

West View Methodist Church

DAILY DEVOTIONS: LENT WEEK 5



JEREMIAH TO JESUS

THE COVENANT OF THE HEART

Much of this week's devotions' content was sourced from a book by Robb, Susan. *Remember*. Cokesbury, United Methodist Publishing House - CoreSource Plus, 2023.

MONDAY – Personal Freeway Moments



Acts 17: 28 *For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also certain of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.*

In her book “Remember ...” that the current preaching series is based on, Susan Robb recalls an incident in her life of spiritual isolation, brought about by her own actions, notwithstanding the faithfulness of the Lord in responding with repeated covenants to invite her into the intimate relationship that He desires. She realizes at that moment how long since her heart and soul had felt full and satisfied; this is due to “zero time or effort” spent tending her relationship with God. She had forgotten about God. This scenario is something that we all can suffer.

Patiently God waits to tend our relationship with Him as Acts describes above, He is ready to reboot our relationships even when we unconsciously have turned away.

The condition of our heart before God intervenes is sadly the human condition but as Jeremiah

in 31: 31-34 envisages, this heart is the vessel upon which the new covenant will be inscribed. This condition matters, and with the coming of the Word made flesh, our hearts have the capacity to become pliable and receive intimacy with God and each other.

But from the salvation story we see that as human beings we’ve failed repeatedly to regain that intimate trusting relationship originally enjoyed between God and Adam and Eve, our fear holds us back from trusting fully. Our self-centeredness isolates us from God, selfish desires, born from lack of faith, leads us to turn material things into idols.

Consider: Why do you think our initial impulse towards something unexpected is fear? How is that impulse helpful? How can it be harmful? How can fear hold us back from experiencing something new and amazing?



Prayer: Lord, as we follow Jesus during this Lenten season, give us the spirit to hear the prophetic voices in our midst who remind us that we have turned away from You. Give us the spirit to repent and return to You. And let us be receptive to Your love that Your law and Your precepts may be written on our hearts. AMEN

TUESDAY – Prophets, Then and Now



Hosea 2: 19-20 *And I will betroth you to Me forever. Yea, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth you to Me in faithfulness. And you shall know Jehovah.*

Susan Robb points out a consistent theme in the story of the people who wrestle with God, starting with Abraham's descendants and throughout, that of human inconsistency. In contrast, the most consistent theme is God's faithfulness in the face of human infidelity.

Throughout our human story, we see the people repeatedly breaking the covenant, starting with the golden calf while Moses is on the mountain receiving God's law.

In the scriptures encountered in the prophet-writings, God is referred to as Israel's husband, she is the unfaithful bride. The prophet Hosea is sent by God to forewarn them against their infidelity. Furthermore, the Lord instructs Hosea to also live it out prophetically, he marries the prostitute Gomer who is unfaithful to him, but God instructs Hosea to remain faithful, giving voice to

what God tells him describing Israel in Hosea 2.

Moses' successor, Joshua, just before they cross into the Promised Land, recounts all that the Lord has done for them and calls on them to renew their covenant made at Sinai and to choose whom to serve. Enthusiastically they affirm their commitment to God, and Joshua issues both a warning and a prediction "that they cannot serve Him for He is holy" (Joshua 24: 19). He then erects a large stone wall as a witness against them, where the people inevitably fail to live up to their promise.

Consider: In Jesus's parable of the wicked tenants; who in that story fulfilled the role of prophets? How did they speak for God? What response did they receive? What does it mean to speak with "the prophetic voice"? Where in our society today do you hear the prophetic voice?



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WEDNESDAY – Making our Gehennas



Jeremiah 2: 7 *And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness; but when you entered, you defiled My land and made My inheritance an abomination.*

In her book “Remember ...”, Susan Robb points out that whenever you read the word hell in the Gospels, a footnote references *Gehenna*, the word Jesus uses to describe utter separation from God, and a place created by humans, not by God.

Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet” holds a career that covers some of the most critical events in the history of Judah where his wish was that his eyes become a “fountain of tears” to weep for the fate of the nation and the dead and dispersed among his people. He rails against one of the most grievous acts of rebellion against God that they have ever committed, that of the abomination of burning children alive as offerings to a foreign god in the Valley of Hinnom, known as Gehinnom or in Greek, Gehenna.

God cannot be present with the people in these places where they have defiled the land as the scripture

above points out, and just so for us, when we walk away from God to pursue selfish interests and inflict pain on others, we create our own form of Gehenna. An action taken, or a harsh word spoken alienates us from those we love, creating our own “living hell”; we break God’s law of love. Evidence of Gehenna’s in our communities and our world can be seen daily on our newsfeeds.

