

“YOU GOTTA DIE A LITTLE!!”

Series: “Promises, Promises”

The Fifth Sunday in Lent -- B

March 22, 2015

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

Citations:

Lectionary Commentary, Jeremiah 31:27-34, 20th Sunday after Pentecost (Year C), by Dennis Bratcher at Christian Resource Institute.

<http://www.cresourcei.org/lectionary/YearC/Cproper24ot.html>

"Behold, I am Doing a New Thing," Paul Tillich, from *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 1955. At Religion Online. <http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll?action=showitem&gotochapter=22&id=86>

The Secret of Strength: Jeremiah 30 - 31, by Ray C. Stedman.

<http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/jeremiah/3210.html>

Sunday Funny:

More things from kids:

Democracy is a beautiful thing, except for that part about letting just any old yokel vote. – Age 10

As you make your way through this hectic world of ours, set aside a few minutes each day. At the end of the year, you'll have a couple of days saved up. – Age 7

Teaching points:

- 1) “Nuheart” license plate.
- 2) Jeremiah’s call to a “new heart”, to not just know about Jesus but to know Jesus (relationship).
- 3) Jeremiah’s words are action words, at their root. They have to do with change, with motivation.
- 4) God want’s a relationship with us.
- 5) Jesus might say, “You gotta die a little.”
- 6) Jesus “did crosses” to fulfill the new covenant and by grace give us the “New Heart” of salvation.

Message:

Soon after I moved to Rush City, MN, I saw a personalized license plate on a truck. It was simple, “NuHeart”. In Nebraska it would have meant a heart for the “Big Red.” But in MN, it caused to wonder about that plate. Was a family name, a spiritual reference, or truly what it said -- someone had a new physical heart?

I got to meet the owner of the truck. It was at his brother’s funeral. When I met him (Audrey Anderson’s brother, Luverne??), I knew immediately that he had a new heart. He had a new lease on life, a positive wonderful way of looking at things, thankfulness for everyone and everything around him. He had a wonderful new

spiritual outlook. When I remarked about his personalized license plate, and his apparent new way of looking at his life, I discovered that he also had a new physical heart. He was the recipient of a heart transplant. As he told his story, it was apparent that much of his new heart in a spiritual sense was directly linked to his new physical heart. And, you know, the same is true for most of us -- we become more thankful and positive people as we are brought low in our humanity.

Jeremiah, the prophet, was constantly calling people to repentance. Jeremiah was constantly seeing how God's people had fallen away from their commitment to the law, to holding up their side of the covenant that God had made with them when God took them up out of Egypt. Jeremiah was in the business of telling people that they needed to get a new heart, a new way of life, a new way of looking at things. Jeremiah was calling folks back to rightness under the law.

The law wasn't working. It wasn't because the law was bad or because God was failing to uphold that side of the covenant. The law was failing because people kept the law external, outside, set apart. People kept the law at a distance, something to be thought about, or looked at, or talked about. It was always external. It helped people know ABOUT GOD, but it did nothing to help people KNOW GOD.

So, through Jeremiah God promises a new covenant. This time not an external covenant. This new covenant was not something written in stone to be held apart, at a distance.

NO! NOT!! This covenant is to be something far different, life changing and life giving. It is to be personal and intimate.

This covenant is not to be written on stone, but on hearts.

It is not to be distant, but intimate.

It is not to be outward but now it is something that is inward.

It is not to be held apart but is to be owned.

It will not be outer principles, but inner contracts.

It is not to be about God's distance, but God's closeness.

It is not to be about knowing ABOUT God, but knowing God.

It is not to be about obedience, but about forgiveness.

It is not now to be cosmic, but personal.

Pr. Reimers did a word study of several of the key Hebrew words in this text. He reported that the root words in covenant, in law, in "writing on" all have to do with movement, action. The words have to do with moving from one way of being to another. They have to do with not just understanding or agreeing to something, but making something happen. They are words of action, change, motion and motivation.

You see, what God wants to communicate is that God needs to get inside of us, needs to give us new hearts, needs to touch the deepest part of our being, needs to get through in a dramatic way. For the covenant to work, God needs to get under our skin to change us, to mold us, to get our attention to build a new relationship with us. Not an external relationship, but internal.

Perhaps one of the biggest problems with Christians and Christianity today is that for many it is simply enough to know about God. It is enough to have been exposed to God, like we might expose ourselves to some kind of a vaccine. That, my friends, is the way of the old covenant, with all the problems of the old covenant.

What is necessary, you see, is to KNOW GOD, to be in RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. To have let God get under our skin, to have written God's love and mercy into our lives in such a way as for us to have "new hearts". To have come to us and become intimate enough with us as to have changed us, so we are not failing to act on what we know, but are acting from what we believe, from what is in our heart and not our mind. What is necessary is for God to come close enough to us that God's ways bubble up from inside of us because we know God and God's Spirit has written itself inside.

Jesus would say it a different way. Jesus says, "You gotta die a little" in being a faithful follower of God. There is a giving up of self (that means our desire to control everything) in order to honor the father. One has to lose ones' self to save life. There is dying in order to rise to his glory.

Jesus and Jeremiah might team up to say that your heart has to be in the right place in order to know the fruits of the life of faith. They might team up to say, "you gotta die a little" to become a part of this new covenant, to become one with a new heart in being a faithful servant of God. There has to be a rearranging of priorities, a change of heart, a new way of thinking and looking at life.

A graduating student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, had just received his appointment from the bishop. He was grouching and grumbling because the appointment didn't fit what he felt he deserved. Another student, in a loving but unsympathetic way, patted him on the back and said, "You know the world is a better place because Michelangelo didn't say, "I don't do ceilings." He lifted up the principle of Jesus, "To Serve is to follow." You gotta die a little.

And if you stop to think about it, that is the spirit of servanthood. The world is a better place because a German monk named Martin Luther didn't say, "I don't do doors."

Go from the beginning of the Bible to the end, and you will see over and over again the story of men and women who had servant hearts, minds and spirits. And the world is a better place, because:

Moses didn't say, "I don't do rivers."	Noah didn't say, "I don't do arks."
Jeremiah didn't say, "I don't do weeping."	Amos didn't say, "I don't do speeches."
Ruth didn't say, "I don't do mothers-in-law."	David didn't say, "I don't do giants."
Mary didn't say, "I don't do virgin births."	Mary didn't say, "I don't do feet."
John didn't say, "I don't do deserts."	Peter didn't say, "I don't do Gentiles."
Paul didn't say, "I don't do letters."	Jesus didn't say, "I don't do crosses."

Jesus did crosses. Because Jesus did crosses, God came close to us. God got intimate with us. In his closeness our hearts are renewed, we experience the dying and rising of Baptism. Jesus did crosses to fulfill the new covenant and by grace give us the "New Heart" of salvation.

Drawing now to the end of Lent, we are called again to His cross. And we are called to Him, the Son of God, who is ever faithful and longs to have us know him with new hearts.

Amen.