

DEVOTION: THE NEW COVENANT

READ JEREMIAH 31:31-34

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,"
declares the Lord.
"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time," declares the Lord.
"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.
No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the Lord.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."*

Jeremiah's nickname was "The Weeping Prophet" because of the heartbreaking message he was called to deliver to the southern kingdom of Judah. His ministry was long and difficult, spanning forty years, during which he was beaten, put in stocks, thrown into an empty well, abandoned by his own family, scorned by his countrymen, and accused of treason. All of this because he was called by God to urge the people of Judah to repent and to remember that their first loyalty was to God's covenant. Jeremiah foresaw the horrors that would befall Jerusalem when Babylon laid siege to the city, destroyed the beloved temple, and drove the people into exile. No wonder he wept.

Jeremiah was also given a glimpse of the kingdom of God that would arrive with Messiah Jesus, and the new covenant forged by God. As New Testament followers of

Jesus, we live under this new covenant. The word "testament" actually means covenant, so the New Testament is the story of this New Covenant and how it came into effect. In our common vernacular, we use "will and testament" to describe the legal document that guarantees assets and blessings to rightful heirs. These promises are bestowed upon death. The connections clarify as we find this passage of Jeremiah quoted in its entirety in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. The author describes Jesus as the great high priest who, rather than slaughtering a sacrificial lamb, became the sacrifice himself, pouring out his own blood for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' death brought God's own "will and testament" into effect, making us eligible for all of the benefits. Every time we take communion, we participate in this ancient process. The Apostle Paul claims that he received this insight from Jesus himself: "'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

In our devotional readings a few days ago, we focused on this passage in the practice of lectio divina. Return to it now, and remember the word or phrase that emerged for you to consider. As we reflect on Jeremiah's ancient words from the vantage point of our current moment in history, we understand that we, too, live in a broken world. The signs and symptoms of a culture who has forgotten our identity as God's children are everywhere around us. Do you find an application for your own life? Can you see a way to live out (incarnate) your status as an heir to the kingdom of God?

DAY 2 • LECTIO DIVINA

PSALM 31:9-16

Go to your place where you meet with God. Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor. Shrug up your shoulders and let them fall. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Ask God to reveal himself to you through the words of King David, a man after God's own heart.

PREPARE

Be seated in your comfortable place. Relax into your chair, intentionally let your shoulders relax, and take a few deep breaths. Greet Jesus as your Savior and friend. He is the mediator of the New Covenant.

READ (LECTIO)

Read through Psalm 31:9-16 aloud slowly. Look for the word or phrase that speaks to you, that speaks to where you are or perhaps brings you some relief.

REFLECT (MEDITATIO)

Read the passage again, lingering on that word or phrase. Let it sink into your soul. Do you feel your current situation is seen? Do you feel a relief in your body? Or perhaps you feel a strengthening in your resolve?

RESPOND (ORATIO)

Read the passage again, noticing the sensations this word or phrase brings to you. Pray to God your response as you open your heart, your life, to him. Allow him to minister to you through your prayer.

REST (CONTEMPLATIO)

Read the passage once more. Linger lovingly on his word to you. Rest in your request or receive the strength you have needed. Sit and worship for a while.

RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)

Take his word to you and its effect on you into the rest of your day. When you drive to work, when you have a moment of stress, when you feel anxiety or feel unseen, breathe this moment in and believe he is merciful.

DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

MARK 11:1-11

When we bring our imagination to Scripture, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill in the details of the scene out of our own experience, but always within the boundaries of Scripture as it is written.

There is a chill in the air when you leave your parent's house early this morning. Throwing your tunic over your shoulder and grabbing the bundle of palm branches you collected yesterday, you head out of the city gate, toward the road that leads from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. Excitement has been building for days. Is it possible? Is this the time? Up to now you have only heard stories about this rabbi from Nazareth. Today, you hope to see him. You pray the whispers are true. Can he be the Messiah? Is he Israel's deliverer? Will he be leading an army that, once and for all, will remove the Roman occupiers from our holy city?

When you reach the road, you find a spot that will afford you an excellent view of the majestic procession. Then you wait ...

PREPARE

As you are comfortably seated, take several deep and cleansing breaths. Let the peace of Christ rest upon you as you breathe in deeply. Imagine the stresses of your life leaving your body as you exhale. Let the sights, sounds, and smells of the scene surround you. Feel the expectation of the crowd. Enter into the anticipation as your deliverer is about to arrive.

READ MARK 11:1-11

Read slowly through the passage several times. Is this what you thought it would say? Does it describe a scene of triumphal entry and deliverance? Are you disappointed? Imagine the initial reaction of the crowd as they see this man, riding on a donkey colt, coming slowly toward them, looking a little less heroic than you imagined. There is no entourage, no trumpeters in front and no battalion of soldiers behind. His "army" is a somewhat scruffy band of a dozen or so followers walking alongside him.

