

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, the thirty-first chapter, beginning at the thirty-first verse:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--³² "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.³³ "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.³⁴ "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the

LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

“Oh, with how great an effort and exertion, also with proof from Holy Scripture, did I barely succeed in justifying before my own conscience that I, a lone man, dared rise against the pope, consider him the Antichrist, the bishops his apostles, the schools of higher learning his houses of ill fame! How often my heart struggled, rebuked me, and threw up to me their one and strongest argument: You alone are wise? Can it be that all the others are erring and have been erring for so long a time? What if you are erring and landing into error so many people, all of whom will be eternally damned? Such questions continued until Christ strengthened and settled me by His own certain Word so that my heart no longer struggles but confronts these arguments of the papists as a

rock-bound shore the waves and laughs at their threatening storming.” And so it is, Martin Luther described his thoughts as he was contemplating the Reformation and that fateful day. We need to remember that Martin Luther did not set out on October 31, 1517 to break up the Roman Catholic Church; rather, Luther wanted a discussion on the problems that he saw creeping into the church’s teaching. When Luther posted his 95 Theses it was not a declaration that the Roman Catholic Church should be done away with, but it was an announcement that he would like to discuss some problems he had.

And so once a year we, as Lutherans, celebrate Reformation Day. The day we look at the pure doctrine and pure teachings of God and of Christ that Martin Luther rescued from error and darkness. Which is like the point God is making through Jeremiah in our text today... God made a new covenant in which He forgave our sins and promised to remember them no more! Ah, what a blessing God has given us with ***His new covenant***, the covenant of grace and of Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah begins this portion of Scripture with a warning, but ultimately a promise. God is going to make a new covenant with His people... because the people broke His old covenant. Instead of upholding the covenant they had made with God at Sinai, the people had walked away from it.

The covenant made at Sinai was that of the Ten Commandments. God gave the Ten Commandments and Moses came down with two tablets. The two tablets do not signify the two tables of the Law; rather the two tablets were the legal requirement when a covenant was made: one went to each party of the covenant. Of course God did not need His copy, because God had made the covenant and God can remember His covenant and keep it. But the people down the mountain, they needed two copies of the covenant. For if you remember, the first time the covenant was written Moses threw it on the ground because the Israelites were worshipping a golden calf. So Moses had to go back for a second time to get the covenant made between God and the people. And it was

at that time the people swore to follow God and God alone.

Joshua led the people after Moses died. He led them across the Jordan to take the Promised Land. As they battled, when the Israelites relied on God they gained the victory, when they did not they fell. Once the Promised Land, once Israel and Judah were captured, the land was divided. It was divided to the tribes to fulfill the promise God had made. As Joshua was dying, he gathered the people to him and made his ever famous declaration, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” And the people agreed that they too would serve the Lord and listen only to Him.

By the time of Solomon, people were already falling away from God. Once Solomon died, the nation of Israel was split in two and some stayed ‘loyal’ to God while others began worshipping false gods in false locales. Once Jeroboam was king, he set up, yep, two golden calves for the people of Israel to worship because he reckoned (1 Kings 12:27), “If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of

the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their Lord.”

Once Israel was firmly entrenched in false worship, there was no turning back for them. Eventually they were taken captive to Assyria. Judah fared a little better. They managed to worship the true God on and off, until they were eventually taken captive to Babylon.

And thus we have our own story. We made a pact, a covenant, with God both at our baptism and at our confirmation. At baptism we promised to worship the one true God. At our confirmation we swore that we would know no other doctrine or teaching except that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We made this vow at our confirmation with the promise that we would rather die than say it is false in any way... but we have failed on both of these fronts. We have not remained loyal to the one True God for all our lives. Nor have we sworn and upheld the notion that the Evangelical Lutheran Church’s teaching is the one true teaching... considering that every time we sin

we admit that there is a better and different law that we would like to follow.

When we look at the Ten Commandments, we can realize our great failures. Consider if you will the fifth commandment, “You shall not kill. What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do no bodily harm to our neighbor, but help and befriend him in every need.” How are we doing on this front? Are we befriending our neighbors and making sure that they are all right? Are we making sure that our neighbors needs are met? Are we truly loving them as God would have us?

Consider the eighth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not lie about, betray or slander our neighbor, but excuse him, speak well of him and put the best construction on everything.” I won’t even ask how we are doing on this, because we fail at this nearly every time we open our mouths. Gossip. Slander. Lies. You name it, we do it. Do we look at every situation and put the best construction on

it? Do we excuse our fellow Christian and speak well of them?

