

March 18, 2018

## **Old Covenant/New Covenant**

### PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations to our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

### SERMON

One of the things that always intrigues me is the differences between the old covenant and the new covenant. Christians are always very happy to say that we are the people of the new covenant. The covenant that is brought through the word incarnate. Jesus coming into the world and making a covenant not just with the chosen people but with all the people.

We often have some difficulty in trying to explain the differences. If there is a new covenant what does it mean for the old covenant. Those are not terribly easy questions to answer. I believe in the Old Testament reading from today of Jeremiah, we get a little bit of a picture of the difference or the two covenants. Jeremiah in speaking God's word to the people to a broken kingdom, is telling them that a new covenant will be founded, will be formed between God and all people.

Whereas, the first covenant is based on a law that was first written on stone and presented to the people. With the people saying we will take this on as a guideline for the living of our lives. The new covenant, the covenant that is to come, will be not an external covenant or a covenant that is bound by external law. God will be present, will write his law, God's law, on the hearts of those who become a part of that

covenant. It won't be enclosed by a chosen people but will be offered to all.

We hear when Jesus speak to the people as he speaks to them about the kingdom of God. That very focus of why he is in the world and what he is inviting the people to be a part of. Jews first and then to all the people. He makes a point of saying I'm not here to take away the law. I'm not here to take away the prophets and their prophetic word but to fulfill those.

We as Christians have come to believe that it is in his living of his life, in the teachings that he gives, in the miracles that he performs. In the passion that he bore. His death on the cross and his resurrection, that that new covenant is formed and is presented to the people as an invitation. To come and be a part. To come and see the life that God wants people to live. To have as their own. With the promise that we receive on the day of Pentecost, that God not only calls you to this new life but God is willing to be with us to be a part of our lives. To lead us into living this new life.

That is the covenant that we claim. That God chooses to be with us. That God chooses to be a part of our lives. To bring us into relationship, not simply as God and creation but as father and children. Chooses to be with us not based on an external law. But chooses to be with us in Holy Spirit to be present in the living of our lives. To give us that opportunity to follow the leading of that spirit as we are willing to give up ourselves. To give up control of our lives as we see it ought to be run. To allow the Holy Spirit in us to lead us to living the life that Jesus himself lived in the world.

Where he saw the brokenness of the world and tried to fix it. Where he tried to give a greater knowledge and understanding of the law of God. To live it out, not being bound by it. But living out its intense as he

touched the people that he came into contact with. To share the truth of that law but also to say there is something new coming.

Now you would think after 2,000 years of practice, we might have a little better handle on the living out of that covenant. Of allowing the Holy Spirit to so lead our lives that we follow. And follow joyfully. That seems to be what Jesus indicates. So many times, we pick and choose what we know and remember about how Jesus lived his life. And we live out our Christianity based on this part and that part but not always the whole.

I believe that's because living a Christian life in the world is not an easy thing to do. To give up the fears of being taken advantage of. The fears of not being able to fulfill what God has called us to do as we live with one another. We still hold on to the idea that we are not brothers and sisters but competitors. That those who do not agree with the way that I think being a Christian ought to be sees those who have a different idea as being wrong. Or even sometimes being evil. Living a Christian life is not an easy thing to do. And part of it is based on that the parts that are hard we choose to ignore.

This year our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, has called upon the Episcopal church to study the gospel according to Luke and its companion book the Acts of the apostles. We have three different groups that are studying that during this time frame of Lent and Easter. But I've heard people say, "Why are we doing this? Why is this important?"

I think the reason it's so important is because we think we know the gospel, we think we know what Jesus said. We think we know what Jesus did but if we truly study the gospel according to Luke, I believe we are going to find in there things that make us uncomfortable. Things that Jesus said or did that don't always go with the picture that we've

created of Jesus and what Jesus calls us to do as being members of the kingdom of God.

I would say also ... Michael Curry couldn't say you guys need to read all the gospels because people would just balk at that. But if you want to get a picture of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. I'm convinced that all four gospels need to be read and studied. You get different pictures. It's like a mosaic, the pieces have to be brought together before you see that whole picture in its completeness.

If you are into the idea that the law is vitally important and following the law is very very important for the Christian. And that there are consequences if you don't. Then Matthew is your guy. Read the gospel according to Matthew and you will be confirmed in what you believe that there are going to be consequences. Weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's one of his favorite little phrases. That you don't see very much in the others.

If you want to have a Gospel where you get more of the parables. Those nice stories that Jesus told that we sometimes twist to our own this is what it means for me and not read the whole and see all the different parts. Luke's the guy. He shares more of the parables than any of the other gospels. You get a picture of that that's a little different. And certainly, one that is much more in the forgiveness mode and the all people inclusion mode than Matthew.

If you want the short version read Mark. He'll get you through it. He'll start with the baptism. He'll end with an empty tomb and you can draw your own conclusions. You have the basics. I was talking to somebody else and I said, it's kind of like the cliff notes. You just get the highlights of Jesus' life. Not a whole lot of extras.

Now if you want something completely different, read the gospel according to John. There you get not only the story in a different timeline. But you also get the author's reflection on what some of these things mean. We read from John this morning, so we heard a little bit that you don't see from the other gospels. And you hear a little bit of his reflection on what this really means.

But it's all about us coming to know who it is that we're following. To get that more complete picture of who Jesus is. Not just a reading on Sunday from one of the four without connection to the context. What's happened? What's going to happen? Why is it said here? What does it mean? What's the audience it was said to? This is a way for us to try to come to know Jesus a little bit better. We need all the pieces. We need to hear what Mark says. We need to hear what Matthew says. We need to hear what Luke says. We need to hear what John says.

You can pick your favorite, that's fine. But you need to hear them all in order to have a good idea of what Jesus said and did. Don't skip over the hard parts. That's part of who we are called to be. It's so easy to kind of gloss over this pray for your enemy's thing. It's so easy to not really look and accept what it is to be neighbors with everyone. Even those dreaded Samaritans.

It's about us living our lives understanding that we are called to love as Christians. We are called to love in a world that often seems to prefer hatred. We are called to be people of peace in a world where war more often than not seems to be the answer that we turn to. We are called to be people who forgive and ask for forgiveness in a place and in a world where more often than not we allow our anger to rule us and to keep us from forgiving. To separate us rather than allow us to see one another not as strangers, not as competitors, not as enemies but as brothers and sisters.

The covenant that is written on the heart. That law that is written on the heart is the Holy Spirit leading us to do the hard things that Christ did in his life. When he embraced those who were broken and tried to make them whole. He forgave the sinner because of their faith and healed them. Invited them to come and follow me. He hung on a cross and instead of feeling anger and hatred towards those who had brought him there. He cried out to God forgive them because they don't understand what they're doing.

It's not an easy thing being a Christian. To truly live it out we are often called naïve. We're often pointed out as those who would just let the bad people run over us. I am convinced that we are called as Christians. Those who truly follow God, who truly follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Who have invited the Holy Spirit and have received the Holy Spirit in baptism. Are called to work for justice. Are called to show mercy. Are called to forgive those who have hurt us.

I said (phone sound) (Laughter) that's new. That was new. Even I'm too loud or that phone has a really good microphone. Shut up watch. (Laughter) What was I saying about forgiveness, that's okay.

As people who are part of the new covenant, we are called to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us. To work for peace in a world that prefers war. To work for love of one another in a world that seems to encourage hatred. We are called to ask for forgiveness when we are in the wrong. And to forgive when we have been wrong. So that we may truly be the people of God. So that we may truly be citizens of God's kingdom.

Greg Hein – Rector

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