

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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October 30, 2022

Looking at all of today's texts, Jeremiah is pulling at me in the most. It doesn't happen often that a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures grabs me more than the gospel reading. After all, Jesus is kind of a big deal in Christianity. But, I think it's the reformational aspect and the covenantal language that draws me to its wisdom.

Before we get too deep into all that, I want to make sure we're all on the same page. In Biblical terms, what is a covenant? It's like what we would call a contract, treaty, or will. It's something that establishes the basis of a relationship and sometimes includes promises and conditions along with consequences for breaking the covenant. In modern times, marriage is a well-known type of covenant. In the Bible there are a handful covenants. Can we think of any? The Noahic covenant—the one where God promises not to flood the world again. The Abrahamic covenant – the promise that God would make of Abraham a great nation and give his descendants land among other things. The covenant mentioned in Jeremiah is the Mosaic covenant. The main point of the Mosaic covenant is that **IF** the people obey God's commands, then they will be God's people, a holy nation. These commands include the big 10 – not the universities, but the commandments.

Part of that covenantal story is the only stained-glass window we have from the Hebrew Scriptures.¹ And in the reading from Jeremiah, there is an

¹ To explore covenants more, check out <https://bibleproject.com/blog/covenants-the-backbone-bible/>

acknowledgement that the people broke the covenant. The people failed to love God and neighbor. The people trusted in themselves instead of God. The people literally worshiped money, power, and beauty. In the story, they turned to chaos, they were mocked by their enemies, and eventually Moses executed over 3,000 people. The covenant was broken.

But this isn't a story from long ago, the Mosaic covenant is broken daily. I wonder how often do we fail to live out the covenant to follow God's laws? Let's take the first commandment to have no other gods. Chances are we break that one without even realizing it. We often worship, emphasize, or honor other idols. We value and idolize the pursuit of money, status, and prestige over loving our neighbor. We venerate process and productivity over God's covenant of love.

Or how about when we deceive others by selectively posting only our best pictures on social media? There we project an unrealistic idea of perfection, and we intentionally leave out the fully reality. In doing so, researchers tell us that it harms our neighbor's body, mind, and spirit.² That harm breaks the fifth commandment. So too, in our desire to consume, buy, and have the latest, we harm our neighbors. Our actions take advantage of the poor and oppressed who farm our food, sew our clothing, and risk their lives for our technology. In doing so, we break the ninth and tenth commandment. You see, far too often, we, like the Israelites, reject God's covenant, we fail to love God, and we neglect to care for our neighbor. And that is what Jeremiah names.

² <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-blog/2019/november/dis-like-how-social-media-feeds-into-perfectionism>

But Jeramiah reminds us of more than that. Jeramiah proclaims a reformation. Not a Martin Luther reformation. Not a reformation that you and I oversee. Not a reformation that we can screw up again with our pride and privilege. Rather this reformation comes from the first reformer. You see, we have a God who remains faithful and will continually seek out new ways to strengthen our relationship. So, if that covenant written on stone can be broken by you and me all the time, then God re-forms that covenant. God says, “I’m going to make this foolproof. I’m going to embed my law within humankind. I’m going to put the law of love in their heart and into every fiber of their being. And on that day, no one will need to speak about needing to love God and love neighbor, but instead, on that day, all will already love and the broken covenant of old will be forgotten.”

And isn’t that a beautiful vision? The vision of a day where all will know God, love God, and love our neighbor. And it’s not that far-fetched of a thought, for throughout the scriptures we hear that our God is always doing new things, that God is obsessively looking for new ways to be our God, and relentlessly encouraging us to find new ways for us to be God’s people. We have a God who is fixated on transforming us for love. As a result, our God will change as many times as needed to get us to see, hear, and experience God’s love. We have a God who took on human form in Jesus to remind us of that truth. A God who fills us with the Holy Spirit so that we might embody God’s love. A God who loves us without a conditional clause in this new covenant. For our God relentless pursues that day where every one of us will have love written in our hearts.

And that is what Reformation Sunday is about. It's a day where we honor our God who never gives up on love. A God who will go to every extreme to reach us, to support us, and to love us. We have a God who is the first reformer. The one who will take on the form of anyone, anything, and take root in any place for the sake of love. And so, we are invited to be on the lookout for God's reformation. We are encouraged to reform our lives, our church, and our world to better embrace God's love because we have been loved first. Friends, on this day and always, we are set free from the covenant of old so that we might reflect God's reforming character all for the sake of love. Amen.