

“The New Covenant ”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron
July 4, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – July 4, 2021

“My Hope is Built on Nothing Less #349 in the Book of Praise

V. 1 My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly trust in Jesus' name

Chorus

On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand

V. 2 When weary in this earthly race
I rest on his unchanging grace
In every wild and stormy gale
My anchor holds and will not fail

Chorus

V. 3 His vow his covenant and blood
Are my defence against the flood
When earthly hopes are swept away
He will uphold me on that day

Chorus

V. 4 When the last trumpet's voice shall sound
O may I then in him be found
Clothed in his righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before his throne

Chorus

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“Shepherd of Love” #464 in The Hymnal for Worship Celebration

V. 1 Shepherd of love

You knew I had lost my way
Shepherd of love
You cared that I'd gone astray
You sought and found me placed around me
Strong arms that carried me home
No foe can harm me or alarm me
Never again will I roam
Shepherd of love
Saviour and Lord and Guide
Shepherd of love
Forever I'll stay by Your side

V. 2 Shepherd of love

Contentment at last is mine
Deep in my heart
There's peace and a joy divine
The future's brighter burden's lighter
My cup runs over each day
Your grace supplied me now provides me
All that I need for the way
Shepherd of love
Saviour and Lord and Guide
Shepherd of love
Forever I'll stay by Your side

John W. Peterson

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“Just a closer walk with Thee” in The Hymnal for Worship Celebration

V. 1 I am weak but Thou art strong

Jesus keep me from all wrong
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk let me walk close to Thee

Chorus

Just a closer walk with thee
Grant it Jesus is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be dear Lord let it be

V. 2 Through this world of toil and snares
If I falter Lord who cares
Who with me my burden shares
None but Thee dear Lord none but Thee

V. 3 When my feeble life is o'er
Time for me will be no more
Guide me gently safely o'er
To Thy kingdom shore to Thy shore
Chorus

Jack Schrader

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Closing Chorus: "Walk with the Lord"

Walk with the Lord
Go from this place
filled with his everlasting grace.
Walk with the Lord
Go where he leads
blessed by his love and his peace

Each day you live in all you do
let the light of Christ be found in you
Walk with the Lord
Trust and obey
Go now and serve him in faith
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Scripture Texts: Jeremiah 33:14-18; 31:31-34

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

¹⁷For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ¹⁸and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with

the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 8:1-13

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up. ³For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. ⁵They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." ⁶But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. ⁷For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one.

⁸God finds fault with them when he says:

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah;

⁹not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors,
on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt;
for they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord.

¹⁰This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.

¹¹And they shall not teach one another
or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.

¹²For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more."

¹³In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we come to the end of our journey through the book of Jeremiah, the story of the ministry of the young prophet who thought he was too young, but made a powerful, lasting impact on God's people. There was nothing too young about him. God's purpose for giving Jeremiah life was to be a prophet, a voice for God. The people had turned away from God, turned to worshipping idols, and the prophet's message was one of consequences for their behaviour.

Exile.

Trouble.

Oppression.

But the message was not without hope. Jeremiah used the image of the potter to illustrate how God forms and re-forms us until we become the beautiful, purposeful people we are meant to be. The prophet bought a field to assure the people that God's promise of a future in which they would build and plant was real, that one day they would make the same kind of transactions as the prophet did from his confinement by King Zedekiah. God's promise was to see Israel through their time of trial, to be their stronghold while they endured hardship, and Jeremiah's words and actions reminded them the promise was real. They could trust it because they could trust God. They had turned away from Yahweh, but Yahweh had not abandoned them. God knew exactly where they were and what was going on for them, and would welcome them back when they turned to the right way once again. It's really quite amazing how many chances God gave to Israel throughout the generations.

It's really quite amazing how many chances God gives to us still.

As a newly appointed member of a national church standing committee, I received a document called a "covenantal pledge for our work together." All members of the committee receive the same document. It lays out a list of things to which we commit in working with one another, regardless of whether we agree on matters or not. As I read through it I couldn't help but think that all of it is a matter of common courtesy and basic respect for other people. Sadly, though, we know human nature can get the best of common courtesy and basic respect for others, and conflict will arise. People will be hurt. People will feel guilty. We will say things that ought not be said, and not say things that need to be said. It becomes destructive when we hold grudges and refuse to forgive another, or we become stubborn and refuse to seek forgiveness. Trust becomes broken, and so does the dynamic of the group. And that is very difficult, nearly impossible, to repair. So, when a group gathers for a common purpose, in the case of the committee on which I now serve that purpose is serving the Lord on a greater scale than my own local congregation, it is wise to remind every member that we all must approach our purpose from common ground. We are not always going to agree. We are not always going to make the best decisions. But we must always strive to work within the covenant relationship with God that blankets our relationships with other people.

That covenant relationship is not only a blanket over committee and group work. It covers the church as a whole, congregations in their specific communities, and people within those congregations. This means when a relationship under the umbrella of God's relationship with us becomes damaged or broken, reconciliation and restoration is needed.

As we read the texts from Jeremiah this week, we see the call for restoration and making things new. We see the promise that God will restore his people. We see the assurance that God will make good on the promise to continue the line of David to rule the people. No matter what damage has been caused by the behaviour and choices of the people, God has the power to restore what has been broken. And restore it he will.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land... The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. That righteous Branch will be the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He will restore the people to a right relationship with God, and will seal that restoration by the defeat of that which broke the relationship in the first place. In the meantime, God seeks to restore the relationship of his people with their God.

