

Sermon Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Sermon Theme: Forgive and Forget

When in the perfect paradise of the Garden Eden Adam couldn't find a suitable partner. So God decided that it wasn't good for man to be alone and he created a companion, a friend, his wife Eve. We are created social creatures who desire to have relationships—from the casual acquaintance with the gas station clerk to the close intimacy of a marriage with everything in between. Some feel they are nothing without their family. Others see their friends more as their brothers and sisters than their flesh-and-blood siblings. These relationships that we have with each other in our lives are important to us. But then that family member, that friend who was close to you, hurts you. Something they did or said or what they didn't do or didn't say, whatever it is, hurt you in some way. And when someone hurts you—especially when they are close to you—it makes it difficult to want to be close to them. That individual broke something that you maybe didn't notice was there before, something is ruined so that bond will never be the same. That trust is gone; at the very least it's damaged. You might feel betrayed and wonder, "Do I even know you? Who are you? The person I knew wouldn't ever have done that!" How many times do you let that hurt happen to you? Maybe you become cautious so that you don't get too close to someone because you don't want it to happen again. Or maybe it's happened too many times which makes it difficult to trust in relationships at all. When we are hurt how easy it is for us to hold someone's actions over their heads to be brought up when it's to our advantage. Maybe you've said it yourself in one way or another, "I forgive you. But I won't ever forget." In other words, there is nothing that can fix this relationship; there are lasting consequences to sinful actions.

Judah's relationship with God, from what it looked like, was destroyed. The people of Israel, the northern tribes, had already been taken away because of their actions. And because of what Judah had been doing and not changing, it was only a matter of time for them too. From the looks of things as they are taken from their homes and carted off into exile to the distant land of Babylon, nothing would fix this relationship. That seems to be the feeling for many of those exiles already in Babylon and those who would be exiled in the near future: God has abandoned us.

The prophet Jeremiah is shown that it couldn't have been more different. Instead of distancing himself from his people, God was working to be closer to them. The Lord declares: in the coming days this would happen. He is going to make a new covenant, a new agreement with the people of Israel and Judah—they would be a united people under this new agreement; they would be his people and he would be their God. But this agreement is going to be different from the covenant that he had

made with their forefathers and ancestors. That covenant was the agreement and promise that God made with the nation of Israel after he had brought them out of Egypt and established at Mt. Sinai in the desert. Along with the Ten Commandments, God had given his people the Law for how they were to live, rule, and worship. The agreement between God and Israel was that as long as they stayed faithful to God and followed his commands, then God would bless them. It was a two-sided covenant—both sides agreed to do what was required from them.

But before the ink dried on the contract—figuratively speaking—Israel failed at their end of the deal. The Lord declares, “*They broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.*” Not too long after receiving the Law, the people of Israel made a golden calf and worshipped it in place of the true God. Throughout their history, reading through the Old Testament, it can seem more like a recording of how much God’s people failed at keeping this covenant rather than actually following it. The Lord was their husband, and instead of remaining faithful to him, they cheated on the Lord by following their wants and desires, chasing after false gods, made gods of their own, lived the way they wanted to live. God remained faithful. It was his people, the Israelites, who failed to keep their part of the agreement. They had a relationship with the Lord, and they threw it away.

How’s your relationship with God? Look closely at how you live, act, and think, and be honest with yourself. Does that relationship with God look differently when you around certain people? Is God treated like one of those friends that you bring around when it is convenient but don’t want too many people to know about? Is he one of those that you kind of know but really only go to when you are in trouble or need something? Do you treat him like someone who you occasionally get ahold of when you think about it, but otherwise there’s always a convenient excuse waiting to not make the time or effort to be with him? Because that’s what it seems like when we do not defend our faith and God’s teachings—you aren’t sticking up for him or defending him. What kind of friend is that? That’s what it seems like when being a Christian seems to stop at the doorway on the way out of church and we act differently around certain groups of people. Is that loyalty to God? Far from it. That’s the impression you might be giving when instead of being connected to him in his Word with your devotional life, prayer life, worship life, we have all types of excuses of busy lives and other things to do that take its place. Do you actually want to be around him? Or do you just say that you do because that’s what you think people want to hear while at the same time how you live and act can seem to be saying something different.

