

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

These opening words from the Old Testament reading today are remarkable for being the only explicit reference in the Old Testament to the idea of a “new covenant”, i.e. a “New Testament”. But the prophet Jeremiah, six centuries before Christ, had no concept that a new series of sacred books would be written, as we know the New Testament today. Instead, Jeremiah was the messenger that *God would do something unprecedented*: God would change the hearts of his people, changing people from the inside out, giving them a center that was in touch with God and from which they could respond faithfully.

This new covenant was not, of course, the *first* covenant of God with his community of people. There had been many others—the covenants with Noah...Abraham...Moses...and the Kings of Israel. God had already been moving through time with this community of people that God had called into being. This was something new in the human experience—the *idea of a God who moved through time with people, in different eras initiating a new relationship*, and repeatedly, in effect, declaring: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

And, in every era of time that God covenanted again with his people, there were heartbreaking failures of God’s people to follow through. And so, in the prophet’s words today there is a *poignancy* to the prophet’s words, where Jeremiah mixes the metaphors of...a *mother* who takes Israel like a child by the hand...and a *husband* who takes Israel as a wife. And yet Israel repeatedly forgets their “mother”...forgets their “husband”...*forgets their God*...and human suffering ensues.

So, the *new covenant* that Jeremiah announces is that God will take God’s outreach to his people one step further, and, you might say, “go right to the heart of the matter”—and begin changing the *hearts* of God’s wayward people: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

This is the new covenant that Christians believe is proclaimed in the *New Testament*, a new relationship with God appearing in Christ and made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit. And again, like the covenants of old: it is not that *we first loved God, but that God first loved us* (1 John 4:10). And we are called and *empowered* to respond: *love others as I have loved you*, as Christ said (John 13:34-35). |

And yet, we still find ourselves betwixt and between. *At times*, our hearts are clear and ready for God: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matthew 5:8). *At times*, we too, forget our “mother”...forget our “husband”... forget the God who first loved us and made us his own. Betwixt and between, we are.

Our *sin*— “original sin” or “shared sin” or however you wish to call it—sin is still with us, as time moves forward. We belong to a global people who do not just have *psychological problems, medical issues, criminal transgressions, sociological dynamics, economic factors, political conflict, and ecological distress*. We belong to a global people who are still ...mysteriously ...*spiritually*...alienated from the God of our life. And one sign of that is that even *Christians* may shy away from the idea of *sin* and become accustomed to thinking of our troubles in only secular terms, without any reference to God. And yet, in the Collect of the Day, we called upon God to “bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners.” Sin is not a matter of thinking less of ourselves, as perhaps we fear—but *thinking more of God...and thinking spiritually...and truthfully*.

Once again, embraced by God’s new covenant, every one of us is in the same place as our ancestors before us: a way has been cleared by God to return again to the hope that has been there from the beginning, as God continues to confirm:

“I will be your God and you will be my people.”