

Promised Presence: Hope Seeds that Break Hearts

5 Lent B March 21, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts.

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: 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. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Gospel: John 12:20-33

Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus’ words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken

to him.”³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.”³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Just as Jews are plotting Jesus' death and as he is announcing his coming Passion there are Greeks demanding to see Jesus – his fame is spreading and others even outside Jewish circles are responding. This new Covenant that Jeremiah speaks of is coming because Jesus is the holy seed being 'planted' into the ground and will blossom with a holy hope for all people (Greeks -and others-as well as Jews). Before the bud rises though, the passion planting takes place and the wonder/horror/tragedy of it draws us all in. We too journey through the furrows of despair that leave their marks upon our forehead and in our spirit. As we continue and often struggle in darkness, we look forward to the light that is coming. This light has been shown to us and promises to raise us up above the surface of our soiled lives. We journey this last week with Jesus into Jerusalem so that he may be planted on a stake and into the ground. Jesus' death is the Hope Seed placed into a grave that breaks open our hearts so we can rise to eternal life even as it breaks our hearts to watch as it is in the hands of those who desire to crush this perceived weed-seed that seems for the moment in their grasp.

Some principles for Life (Living in Faith Everyday)

A) Jeremiah reminds us that ancient covenants were expressed externally, this new covenant will be rooted inside; inside our hearts and minds and souls. This new covenant is that which gives rise to a sense that something is here and real in this soul-touching, behavior impacting, spirit inspiring, gospel convicting faith that simultaneously drives/urges us to become that which God has called, gifted and privileged us to be AND to use those charismata (Greek for gifts) so that we can truly have an abundant life as well as work to ensure that abundance is for all – including the abundance of justice, fairness, equality, opportunity, forgiveness and joy. This covenant that is coming will be forever and will secure the Promise of Being Known (the complete intimacy of Heaven) by God forever. How do you describe the sense of faith within you? Was there an incident, experience, moment of insight when you realized you had the gift of faith – or something that seemed a connection to something bigger than you? When did you last have an experience of that faith being moved, touched, inspired, grown, challenged, awakened inside of you? How have you helped anyone else in your family/friend

network to know of this? Why wouldn't you talk with them about something that is so life shaping for you? What would make that possible?

- B) Jews would come to the Temple in Jerusalem to cleanse themselves to be ready to participate in the Passover. The fact that people are coming to Jesus (the Greeks insisting to do so) instead highlights John's emphasis that Jesus and not the temple is now the focus of God's presence and activity. Where do you go to find or 'see' Jesus? Do you see him in nature, crises, churches, relationships, acts of Grace/kindness/justice/love? What does 'seeing' him do for you?
- C) The Cross is a train wreck – no one wants it to happen and yet all eyes turn to it to experience its tragic reality. We 'see' Jesus fully upon the Cross. His mission, message and presence are all about the love and life that God desires for Creation. The Cross reminds us that if we are to truly be embraced by that love, life and mission ourselves then we CANNOT look away from the tragedy, pain, and hurt of the world. The voice of the World demands its scream of self-preservation. There is a mysterious attraction in the gracious obstinance of the Cross – hung with a final sacrifice of love's promise. How has your life and faith been shaped by understanding just how far God will go to show God's love for you? Facing difficulties, cruelty, and injustices requires strength. Where did that come from for you? How have you faced the world's ugliness and brought to it some justice, forgiveness or soothing presence? Do Jesus' actions put in contrasting relief the whining and complaining many of us do about our 'sacrifices'? What kingdom 'good' have you found worth sacrificing parts of yourself for? How often have you done that? Why or why not?

Upcoming:

3.28 Promised Presence: From Waving Palm Branches to Hanging on a Tree Branch