

Sermon Proper 24 Year C, October 17, 2010

“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...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.” Amen.

Often we think about law as rigid and external — something that "bad" people break and "good" people keep. In a recent survey of Americans on their beliefs more than 90% said they believe in God, yet nearly half the respondents think of God as a God of judgment weighing people's good and bad actions and rewarding or punishing as appropriate. Sadly, a far smaller number of Americans see God as the God of love and compassion. Today's passages invite a shift from an external perspective of law to an internal one. It is written on our hearts, God-breathed, law that transforms us for the work of justice.

The book of Jeremiah is about catastrophe and survival, destruction and rebuilding, grief and joy. Jeremiah's prophecy is the reflective outpouring of very troubled times; times not unlike our own. Jeremiah's prophetic purpose is to help people make sense of their tragedy, recover their identities and move toward the future.

In today's passage from Jeremiah, we see an ideological and theological shift in the understanding of being in relationship with the divine. This mention of a new covenant is at the heart of Jeremiah's message. This passage is the only time in the Old Testament scriptures where reference to a new covenant is made. God is promising a new

type of relationship with God's people. In God's previous covenant with the people of Israel, the law was an external experience.

The words of God's law once written on stone tablets needed to be passed on from one generation to the next through teaching and rigorous instruction. In this text Jeremiah is prophesying a new future where *all* people will live in unbroken covenanted relationship with God. God has made this new relationship possible by shifting the religious experience of God's law from an external enterprise to an internal one. God tells Jeremiah, "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". The fundamental theme of the text is that *all* of humanity will live in a restored covenanted relationship with God. And that restoration will include everyone, "from the least to the greatest."

Both Psalm 119 and Jeremiah are speaking to an experience of relating to God in a new way. The Israelites were an exiled and oppressed people who, in these texts, are being promised the gift of hope. God is **our** God, and **we** are God's people, and the pronouncement of this new covenant has been sealed upon our hearts through the internal transformation of divine law.

For Christians, this new covenant is established through the sacrament of baptism. When the baptized is anointed with the Holy Chrism Oil the priest says, "*You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's Own forever.*" In baptism we are claimed by God... marked as God's children...a claim that can never be undone!

So what is this new law, this new covenant that is to be written in our hearts...it is the law of love. We are called to engage in internalizing the love of God to the point that we engage in God's mission of reconciliation and renewal. Internalizing God's law of love compels us to seek justice and peace for all God's people. We can't help ourselves. Love compels us to do some pretty astonishing things.

So the take away this morning that I want to leave you with is that God has established a new and unbroken covenant with all people, a covenant into which we are called to internalize God's law...God's law of love.

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.

Amen.