escape from Egypt, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." In the second, it is expressed in God's willingness to make a second covenant with the people who broke the first, "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." To a people shattered by war and exile, these words of hope are offered as a restorative balm. The broken covenant is not the end of their relationship with God. With God, they can begin again.

The new covenant was absolutely the same in its content as the old covenant. There was still the expectation that the people would reflect, by their behaviour, their relationship with God. That is, they would know God and reflect God's concerns for justice and righteousness in the way they lived. The role of torah, whether it was internal or external to the person, was always to guide the people so that they might know God and live accordingly.

The covenant was meant to change the people's hearts. Our relationship with God is meant to change ours. "Prayer is meant to change our self-centeredness into community that, having prayed the Our Father, 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done,' we spend our lives doing something to bring it." And the assurance of God's grace is with us always as we work to live faithful lives.

A covenant is a relationship, pure and simple. It is a commitment that creates a bond between at least two parties that usually involves expectations, limitations, and trust. It is tempting to hear the proclamation of this text from Jeremiah and focus on the trust, the bond, the mutuality. It is a little like listening to the exchange of vows at a wedding and thinking that some magical process has occurred that enacts a relationship that is actually merely promised. It ignores the enactment of that bond.

The intersecting elements of covenant relationships can be easily missed in its dreamy ideal. Let's focus on three of those:

- 1) Covenants affect more than the parties involved because they create new interconnections between and among pre-existing communities.
- 2) A covenant needs to be internalized to be effective, and
- 3) Covenants place parameters on behaviour; they have their own internal logic that can be expressed in legal metaphors.

These three elements are present in this short biblical passage, and they are still part of the new covenant of Luther's Reformation.

The audience that this ancient text addresses is one whose identity is formed by a common communal past, one symbolized by God's deliverance of their ancestors from systemic oppression and the shaping of that community through the constitution revealed on Mount Sinai. This foundational event, however, Christ's death on the cross, did not guarantee that the community stayed true to the vision of a community that had learned the lessons of systemically unjust labour practices or the depth of divine self-giving love.

Luther's principle of "faith alone" mirrors Jeremiah's law written on the heart, in other words, an 'interiority' that re-orientes the person to God. But note that this text does not expect that this is achievable in any kind of real time. The phrase "The days are surely coming ..." locates this promise into a distant

future. It is utopia and not constitution. The uncovering of systemic racism in our country as part of a culture which stemmed from Protestant Christian principles, demonstrates that we have not come far from the days of Jeremiah, and that humans as individuals and as communities, even faith communities, still fail.

What Jeremiah envisions is an internal torah or law as the necessary linchpin for transforming a community. While that torah does contain legal requirements, its general meaning is “teaching” or perhaps better a system that inculcates justice. The only systemic structure that can truly enact justice cannot be made by human decrees. It stems from a conversion to full recognition of the nature of God, the depth of divine grace, and the servanthood to community that flows from this epiphany.

This passage reminds us that systemic justice is both promise and enactment. Although the promise cannot be achieved by our own efforts, the passage calls our faith communities to live into that promise through our own communal incarnation, inadequate though they may be, that attempt to embody an interior culture of gratitude and servanthood.

Immediately prior to this passage, Jeremiah declares that individuals are accountable for their own sins, not someone else's. This contradicts the belief that future generations could suffer for the sins of their ancestors, as expressed frequently in the Hebrew Bible. There is certainly truth to the notion of intergenerational punishment or intergenerational suffering as experienced by our Indigenous siblings. Cycles of abuse or addictive behaviours manifest themselves across many generations, and contemporary societies continue to grapple with the consequences of injustices committed centuries ago. At the same time, one can use this idea as a strategy to deflect blame. “It's not my fault — it's just the way I am! I can't help it!” To combat this strategy, Jeremiah insists upon personal responsibility for one's actions.

This individualism also characterizes the new covenant of Jeremiah. The requirements of the old covenant stood outside of the individual, as external teachings that had to be passed on communally. But if a new generation was not properly initiated into the covenant — not adequately catechized, we might say — then the covenant could be broken. By contrast, the requirements of the new covenant reside “within” each individual, no matter what their social standing “from the least of them to the greatest.” As a result, they no longer have to be taught. This internalization shifts authority from a communally shared body of tradition to the transformed individual conscience. This is still a long way from the radical individualism of many contemporary Western societies.