The thing is, like those Israelites, we know better. We know we should **be** better. We know what God wants us to do. It’s really not that secretive at all. In fact it’s

quite simple: Love him above all things and follow his will. When what you want to do goes against God, follow God's will instead. And every time we do not, it hurts our relationship with God. God gives us a target to hit with following his law; sin is missing that target. Sin is never just an accident. It's never only a "woops." It's never okayed and condoned with any excuse or reasons. God's Word tells us, "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you*" (Isaiah 59:2). If God acted the way that we do in our relationships, then we are lost. We give him plenty of reasons to not trust, to not want to be close to us. There is nothing that we can do to fix our relationship with him because all we end up doing is failing again. Because of that sin, we are cut off from God and separated from him. Not having a relationship with God then means not having a home with him in heaven. It means still being in your sin and there's nothing that you could do about it. Separation from God means separation from life both here and suffering for eternity in hell.

And, yet, despite what we deserve and in spite of what our sins do, God went to work for you. The problem wasn't with the original agreement with Israel; the problem was that Israel broke it. There was nothing that God had done wrong and nothing God had to do. Israel didn't deserve a second chance. You and I do not deserve any more chances. But that's God's grace. Notice, this isn't a two-sided agreement. This is 100% the Lord's work. *I will make a new covenant*, he says. And so he does. To fix our broken relationship with him, Jesus came to this earth. Even when his very human soul was troubled at the thought of death he doesn't turn from it. No, it was for this reason—to suffer and die—that Jesus came for us. In reverent obedience to his Father's will (Hebrew 5:7-9), Jesus lived under God's Law going to the cross and grave according to his Father's will. It was time for judgment to come on this world and the prince of this world—the devil—to be driven out and defeated. Instead of pushing us away from himself because of our many sins, Jesus was lifted up on the cross to draw us closer to him. While claiming our sins to be his own, Jesus along with this sinful world and the devil came under judgment on that cross and all three were condemned. Jesus—not guilty of any personal sins—is condemned for us and for our sins so that the devil may be condemned forever and lose his claim on us. Jesus is condemned, forsaken by his Father on that cross, so that your sins would be removed from you to fix your relationship with God. Our sins, placed on Jesus, are traded for his holiness and perfection.

And what does God do? He makes this your own. The Lord declares in v.33 "*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*" God's law being spoken about here is God's saving work. And

this isn't just for those of the Jewish nationality, it's for you. By a miracle, Jesus' accomplishment on that cross—forgiveness of sins, new life—is put into your inmost parts so that this teaching permeates your entire being. You are made into a new creation as people of God. You don't need to be told to know the Lord because knowing the Lord is having saving faith. There's nothing for you to do, God has worked for you to know this truth.

How is this possible considering all that we have done and not done? The Lord declares: *I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.* The guilt of your sin has been removed from you. God does not hold your sins against you. In fact, he doesn't even remember them. This is what Jesus accomplished for you. This is what is yours because he rose from the dead. This full and free forgiveness is the New Covenant, agreement that God has established with you, his people. God wanted a relationship with you and so he takes away that sin that separated you from him, placing it on Jesus, so that you have peace with God. This is what was sealed, guaranteed, and given to you in your baptism. And so each day you live in this baptismal grace of God continually forgiving and forgetting your sins—even the deliberate sins. It does not give us the license to do what we want, but instead this gospel truth empowers and enables us to get back up again and want to do better next time. This new covenant is what you receive when you come forward for the Lord's Supper. You receive Jesus' body and blood for the full and free forgiveness that is yours because of Jesus' once and for all sacrifice on that cross. Through saving faith you know and believe this truth and it becomes your own.

Run to that cross of Christ where we see our Savior giving his life to establish our relationship with God. We want to live as God's people who have his Word on our hearts and on our minds affecting all that we think, say, and do. We want to do this and strive to do this because God has forgiven all our sins and remembers them no more. Amen.