

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fifth Sunday in Lent - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-12

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

03/17/2024

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30Jesus answered, "This voice has

come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Gospel of Our Lord.

### **Prayer**

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

### **Jeremiah, a Prophet of Hope?**

Good morning! When I attended seminary there were two options for learning Greek. You could go six weeks early and spend six hours a day learning Biblical Greek or you could take it throughout the first year. I was not insane, and so I chose the second option. But I did hear the horror stories. Those who attended summer Greek were like a group of soldiers who had seen tough combat together. The days were six hours long, with two breaks and a lunch in between. In the evening they worked on the homework for the next day, and woke up to do it all over again. The detail that really got me was the way my new friends would get this strange far off look as they recalled the torture, I mean education. Then they said this: “you know it’s really starting to become your life when you start dreaming in Greek...” Well St. Paul’s, that sounds a little too intense for me! But as I read our first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, I was once again reminded of that story, because we see in it a glimpse of what it’s like to have God’s covenant written on our hearts. Here, listen again:

*“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.”*<sup>1</sup>

What a beautiful text, right?! It’s all the more impressive when you learn a little bit about the prophet Jeremiah. He’s not really known for being a bundle of happiness. Beth L. Tanner, a professor of Old Testament at New Brunswick Theological Seminary writes that *“Jeremiah is not known as a prophet of hope and good news. This may be why his words here seem to carry so much joy.”*<sup>2</sup> This is certainly true, for most of the book Israel is portrayed as an unfaithful spouse, wooed by pagan worship and having broken the covenant relationship with God.

Christians have often warped this text to mean that God was doing something “better” than the original covenant on Mt. Sinai. This isn’t that, but it is something new. God is responding to the tragedy of the Babylonian Exile. In the year 587 B.C.E. they destroyed the first Temple that I talked about two weeks ago, and carted off a bunch of the Jewish elite to other parts of the world. The nation was destroyed, becoming a vassal state of Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah writes after these events, trying to explain why it happened as well as what the people of God should do about it. One of the major blows was the sacking of the Temple and the loss of so many holy relics, specifically the Ark of

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34 NRSV

<sup>2</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-jeremiah-3131-34-21>

the Covenant, something that was lost for the rest of time. But because the Israelites saw this as a sort of written contract between God and the Jewish people, they were heartbroken.

And into this pain and grief Jeremiah speaks words of comfort: “*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.*” How amazing is that! Not only has God not forgotten them, but God will make sure that the loss of the written covenant will no longer be cause for concern, because upon each person God will write a covenant of hope and love.

What will this covenant look like? Well, actually it's a lot like the old one. God knows that Israel will mess up, and yet God promises to be faithful, forgiving their sins. God speaks these same words to us. This isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card. It's a promise to all of us when we forget that God doesn't work like we might expect the rest of the world. God is never selfish, never greedy. God does not give up. God continues to love us constantly. I was tempted to say that God loves us unconditionally, but that just isn't true. It's not as if God's love is blind to our mistakes and failures. That's what makes it so powerful. God knows all our dirtiest and darkest secrets and STILL chooses to love us! It's something much more powerful than unconditional love. It's a love that ultimately leads to God's death on the cross, a death God knowingly accepts. But that's a story for next week. Today we rest secure in the knowledge that God's word is written on our hearts, forever and always. Amen.