Like its predecessor at Sinai, the new covenant remains a collective relationship between God and the “house of Israel of and the house of Judah.” Nor can any individual take credit for their participation in it. The sole basis for the new covenant is God’s gracious initiative and unmerited forgiveness. Still, Jeremiah’s denial of intergenerational punishment and promise of an internalized Torah together offer a degree of individual freedom and responsibility that is nearly unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible.

As we consider this passage, we might try to imagine being exiled, far from our home and wondering what will become of us – not unlike our current day millions of refugees scattered around the world, wondering the same thing. The “new covenant” of Jeremiah might seem strangely hopeful and consoling, but the passage is a reminder that Jeremiah’s book offered the ancient Israelites the hope of a new covenant and a continued relationship with YHWH, even in the midst of exile. For the original survivors, such a promise must have provided balm and comfort in the face of despair.

The book of Jeremiah was written in a specific place and context, offering hope to the exiled Judeans that the covenant with their God would continue in a new fashion, mended after the disaster of 587 BCE. Yet the book of

Jeremiah also transcends its context. The words of comfort can speak to all of us who are suffering in the world now, After all, no matter how broken the world might seem, “the days are surely coming, says the LORD ...”

In the midst of this dark valley of despair and judgment in the book of Jeremiah, however, a dense cluster of promise oracles in this “Book of Comfort” radiate like a dazzling diamond. They radiate with bright promises of hope, comfort and restoration. These four chapters proclaim that after the judgment of exile is over, God will indeed bring God’s people back to the land of Judah and restore them as a new and faithful people once again.

God promises that this new covenant “will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors.” The old covenant was the one made on Mount Sinai after God had led the people out of the slavery of Egypt. Its basis was the Law, the Ten Commandments, which parents were to teach diligently to their children.

Some features of the old will remain. God will continue to be the initiator of the covenant rooted in God’s gracious action on behalf of the people. The Law will remain as the norm for living as God’s people. The goal will be the same: to love God and to love neighbour as God’s chosen people in the world.

What then is new about the “new” covenant? First, the new covenant involves a surgical procedure, re-writing the human heart. The biblical understanding of the “heart” is that it is the centre of human intellect and will, knowing what is right and having the desire to do it. Under the old covenant, the Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone and posted for all to see. The old heart, Jeremiah proclaimed, is deeply engraved with an evil inclination to rebel against God and God’s law: “the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of the heart.”

Jeremiah promises that God will replace this deeply engraved sinful heart with a new heart engraved with God's law, written in God's own handwriting. People will obey not because they are supposed to obey but because they naturally want to obey. Obedience will become habitual and second-nature. We will love God and neighbour just for the fun of it, often without even realizing what we are doing. "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food?"

A second element in the new covenant is the elimination of religious education: "No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, . . . says the LORD." The old covenant stressed one person teaching the faith to another. The new covenant stresses God's action in getting inside our hearts and reprogramming our words, actions, habits and feelings to conform naturally to become the faithful servants of God we were created to be.

Of course, we still have religious education programs in our congregations. The church remains a people on the way but not yet fully there. But one day we will not need human teachers to mediate God's growth. In the interim, however, we require creative and energetic teachers and preachers to be instruments of God's work of making disciples of all nations.

A third important item in God's new covenant is a generous forgiveness that wipes the slate of the past totally clean. From the least to the greatest, "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." We often place tight limits on forgiveness, just as Peter asked Jesus how many times we forgive those who wrong us – "seven times?" Jesus, reflecting a new covenant kind of forgiveness corrected Peter, "No...seventy times seven.". This forgiveness is generous and extended to all, from the wretched and despised to the great and the honoured.

In the Christian tradition, Jeremiah's new covenant becomes the basis for

naming the second part of the Christian canon as the “New Testament” or “New Covenant.” However, the most powerful actualization is in the person of Jesus and in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus eats the old Passover meal and re-creates it into a new covenant meal. Jesus lifts the Passover cup of wine and proclaims on the eve of his death and eventual resurrection:

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.”

The sacramental meal internalizes the body and blood of Christ into our hearts and bodies, breaks down barriers, levels the field as all are welcomed, and offers forgiveness even to those disciples who betray, deny or abandon Jesus when he most needs them.

Although we confess that Jesus fulfilled the new covenant in his life and ministry, the promise of the new covenant has not been fully realized in us. We continue to wrestle with our old sinful hearts. We still need our teachers and preachers. We struggle to distribute forgiveness beyond our small and limited doses. Jeremiah’s new covenant remains a hope, but it is a hope that is underway and a hope that is certain to arrive fully in God’s good future: “the days are surely coming, says the LORD, the days are surely coming.”