The warnings Jesus offers us about Gehenna are given so that we do not harm our life and health, our relationships with family and friends and bring harm into the lives of others.

Consider: Where in our society do you find examples of putting man-made things or human values above the steadfast and complete love for God? Do people have blind spots about this idol worship today? How have these examples of modern-day idolatry helped bring about modern-day Gehenna’s? What harmful consequences have they created?



Prayer: Lord, when we are reminded of how we have fallen away from You, we also remember Your willingness to make a new covenant to replace the one that we broke—and Your promise that it would be forever written on our hearts. We are overwhelmed by Your amazing grace that would set aside even our worst offences. Help us to respond to Your forgiveness by teaching others, as Your prophet foretold, and by building communities around Your love, Your justice, and Your mercy. AMEN

THURSDAY – The Days Are Surely Coming



Jeremiah 31: 31 *Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah*

Jeremiah 31: 33b *After those days, says Jehovah, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

Susan Robb points out that Jeremiah is not just a prophet of doom and gloom, he also proclaims hope. His “plucking up and breaking down” language is accompanied by his performative acts like buying a field in the countryside prior to the siege, and with the land already under Babylonian occupation, it makes no sense financially but Jeremiah is making a statement: the days are coming when properties will be bought and sold in Judah, crops will be raised, fortunes restored (Jeremiah: 32: 42-44):

God will remember God’s people.

Although the people have broken faith, God, in His response, does not null and void the contract as if legal, instead, He renews or reaffirms it. And in renewing it He does not change the terms of the promise of faithful love for God’s people. Instead, He adopts a breathtaking new approach to how it will be implemented and understood; allowing us an even deeper

appreciation of God’s commitment to a relationship with rebellious human beings. It will not be written on stone tablets, it will reside within human beings, written by God’s merciful hands on our hearts!

God, remembering His people, will line by line write the law of the love of God and neighbour within us and we will intimately know God and how much He loves us. The covenant will be renewed, the past infidelities and faithlessness will be forgotten entirely.

Consider: Where do you see parallels between Jeremiah’s “covenant of the heart” and Jesus’s teaching that the condition of one’s heart is as important to outward adherence to the written commandments of the Law?

When Jesus forgives His killers even as He is dying on the cross, saying that they do not realize what they are doing, where do you hear echoes of Jeremiah’s new covenant?



Prayer: Lord, we become very quiet and very humble before Your mighty acts of mercy, love and grace in renewing our relationship with You despite our unfaithfulness. Thank you. AMEN

FRIDAY – Jesus Initiates the New Covenant



Ezekiel 11: 19 *And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. And I will remove the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh.*

Ezekiel 37: 24 *And David My servant shall be King over them. And there shall be one Shepherd to all of them. And they shall walk in My judgments, and obey My Laws, and do them.*

In her book “Remember ...”, Susan Robb explores the relationship between Lent and God’s and our memories. The connection to the covenants in the Bible with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David especially, and how these relate to the way that Jesus lived His life, His journey to the cross, His resurrection, and the institution of what Jeremiah described in his day as a new covenant.

We see that in the face of humanity’s forgetfulness and faithlessness, God faithfully continues to remember to reach out not only the salvific and life-giving four covenants but also through Jesus He continues to renew the covenants.

Jesus is a son of Abraham and a descendant of David and He is promised as the Davidic king, as The Word made flesh, He restores God as ruler, not just of Israel but of humanity. In renewing the covenant

He made with Moses, Jesus becomes the new Moses and initiates the covenant Jeremiah announced.

St. Augustine writes “*You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.*”

Luke’s gospel is the only one that uses Jeremiah’s term when Jesus is referred to as the “new covenant” the night before His crucifixion. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus reinterprets the law of Moses to focus less on the words inscribed on tablets than on what is in the heart.

“You have heard it said...But I say to you”... references the law and then directs the listener towards the spirit, the heart of the Law.

Consider: In the coming weeks of Lent, how will you prepare yourself to follow Jesus to the cross?



Prayer: Lord, when we are reminded of how we have fallen away from You, we also remember Your willingness to make a new covenant to replace the one that we broke—and Your promise that it would be forever written on our hearts. We are overwhelmed by Your amazing grace that would set aside even our worst offences. Help us to respond to Your forgiveness by teaching others, as Your prophet foretold, and by building communities around Your love, Your justice, and Your mercy. AMEN