Then you recall something you heard in the synagogue. "Behold, your king is coming, humble and riding on a donkey colt." From Zechariah, you think. The rest of the crowd must have remembered the same Scripture because suddenly everyone surrounds him and begins to shout, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Now, join the celebration; lay your palm branches and your cloak on the ground before him. As he passes, he looks directly at you with the kindest eyes you have ever seen. And he smiles.

PRAY

As you finish your time, thank Jesus for coming in such an unexpected way, and ask him to keep you watchful so you will see him when he surprises you. You might want to write about your experience to help you reflect on what he shows you. And remember that smile.

DAY 4 • BIBLE STUDY

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

PREPARATION

Pause for a moment as you arrive to study today. After you have gathered your favorite tools, be they pens, highlighters, or just your favorite Bible open before you, ask God for eyes to see and ears to hear the message he has for you today.

Today's passage is from Paul's letter to "all the saints in Philippi." If you'd like to get acquainted with some of these saints, you can read the backstory in Acts 16:11-40. Sometimes called "Paul's Letter of Joy," Philippians carries a different tone than most of his letters. This is especially notable in light of the prison cell from which he wrote. If you have a few extra minutes, I encourage you to read Philippians in its entirety. You may also consider listening to it on an audio Bible app like YouVersion. You'll hear the words joy and rejoice sixteen times in these four short chapters, and you will probably feel more happy afterward.

In Philippians chapter 2, Paul encourages the church to value unity over being right, or getting one's own way. To this end, he urges them to cultivate humility, and then uses Jesus Christ as the ultimate example. Here we find some of the most beautiful words assembled by the Apostle Paul.

With this context in mind, take a couple of deep breaths, and read the passage two or three times, aloud if possible.

OBSERVATION

Mark any words that catch your attention. Use the questions you learned in elementary school; *Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?* to investigate further. I like to use my yellow highlighter on every mention of God, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit. Is anyone other than God mentioned? If you can remember your grammar lessons, notice verbs (action words) active, passive, past or present? Who's doing what? When? Where? Why? And how?

INTERPRETATION

This passage describes a unique relationship between Father and Son. Paying attention to the verbs, the action words, what do you learn about the Trinity? What did the Father do, and what did the Son do?

APPLICATION

Paul uses Jesus, the creator of all things, as an example of humility. Bearing in mind that humility is not lowering your estimation of yourself, but raising your estimation of God, how can you practice humility among your family or friends? In what ways can you put others first at work, church, or home?

As you close your time with God today, ask him to draw your attention to any hint of arrogance or pride within you in the coming days. If—more like when—it shows up, just agree with God, smile with him, and say, “Thank you for being gentle with me.”

DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA



“THE LORD HAS NEED OF IT” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY

TURN TOWARD

The Son of God had proven time and again that he could do miracles—big ones. Water into wine, feeding over 5,000 people from a few loaves and fishes. Obviously, if the need arose Jesus could, according to John the Baptist, make children of Abraham out of stones. Food and wine would not be a stretch. One sometimes wonders why Jesus turned water into wine, when he could have gone straight to wine, skipping the intermediate step. Having the servants pour water into the wine vessels seems almost superfluous. Transportation into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? He could have simply materialized the finest, most tricked out chariot ever seen. He chose a different way. Perhaps “turning toward” him is to recognize that he also delights in *our* participation.

SURRENDER

This breath prayer is a good way to begin:

[On the inhale] *Immanuel*
[On the exhale] *God with me*
[On the inhale] *Open my heart*
[On the exhale] *That I may truly see.*

READ

With the image in mind, read the following from Mark 11:1-7.

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

ENGAGE

One of the best ways to allow an image to speak to us is to personalize it. Rework it in your mind using things you are familiar with. Imagine you're sitting on your front porch with a few friends, although not that many people do that these days as we tend to hide from our neighbors on the patio in the backyard. Your car is parked in the driveway. Usually, it would be in the garage, but you have just finished washing it, so it sits in the sunlight of your contentment.

Two strangers walk up and without so much as a nod to you, get in your car. Clearly, they mean to drive off. Wait. What? You're speechless at the two strangers' brazenness. But one of your friends speaks up and asks, "What exactly are you doing?"

Their reply must have sounded as strange in the first century as it would to us today. "The Lord has need of it and will return it immediately."

"Mmmhmmm. The Lord you say? Riggghhht."

How do you react—other than calling 9-1-1? Do you give their statement any credibility? Are you able to consider the possibility that the Lord really does have need of something that is yours? Your car, perhaps. Your talents? Your money? Your relationships? Your heart? Is it possible that everything God asks of us has already been given to us as a gift, fulfilling first his promises to provide, and second to enable us to participate in his own kenosis, emptying ourselves and using our gifts for others.

REMEMBER

Carry the image and the questions it raises in your mind and heart throughout your week. Let them remind you to listen for God's voice telling you he has need of you. Let yourself see that even the lowliest donkey colt is priceless in service of the King of Kings. Then know that his "need" is his highest and holiest desire for you.

