

Sermon Jeremiah 31 31 34 5th Sunday in Lent Series B

Sermon: 5th Sunday in Lent

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34 (v.33)

Theme: A New Covenant

Goal: We are living under God's New Covenant through the blood of Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Can you imagine being betrayed by your husband/wife? What would be your reaction? – Once you both established a covenant, an alliance, symbolized by the wedding ring (in Portuguese called: aliança= alliance). Your/our wedding was the public declaration of our love for each other. It was not forced, it was not imposed. It was a mutual decision out of love, an agreement to live together and to support each other bound by love.

God says in our text speaking about His people: “They broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.” The image of God as the husband and the people as the bride is very common in the Old Testament. Idolatry and apostasy, - running after other gods – is compared to adultery, to unfaithfulness. *Notice the bitterness which is latent in this text... “they broke that old covenant, even though I was like a husband to them”. God feels jilted? The OT prophets often likened the relationship of Israel to God to that of a cheating wife who betrays her faithful husband.* (Phil Brandt).

Can a betrayed partner redo the partnership, forgiving the betrayer? It is seldom, but happens. I know two cases among my friends. – God was always willing to accept His unfaithful people back. But the people rejected Him again and again. Then God said: “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people 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.”

I – The Old Covenant

The Old Covenant was remembered every year by the people as they celebrated the Passover. The story how they had been delivered from the slavery of Egypt was retold around a table, so that the children grew up knowing the great wonders God had made. Like at the first Passover, they used to slaughter a lamb for dinner, remembering that the blood of the lamb put on the frames of the door of their houses saved them from death; while in the houses of the Egyptians, who didn't put the blood on their doors, the first born died, from the most simple family to the palace of Pharaoh.

After this deliverance, God sealed the covenant on Mount Sinai, giving them the Ten Commandments and declaring solemnly: “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2) and you are my people (Exodus 6:7), as we heard two Sundays ago.

But it didn't work. The people broke the covenant several times, beginning with the Golden Calf while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments; and culminating with the rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God sent to save His people. They didn't accept Him and put Him on a cross.

II – The New Covenant

A New Covenant was needed. And God proclaimed through the prophet Jeremiah: “This is the (new) covenant I will make with the people 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”... “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

The New Covenant was sealed by blood like the Old Covenant. But it was not the blood of goats and lambs anymore, but the blood of “the

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). "The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" states John (1 John 1:7).

Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah when He instituted the Holy Communion the night when He was betrayed. In spite of the betrayal of one of His best friends, Judas; in spite of the quarrel of His other disciples about who was the greatest among them; Jesus instituted the New Covenant in His blood, as He said: "This is my body; which is for you; do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). And we celebrate it in remembrance of Christ every Sunday, remembering and renewing the Covenant between God and ourselves. God is always faithful and He loves us, He embraces us, He feeds us, He joins us in our fellowship. Just come and believe in God's New Covenant, believe that through the body and blood of Jesus He forgives you and renews His Covenant of grace and love. "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

God wrote the New Covenant and His Law in our hearts when we were baptized. As new creatures in Christ, we are guided by the Holy Spirit to live according God's will. *Jeremiah reminds us that this is all about heart, the person, the real person who lives at the centre of this. This is not about some external obedience to a rule which is imposed upon us from the outside. Unlike the covenant which God made at Sinai, this covenant will be written on the very hearts of the people. It is different, and yet, if you look at it, it is exactly the same thing that he said through Moses. "I will be there God, they will be my people."* It is the real relationship which God seeks. (Phil Brandt). It is not just a relationship of obedience and gratitude, but a relationship of love, like between a husband and his wife. - I'm always a little concerned about a very common statement inside the church: *We*

have to obey God in gratitude for all He did for us; we have to give our time, skills and offering in gratitude for what we receive from God... Of course we have to be grateful for everything God bestows on us. But our relationship with God is much more than a relationship of gratitude. How is it between husband and wife? Does the wife prepare a special dish for her husband just because he gave her a new ring? Or does the husband bring flowers to his wife just because she has his shirts always well washed and ironed? NO! We please our wife/husband out of love, not just in gratitude. – Can you feel the difference of relationship that some people have with God? They just do or give something to God in return, like a “payment” for what God does, in gratitude; and this is all... . May our relationship with God be always the one that God expects from us: a relationship out of love, because He loved us first and gave us His beloved Son to seal the New Covenant and to be our Saviour; and a relationship of faithfulness, because He is faithful to us.

Conclusion: The Apostle Paul has a very nice text about the New Covenant, that I appreciate a lot; because it is part of the Watchword of my Graduation and is my personal Watchword for my ministry. It says: “Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, *but our competence comes from God.* He has made us competent as ministers of a *new covenant*—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). This is the New Covenant written in our hearts, not on tablets of stones. As we are approaching the Holy Week and Maundy Thursday, the “night when Jesus was betrayed” and celebrated for the very first time the Lord’s Supper, let us enjoy the New Covenant with God and the fellowship with our brothers who are part of the same blessed New Covenant in Jesus. Amen. Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 22 March 2015