One last time, the Hebrew Bible scholar whose work I've been consulting throughout this series writes this about these texts from Jeremiah: "These two passages look beyond the disaster periods to a time of restoration. They address different concerns: leadership (33:15) and interior renovation (31:31). Leadership at various levels receive harsh criticism in the book (22:1-30; 23:9-40). Despite this negativity, 33:14-18 anticipates a future where a Davidic monarch and the Levitical priesthood perform prominent functions. The Davidic monarch springs as a new branch that bears, in this period, the appropriate fruits of righteousness and justice. That the branch springs from the same tree that presumably bore branches that we cut down does not matter since the branch will bear the divine name and nature built upon right relationships (33:16). Restoring relationship becomes another critical feature of the new age. If the restoration of the monarchy seems forced and incomplete, lacking any hints of transformation, then individual transformation springs from interior renovation (31:33-34). Restoration to ensure right relationships will rest upon an internalization of divine teaching. As Jeremiah ingests the divine word in order to speak to the people at the initiation of his prophetic career (1:10), the future is marked by the intake of teaching that leads to living right with one another. Renewed relationships serve as the start of a new dispensation of mutual help and divine forgiveness."¹

This promise of restoring the people's relationship with God is so significant that much later the apostle quotes Jeremiah in the letter to the Hebrews. This letter affirms that God not

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/planting-and-building/commentary-on-jeremiah-321-3a-6-15-5>. Written by Steed Davidson, Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Ill.

only made a promise that could be trusted, but the promise has been fulfilled. The people broke the first covenant, repeatedly, to the point where God had to take some pretty dramatic action to create the new covenant, the new covenant promised through Jeremiah's prophecy, repeated in Hebrews. The internal renovation of which we heard from the Hebrew Bible scholar is made possible by the covenant made with God's people through faith in the risen Christ – the branch that will spring up from the line of David and restore right relationship with God. The new covenant will make all things new, and it will wipe clean the slate of sinfulness that led to this necessary way of fulfilling God's promise.

What an amazing assurance for the people living in exile, wondering when and maybe even if the promise would be fulfilled. God will restore them to right relationship by assuring them of his forgiveness, and remembering their sin no more.

What an amazing assurance for us, wondering when and maybe even if the promise for Christ to come and claim his people, wiping evil from the earth forever and taking God's people to himself for eternity will be fulfilled. The trump shall resound, the Lord shall descend. The dead shall be raised, the darkness shall be turned to light. And all shall be well, all shall be right, between God and God's people.

God's promise - revealed through the prophet, fulfilled through the Messiah - is trustworthy and true. We must pray for that internal renovation, restoration, renewal that comes with faith in God through Christ, through the promises that have all come to their fulfilment in Christ. Faith in the Father through the Son, by the power of the Spirit, changes us. It restores our relationship with God. It assures us that as much as we need to be changed, and are changed by faith, God is steadfast and unchanging, as are God's promises to all generations.

I came across a hymn in a worship resource recently, and the message it conveys is what the exiled people of Jeremiah's time needed to remember. They needed to believe it to be true and not turn away from it. It is also a message we need to remember, believe to be true, even when it is tempting to turn away, tempting to be distracted, tempting to be led astray. God is always, always ready to welcome us back, to make good on the promise to restore us to right relationship, and to show us incomparable grace when we are less than grace-filled.

God, eternal and unchanging,
 Though unbound by time or place,
 Yet with constant, tender yearning
 You sustain our human race.
 History in all its colours,
 Present moment where we stand,
 Hidden future, still to open –
 All are gathered in your hand.

God, who sees all human stories,
 You in each your touch display;
 Sometimes known and sometimes hidden

You have met us on our way.
Though we may have failed or faltered,
Doubted love, resisted grace,
Yet, persistent, you walked with us,
As we travelled to this place.

God, whose life pervades each moment,
Meet us in this present hour,
As we open thought and action
To your life's transforming power.
Startle, challenge and confront us,
Touch our hearts and free our hands
So that we may see and serve you,
Yield to all your love demands.

God who stands beyond the future,
What's to come is still unknown.
Yet, unchanging, you are with us
And we will not walk alone.
God with us through doubt and darkness,
Stand with us in hopeful place,
'til the chain of time is broken
And we see you face-to-face.²

The people who heard Jeremiah's prophecy were told there was a future for them in which they would be restored as God's people. They would be set on a right path. They would know freedom after confinement. They would suffer exile and displacement, and yet they could hold onto that which they were promised. Jeremiah told them, taught them, reminded them and showed them what it meant to believe in the promise.

We hear Jeremiah's prophecy, and we see it fulfilled in Jesus. We are restored as God's people through faith in Christ. We are set on a right path. When we feel confined, faith in God frees us. We can hold onto the fulfilled promise. We can tell others, teach them, remind them and show them what it means to believe in Jesus. And when the day comes that the final promise is fulfilled in completeness, we will know the joy of having believed, and the reward of having lived in faith. Amen.

² "God Who Stands Beyond the Future." Hymn written by Pat Bennett, Tune: Blaenwern. Found in the worship resource, [Bare Feet and Buttercups: Resources for Ordinary Time \(Trinity Sunday to the Feast of the Transfiguration\)](#), Compiled by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 2008, Pg. 213.