Pastor Keith GeRue

Sermon for Maundy Thursday
March 24, 2016

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The New Covenant

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Luke 22:7-20

The Passover with the Disciples

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.” 9 They said to him, “Where will you have us prepare it?” 10 He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters 11 and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 12 And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” 13 And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

Institution of the Lord’s Supper

14 And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”
In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A new covenant, Jeremiah prophesies. But like everything else that Jeremiah prophesied, the people didn’t much care. They had more important things to do, more important things to worry about, more important things to give their attention to than this crazy prophet who never said anything good to them, but kept telling them to repent and return to the Lord.

They were a people of God turned worldly, with their own prophets telling them what they wanted to hear, and using God instead of worshiping Him. This is what God means when He says they broke His covenant. It wasn’t just that they sinned, or broke a few rules here and there – it was that while He was to them a faithful husband, providing for them and taking care of them, they were adulterous and unfaithful. They turned their back to Him. They took His Word and threw it back in His face. And so actually, they didn’t just break His covenant, they smashed it to smithereens!

And so God would give His idolatrous bride to the false gods she prostituted herself with. He would not force her to stay with Him. And so He withdrew His husbandly protection and allowed the armies of the nations to conquer them and take them into exile. For if other gods they want, then other gods they shall have.

But God took no delight in this. No gloating, no “I told you so!” In fact, even before it happened, God planned to bring back His bride. He would not, could not, abandon her forever! For though He withdrew His protection, He could never withdraw His love. No, a new covenant I will make, God says. Not like the old one. I will not just give them my Word, I will put it in them. I will renew my vows to them and they to me: I will be their God, and they will be my people. And last (but certainly not least): I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

And though God’s people ignored these words when Jeremiah first spoke them, how precious would they later become! For what unfaithful husband or wife, returning to their spouse, would not want to hear those words: I forgive you. And not only forgive you, I will forget it. I will never bring it up again!

Well dear brothers and sisters in Christ, tonight those words are spoken to you!

To you who (like the people in Jeremiah’s time) think you have more important things to worry about, more important things to do, more important things to give your attention to than your God and His Word. To you who have sinned in thought, word, desire, and deed. To you who have been unfaithful and sought your life, pleasure, and good in the things of this world. Repent and return. For tonight, your God comes for you and says: I forgive you.
For tonight is the night of Jeremiah’s **new covenant**. This is the Passover above all others that Jesus desired to eat with His disciples. That Passover that would change all Passovers. Tonight is the night when the bridegroom will lay down His life for you, His bride, that death *pass over* you and descend upon Him. Tonight is the night when *He* will be exiled, and *you* brought home; when *He* will be broken, that *you* may be made whole; when *He* will be condemned, so that *you* will be forgiven.

Tonight is the night when Jesus not only gives you His Word, **but puts it in you**. For before He lays down His body and blood on the cross, He lays it on the Table, for His disciples to eat and drink. **This is My body. This is My blood.** The Word made flesh put in us, that we may live in Him. And be again one flesh. All your sins forgiven, and forgotten. Tonight is the night.

And while our Lord promises to forgive and forget, He call on us to **remember**. Not our sin, but all that He has done for us. **His faithfulness. Do this in remembrance of Me.**

**To remember** the grace of God that is uncaused, unasked-for, unprecedented, and unlimited. The grace of God in coming down from Heaven and being born a man. **To remember** the grace of God in finding the lost sinner, welcoming the outcast; healing the blind and the deaf; the leper and the lame; raising the dead, and having compassion. And to remember that all of this is for **me**.

To remember the grace of God in that what I did not deserve, God provided. What I did not ask for, God gave. When I did not seek, God came. To remember that God would not, **could not**, abandon you and me. But came for us, and renewed His vows to us: **I will be your God, and you shall be my people.** Not just for a time, but forever. Take eat. Take drink. This is the new covenant. For you.

Tonight, that new covenant in His blood is here for us. Indeed, it is here for us every Sunday. For we need it. The siren song of Satan and sin is strong, but the love of our Savior even stronger. Calling us back. Forgiving our sin, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness. **And never bringing it up again.**

And so tonight our Lord goes as it is written of Him. It is the night on which He was betrayed – handed over to sinful men. But He **wanted** that, for is that not what He does for us here? Handing Himself over to sinful men and women. Then it was to be consumed on the cross; here it is to be consumed by us. But for the self-same reason: **To forgive my iniquity and remember my sin no more.**
How precious those words! Promised through the prophet Jeremiah some 600 years before Jesus came. Tonight delivered.

In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.