

A new covenant
Jeremiah 31: 21-34
July 21, 2013

One of my favorite shows is on the Cooking Channel, “Chopped.” It involves four chefs and three courses, with a chef getting “chopped” after each round. Each chef is presented with a basket with mystery ingredients and are required to make a particular course: appetizer, entrée, or desert. The last one remaining is the winner.

I have asked John and Bob, two of our own chefs in the church, to come forward to receive their mystery baskets. “Chef Bob, are you ready?” “Chef John, are you ready?” Please open your baskets.

Chef Bob, Chef John what is in your baskets? That’s right. Nothing. There are no ingredients. They are empty.

And yet this is what atheists would have us believe, that from absolutely nothing, creation was created. Any mathematician will tell you that zero plus zero always equals zero. Again, the atheist would have us believe that, when it comes to creation, zero plus zero equals creation. That makes as much sense as asking Chef John to create a chocolate cake using a basket with no ingredients.

As we read the scripture today, we see that God is creating with us a new covenant, not one of rules and regulations, but a covenant within our hearts. “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon our hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Jeremiah is reminding all of us that we are a people of God. Because God is within our hearts, He is with us always. There is no place we can go where He is not. When we try to turn from God, He is with us, seeking us out. When we try to turn our eyes from God, He is there and moves within our being so that He is always in our sight. There is nothing we can do to prevent God from loving us.

And yet, Jeremiah is writing to his people, and to us, about idolatry, the turning from God. He has written about the doom of those who turn to idolatry. But now, he is writing about the redemptive love and purpose of God for his creation.

“...for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” This is not to say that God is forgetful. He remembers our sin in such a way that He uses it for redemption, for making our hearts and souls right with Him.

Have you heard a married couple get into what we shall call, a “discussion.” They are having some disagreement and then one of them says, “well, I remember what you said ten years ago. And the other says, well, what about the time you did such and such.”

There are Christian ways of solving disagreements and of arguing. The above is not one of them. The above is symbolic of a resentment carried and of a weapon to try to beat the other down. There is no redemption in the above. It is a power play by which one or both is more interested in winning than in redemption.

When God calls us to remember how we sinned, it is to bring us closer to Him and remind us that we are now, in Him, a new creation. The old is no longer us. God has forgiven our sin and we are called to live in this new reality.

The forgiveness of sin is for restoration of fellowship with God and restoration of our fellowship with each other.

Humanity can be a very fickle thing. For example, we may be grieving over the actions of a child, no matter how old they are. We try this and we try that. Nothing is working. Finally, having reached a point where we can

do no other, we place our most treasured possessions in the hands of God for his love and care and healing. There is no greater thing we can do. Nothing has changed. The child may still be acting up, may still be in prison, may still be on drugs, may still be not doing their homework, may be in a bad relationship, etc.

But, when we place them in the hands of God, we stand straighter, we move with hope, we believe that God is working within their lives, our countenance changes.

And yet, in our humanity, after a while, when we don't see the changes we want to see, we begin to get anxious, frustrated, scared, worried, angry...and we begin to reach towards the hand of God to take back our loved one, knowing all the while there is no greater or better place for them to be.

We hear the voice of God lovingly and wisely asking, "What are you doing?" Why are you trying to take your most prized possession out of My care? Do you believe you are more capable of bringing them to healing than I?"

In Isaiah 55: 3, the message of God is "Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, that your soul may live."

In Psalm 25: 1, the word of God tells us "To thee, o Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in Thee I trust." If we don't trust our most precious possessions to God, to whom or what will we trust them?

Jeremiah is telling his people that they have chosen to place the care and welfare of themselves and their children and their grandchildren into the hands of idols. And yet, as we asked last week, scarecrows cannot hear or help, why we would expect them to.

Leslie Weatherhead, one of the great preachers of the 20th century, writes extensively of this conflict between trust and faith in God against trust and faith in things other than God. He especially emphasizes our identity as the creation of God, that we are made in the image of God and that God will allow never allow anything to come between Him and His love for us.

He tells of the story of a friend of his, whose father was a very great man. The friend told how, when he was a little boy, his father would, at times be away from home at various conference or meetings. One night, when his father was expected home, he wanted to stay up to greet him, but he had been acting up and was sent to bed. He wakened when he heard his father come home. He got up and went downstairs to see his father. He simply couldn't keep away, although he was fearful of what his father would say. But his father took him in his arms and held him very close and said, "My child." Weatherhead said his friend said he can still remember the tremendous sense of belonging to his father.

We want to see God. We want to be with God. We sin. We are fearful. And yet, when we draw near to God, He wraps His arm around us, draws us close, and says, "My child."

No idol will ever sing these great words which we so strongly proclaim and sing: "I am His, and He is mine, for ever and ever."

Go in peace, and be assured of God's precious love and power and purpose in your life.