

*Texts: Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-23, 27-28; then 31:31-34; Luke 22: 19-20*

*Subject: God Promises a New Covenant*

*Theme: Write it Down*

*25th Sunday after Pentecost; Christ the King Sunday; Nov. 22, 2020; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

As you might imagine, we have a lot of books in our house. Not just books on scripture and theology and ministry - those are mine, but books on childbirth and parenting, anatomy, healing, massage, cookbooks, and books on baking, classic stories, animals, Minecraft, and superheroes, and shelves of children's books. Then we go to the library. And we come back with 40 more books. We all love to read. The little ones are still learning, but once they pick it up, they're reading everything they can find. They're curious, and interested in so many topics. The written word is powerful. It can take us places, to new worlds, sparking imagination and ideas, teach us new things, prepare us for the future, and open our minds to the world around us. I love to read.

But I get distracted. There's so much going on in our house, and we have things to do, and places to go, and television and movies and phones and games, that I rarely get to read as much as I would like to. I've got a pile of books next to my bed that I've started but then woefully neglected. I've got more on my wish list that I'd love to get to, and new ones arriving on store shelves every week. My work and ministry involves plenty of reading of scripture and articles and commentary, but there is so much more I'd like to do that I just don't get around to, and often I take that gift of reading for granted.

The tradition of the prophets predates the written word, and the speaking of God's law and promises to the people and to the rulers of Israel was way. Most people,

with the exception of the scribes and elites didn't read or write. In the late 8th century the Word came from the mouth of the prophet Isaiah - remember his vision: an angel touched his mouth with a hot coal. Just about 200 years later, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, another of the major prophets, who was called as a young boy, and had a vision as well - the Lord touched *his* mouth - to put the word in it. He grew up in a time when more were becoming literate, able to read the written word, and prophesied when Josiah was king.

It was King Josiah who found the book of the law, and made a covenant - a promise to follow the law and the commandments (2 Kgs. 23:1-3). King Jehoaikim was one the sons of King Josiah. He took the throne at age 25 and was king for 11 years, and "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." What was the evil? We can't be sure, but following other gods, oppressing the people, going against the commandments of the Lord - these are good guesses. These are the kinds of things that the prophet speaks out against, and he is called to proclaim what he hears - the Word of the Lord tells of the destruction of Judah and Israel. There's trouble coming from the North, and it's not the Assyrians this time, it's the Babylonians.

How do you react when you read or hear something that troubles you? When it's bad news, like a report of a disaster, new restrictions because of a virus, or results of an election. Maybe we'd like to deny it, rebel against it, act like we didn't hear it, or say it can't be true. Sometimes you might get mad at the one who said it. Most of us don't like to be challenged when it comes to closely held beliefs. Even reading the Bible can be hard for us. When it confuses us, or convicts us of the way we've been living, reminds us of our faults as individuals, as leaders, as a church, or as a nation, maybe we'd like

to tear those pages out and pick and choose the good stuff. That's been done before, and it didn't change much.

The word the Lord gave Jeremiah was of a coming tragedy - the fall of Israel and Judah. Most Kings don't want to hear about transformation. They don't want to hear about their demise. They don't want to hear about anything that threatens their power. The prophet spoke this word to the religious leaders and the king, and eventually was no longer allowed to come into the temple where he told them it had become "a den of robbers" (yeah that was his line). But Jeremiah didn't give up. Instead of shouting prophecy from outside the walls of the temple, he would dictate the word to his assistant Baruch, and have him *write it down*. Then, it could be read in the presence of the King. This King doesn't want to hear this prophecy - this Word of the Lord, spoken or written, so he rips out the parts of it he doesn't like, and throws it into his little fireplace.

But this is God's Word. That cannot be the end. Jeremiah hears what happened, and has his assistant Baruch *write it down* again. The word was true. Judah would fall, the people would be taken into exile in Babylon, and just as it was written, the temple would be destroyed.

We all want to hear good news. Most of us are tired of the arguments, the frustration, the sickness, the isolation and the loss we've witnessed and suffered this year. Burying our heads won't change the world we live in. Leaving one social media site for another doesn't alter our reality. But that's what we do - we compartmentalize our lives, we tear out parts of our lives that we don't want to acknowledge or share. We pick and choose what we read and view and hear, creating personal echo chambers. Anything we don't like, we throw into the fire.

We can burn it or we can learn it. God's Word remains.

We are people of the book. This Word, when we open it, has the power to transform us from the inside out. In holy scripture we read stories of creation and fall, ancient wisdom and inspired teaching for today, promises of hope and love for tomorrow. This Word is alive and moving and active and it moves us. We might be in a world of hurt, but this Word doesn't leave us there. We read the word that has been written down for us, we hear it and we are given new opportunities to act. It makes us believe. We hear and are called to turn around, to trust in Christ alone - the true King of the Universe.

In a time of trouble, Jeremiah offers a rare word of hope:

*the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant... 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...for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

After their time in Babylon - in exile - away from the land and their homes, the people would suffer. But there would be a new beginning. That *is* a promise of grace and gift and goodness. It's undeserved and undeniable - this word is written on our hearts - unless we can shut them off - and maybe we do sometimes - but the Word continues to call us, to convict us, to remind us, that trusting in God, living in the Kingdom of the Lord - loving, serving, giving, is the way we are called to be.

As we wait for an end to *our* current struggles, and prepare for what the future will bring, we are invited to trust and imagine. Where will we be in a year? Will you pray about that with me this week and in the weeks to come? Think about it, dream about it,

and *write it down*. How is God calling you here and now? What new opportunities will we find together as friends and family, as neighbors, as the church?

Jeremiah knew what Isaiah knew, and what Jonah knew, that God could choose to save the people. Even when they would not hear, even when their own hearts were hardened, when their King shut his own ears to it, and when destruction was imminent God would come through. And now, there is no more “if.” This promise is unconditional. The Lord doesn’t say tell the people to do this or that - God says I will do it. I will make this promise, and I will fulfill it. I will *write in down* on their hearts, and I will be their God.

There would be pain and destruction, and still the promise would come true. The remnant would be the seed for a new Israel. Those who returned would rebuild. The people would worship God once again, and the world would be renewed.

Our world is still struggling. There are more problems here and around the globe than we can name. And still the faithful gather and call on God’s name, and pray and give thanks. We may not know what is ahead, and there will do doubt be obstacles to overcome, but we can know for sure - because we have read it in the book, we have heard it sung, and we have had it passed down from generation to generation: We have this word, a promise from Jesus that is a new covenant of grace. It’s on the cross and in His blood: we belong to Him. We are children of Christ the King. We are loved and forgiven and freed. And now, God in Christ calls us to a new way, to live in the freedom we have been given, to share what we have, to serve those in need to help, to speak good news, to walk together and work toward justice in our world, in hope and faith always.

Amen.