I don’t even have to go into the other eight because otherwise we would be here all day... and we know that we can’t stay at church all day. We need to go home and watch a football game, or just have “me” time, or whatever else it is that we do; but it’s not picking up our Bibles. When was the last time you spent the DAY with God? When was the last time you spent the entire day in His Word, or is it too dry and boring?

So much sin in our lives, and yet we can still see how we are just like the Israelites of old. Instead of trying to follow and honor the covenant we made with God at our baptism and confirmation, instead we ignore, abandon, and betray God many times a day.

And yet, God made a new covenant with us. A covenant where He put His Law on our hearts and in our minds. God made a covenant of promise... God gave us the Gospel. And yes, the Israelites of long ago had the gospel, they

simply chose to ignore it and follow other gods. But the new covenant that God has promised us He has given to us. As Pieper says, “The ‘new covenant,’ or the ‘new testament,’ is the remission of sins. This definition of the new covenant Scripture itself gives. Already in the prophecy of Jeremiah the new covenant, in distinction from the old covenant is defined as the remission of sins... The old covenant, as the covenant of the Law, is the imputing to man of his sins... The new covenant, or the new testament, as the covenant of the Gospel, is the forgiveness of sins.”

God gave the new covenant to us when His Son Jesus Christ lived a perfect life for each and every one of us. He gave us the new covenant as His Son hung on a cross dying. He gave us the new covenant when Jesus died for all of our sins. He gave us the new covenant when three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead. In Jesus Christ, God gave us the new covenant. The covenant of love, the covenant of grace, the covenant in which “He will forgive our iniquity.” With the life, death, and resurrection

of Jesus, God has forgiven our iniquity. He has given us a new life in His Son, Jesus Christ.

When we failed to uphold His covenant, when we broke the covenant we made with God... He still honored His side of it. He still honored it and sent His Son to be our savior from all of our sins. And it is through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done that we know salvation and heaven are ours. It is not through works which are supposed to earn us a better spot in heaven; it is not through the fatalistic approach that God saves some and damns others; it is not through the completely unbiblical notion that all people will be in heaven; and it is not through a false god and a false sense of Jesus Christ which confuses and leads away millions of people each year. Salvation is through Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. That is what we gather together every Reformation Day to acknowledge and rejoice in.

And once we know that we have salvation, once we know that we are saved through faith by grace, then we do good works... good works which show off our God, which show off His

love. As our apology says, “the prophet shows what those impulses are when he says, ‘I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.’ Therefore, after we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God, to pray for and expect help from Him, to thank and praise Him, and to obey Him in our afflictions. We also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses.” This is what God would have us do... and thanks to the Reformation that God has allowed to happen and the Confessions which Lutherans painstakingly crafted to explain Scripture, we know that God loves us and wants us to show that love.. that love that we have through faith in Jesus Christ. Also as Pieper says, “Sanctification, which plays such an important part in the life of the Christ and of the Church, is the result of justification without works; only after man is justified does he love good works.”

Pieper also notes that “It is faith which writes the Law into the heart and establishes the Law. Faith works by love, and love is the fulfilling of the Law. Only after a man is justified does he

take the right attitude toward the entire Scripture, believing that Scripture is God’s Word, and make diligent use of Scripture. But this love of the Law and of the entire Scripture has nothing to do with faith so far as it justifies. It is ‘without the deeds of the Law’ that faith obtains the forgiveness of sin and salvation.”

Dear friends in Christ, what Martin Luther began nearly 500 years ago, we are still coming to terms with today. Not one of us is a scholar to the degree that Dr. Luther was; nor do any of us have a thorough and deep knowledge and understanding of him... but when we come together on Reformation Day it is not to praise Luther, it is to praise and thank God. Thank Him for all that He has done for us in sending His Son to live, die, and rise again for our sins. We praise God for all of the blessings that He has given to us. And we thank God for the prophecies that He has placed in His Word. The promise of the Gospel, the assurance that the Word of God will endure, and the assurance that God’s Gospel cannot be quieted.

I want to leave you today with what some, in Lutheran circles, point to as the proof that the Reformation was bound to happen, and maybe even Luther was talked about in Scripture. I point you to Revelation 14:6-7, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people - saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” And if it is not a direct prophecy of Luther... it is a direct promise that the Gospel of Christ will never die out.

Thank God, from whom all blessings flow.
Amen.