In 2014, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America launched a ministry campaign titled “Always Being Made New.” It seems that this is a good spirit in which to read these verses of Jeremiah. We are being made new in all the mighty acts of God across the salvation history of the Old Testament. We have been and are still being made new by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are being made new thanks to the work of Martin Luther and numerous other reformers. We are being made new when we are baptized and when we partake of the Eucharist. We are indeed always being made new. And the day will come when all newness will be made complete.

**Amen.**

## **PRAYERS FOR JULY 27, 2025**

Let us pray for the whole world for all creation, for every living creature for plants and flowers, for animals and for fragile human beings.

Gracious God, we come to you broken – from that which confines us: the prejudice buried, weighted down with fear, distorted self-protection breaking me, breaking you. And, so we come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

Living God, you are here with each and every one of your beloved creations across the world right now and always. You hurt when we hurt, you cry when we cry, and you rejoice when we rejoice. Let that comfort us, but also instill in us a desire for change; knowing we can and must partner with you in healing the world. Emmanuel, God with us, you showed us the way of love in Jesus Christ. Help us as we strive to love your Creation more fully.

Compassionate God, God of covenant, God of love, we come to you tired, yearning for peace and harmony. Loving God, we offer up our suffering and come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

Jesus, Bread of Life, too many of your people are hungry. Each day, human beings from babies to elders are dying of malnutrition in the Gaza Strip of Palestine. Hundreds more have been killed by Israeli forces as they try to reach aid stations for food. In Sudan, over 1/3 of the population lives with extreme hunger. In Haiti, the combination of drought and rising food prices have led to widespread food insecurity.

Prince of Peace, we see violence and war around the globe. We lift up Israel, Palestine, Iran, Russia, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, and all war-torn nations. We are grateful that a declaration of principles for a permanent ceasefire in eastern Congo has been signed, after ethnic tensions and the quest for rich minerals have resulted in thousands of lives lost this year. Help us bring about your peace, O God.

Loving God, let your blessing be upon those who serve their neighbours without thought of reward, who forgive their enemies seventy times seven, who care for broken strangers as if they were dearest friends, who weep with the bereaved as if they were sisters, who heal the diseased not counting the risk to themselves.

We pray for those who are sick, recuperating at home, or in the hospital, waiting for results or surgery, those who live in fear. We lift up before you: Pr. Kristen Steele, Dawn Hill, and Mark Wickson. We are thankful for all the doctors, nurses, care givers and hospice workers. Give them strength to continue their services. Give guidance and wisdom to scientists and doctors searching for cures and therapies.

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ; that, begun, maintained and promoted by the Holy Spirit, it may be true, engaging, glad, and active, doing your will. Let Your church be always faithful, O God, and ready to promote the cause of compassionate love and peace. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; Newly elected Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, newly elected Anglican Primate the Rt Rev. Shane Parker, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran in Langley - Rev. Kristen Steele, St. Mark's Lutheran in Vancouver – Rev. Ulrich Hossbach, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray for all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

We pray for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the destitute, the housing of the homeless, all refugees, the reformation of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of those who have been addicted to drugs. Bless every agency, church or government, which is dedicated to the care of our disadvantaged sisters and brothers.

Compassionate and counselling Spirit, we commit ourselves, as part of your global church movement, to play our part in bringing a kingdom of justice; in bringing spiritual and material transformation into the darkest places, in being part of the church and releasing its potential to be your agent of change in the poorest of places.

At this moment there are thousands who are in terror or despair because of natural disasters: Flood and house fire, cyclone and earthquake, avalanche or wild fires, drought or lightning strike, storm waves or volcanic eruption. We pray for the three men caught in a mine in BC which was buried by rock slides. We are thankful for all responders and volunteers. Comfort all the evacuees, and help them rebuild their lives.

We pray for the leaders of nations and cities; may they remember to lean into you and to listen to our words. May all who govern and hold authority in the

nations of the world govern to bring justice and peace to all the earth.

Lord, we pray for all people in their daily life and work — for our families, friends, and neighbours, and for those who are alone. We name before you individuals and families experiencing personal hardship or facing an uncertain future, those who are separated from loved ones, those who grieve this day. Hear us Lord as we now lift up those people and those situations you have placed upon our hearts ...

Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered here now, that our faith may be enlarged and fortified, our vision enlightened and extended, and our compassion refreshed and widened. Through Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was good enough for the simple, too much for the proud and powerful, and absolutely amazing for all who shared his cup. **Amen!**

Let us pray as Jesus taught us ...

**Our Father ...**

## **PRAYERS FOR JULY 27, 2025**

Let us pray for the whole world for all creation, for every living creature for plants and flowers, for animals and for fragile human beings.

Gracious God, we come to you broken – from that which confines us: the prejudice buried, weighted down with fear, distorted self-protection breaking me, breaking you. And, so we come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

Living God, you are here with each and every one of your beloved creations across the world right now and always. You hurt when we hurt, you cry when we cry, and you rejoice when we rejoice. Let that comfort us, but also instill in us a desire for change; knowing we can and must partner with you in healing the world. Emmanuel, God with us, you showed us the way of love in Jesus Christ. Help us as we strive to love your Creation more fully.

Compassionate God, God of covenant, God of love, we come to you tired, yearning for peace and harmony. Loving God, we offer up our suffering and come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.

Jesus, Bread of Life, too many of your people are hungry. Each day, human beings from babies to elders are dying of malnutrition in the Gaza Strip of Palestine. Hundreds more have been killed by Israeli forces as they try to reach aid stations for food. In Sudan, over 1/3 of the population lives with extreme hunger. In Haiti, the combination of drought and rising food prices have led to widespread food insecurity.

Prince of Peace, we see violence and war around the globe. We lift up Israel, Palestine, Iran, Russia, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, and all war-torn nations. We are grateful that a declaration of principles for a permanent ceasefire in eastern Congo has been signed, after ethnic tensions and the quest for rich minerals have resulted in thousands of lives lost this year. Help us bring about your peace, O God.

Loving God, let your blessing be upon those who serve their neighbours without thought of reward, who forgive their enemies seventy times seven, who care for broken strangers as if they were dearest friends, who weep with the bereaved as if they were sisters, who heal the diseased not counting the risk to themselves.

We pray for those who are sick, recuperating at home, or in the hospital, waiting for results or surgery, those who live in fear. We lift up before you: Pr. Kristen Steele, Dawn Hill, and Mark Wickson. We are thankful for all the doctors, nurses, care givers and hospice workers. Give them strength to continue their services. Give guidance and wisdom to scientists and doctors searching for cures and therapies.

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ; that, begun, maintained and promoted by the Holy Spirit, it may be true, engaging, glad, and active, doing your will. Let Your church be always faithful, O God, and ready to promote the cause of compassionate love and peace. We pray for Pope Leo XIV; Newly elected Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, newly elected Anglican Primate the Rt Rev. Shane Parker, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Azar and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran in Langley - Rev. Kristen Steele, St. Mark's Lutheran in Vancouver – Rev. Ulrich Hossbach, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanze and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray for all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers.

We pray for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the destitute, the housing of the homeless, all refugees, the reformation of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of those who have been addicted to drugs. Bless every agency, church or government, which is dedicated to the care of our disadvantaged sisters and brothers.

Compassionate and counselling Spirit, we commit ourselves, as part of your global church movement, to play our part in bringing a kingdom of justice; in bringing spiritual and material transformation into the darkest places, in being part of the church and releasing its potential to be your agent of change in the poorest of places.

At this moment there are thousands who are in terror or despair because of natural disasters: Flood and house fire, cyclone and earthquake, avalanche or wild fires, drought or lightning strike, storm waves or volcanic eruption. We pray for the three men caught in a mine in BC which was buried by rock slides. We are thankful for all responders and volunteers who rescued the men. Comfort all the evacuees, and help them rebuild their lives.

We pray for the leaders of nations and cities; may they remember to lean into you and to listen to our words. May all who govern and hold authority in the

nations of the world govern to bring justice and peace to all the earth.

Lord, we pray for all people in their daily life and work — for our families, friends, and neighbours, and for those who are alone. We name before you individuals and families experiencing personal hardship or facing an uncertain future, those who are separated from loved ones, those who grieve this day. Hear us Lord as we now lift up those people and those situations you have placed upon our hearts ...

Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered here now, that our faith may be enlarged and fortified, our vision enlightened and extended, and our compassion refreshed and widened. Through Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was good enough for the simple, too much for the proud and powerful, and absolutely amazing for all who shared his cup. **Amen!**

Let us pray as Jesus taught us ...

**Our Father ...**