

***Jeremiah 31:31-34. "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."***

Behold! It's a word that calls us to attention. Several translations retain the use of this word that comes from a short Hebrew article! The word is small, at times it may be left untranslated, but it is a word designed for the very purpose of contributing an attention-grabbing weight to that which follows. Behold! Listen! Pay Attention! Something unexpected, something out of the ordinary is about to happen here, something extraordinary is about to be heard! And, lo and behold, the LORD speaks, and this is the breaking news, this is his holy utterance of God, this was his surprising declaration that we would do well to listen to. ***"The time is coming declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."***

***Listen to this new covenant, this unexpected declaration!***

- 1. The LORD insists on a relationship with his people***
- 2. The LORD forgives unfaithfulness, wickedness, and sin***
- 3. The LORD impresses his image upon his people***

This was big news because God assures his people of his faithfulness and his steadfast love despite the blatant unfaithfulness of his people. ***"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*** The people of Judah were on the brink of exile, rightly punished for their disobedience, their idolatry, their unfaithfulness, and yet God would not let go of his people, he would not forget about his love for them, and his love for all people through them. Jerusalem would be left in ruins. The temple would be destroyed. The people would be scattered throughout a foreign land. What would the people do without the temple, without their holy city?! Would God abandon them like they had abandoned him?! Would God nullify his promise to send a Savior because they had been so unfaithful to him?! No doubt that's the kind of verdict that the people expected and deserved to hear.

But that's not what God had in mind, at all. Thus, God calls them to pay special attention. Something else is coming. Something unexpected and divine and wonderful! Behold! Listen to what is being said here through the prophet. Pay attention to this unexpected and divine declaration. ***"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them."*** God was committed to his people. He was loving and patient and good to them. He was faithful husband to his people and they were like a bride who had broken their vows. The people had promised their commitment, their service to God, but they had fallen into shameful lusts and practices. They had given their love to false gods, pointless pursuits, they loved their things, themselves, more than they loved their God. As a people they looked for pleasure and fulfillment in other places. As a nation they looked for safety and security in other lands and foreign kings, instead of trusting in the LORD their God. They shunned the love of God, even though the LORD was nothing but faithful and patient, loving and kind, a faithful provider and steadfast in his care. But they were an adulterous wife even though he was a faithful husband. It is a jarring illustration that is also quite telling and reveals much about the relationship God has with his people.

Now what would we usually expect in such a circumstance of betrayal and unfaithfulness? Most likely a parting of ways, a declaration announcing broken vows and an impending split. Instead of verdict of guilty, abandonment, or punishment, God spoke a message of forgiveness, of patience, of love, of a new covenant. He spoke of his undying love, his commitment, his unrelenting faithfulness to his people. God assured his people that nothing could break his bond with them. They would return from their exile and from them a Savior would come. God would preserve his people and his word among them. God would preserve his relationship with his people through his holy Word. He would send a new covenant based on his unconditional love. Listen, pay attention! Behold! The LORD speaks, and through his surprising declaration he assures his people of his unfailing and extraordinary love. ***<sup>33</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*** Despite, the wickedness, the sin, the unfaithfulness of his people the LORD insists on a relationship with his people. ***I will be their God, and they will be my people.***

Lately, the breaking news of the day has been the report of one scandal after another. A lot of time has been spent on the local and national news discussing the latest reports of unfaithfulness and wrongdoing, and such news had upset multiple arenas of our culture, in the movie industry, in sport, in local and federal government, just to name a few. Breaking news, it's reported. *Did you hear, another accusation, another report. Will there be punishment! What will the punishment be!* That's the news that we have come to expect. It's gotten to the point where to a certain degree we have become numb

to it all. The reports of wrongdoing pile up and run together. This world is full of sin. This world is full of sinners. Sin disgusts and disrupts, corrupts, wrecks, and ruins.

But we must admit that it's not just the world that is full of sin. We too are full of sin. We cannot just accept that is the way it is and move on, our conscience holds us accountable, we know that God will call us all to give an account. In a world that is filled with the dull roar of accusations, constantly abuzz with the reports of wrongdoing and impending punishment we may become all too aware that our own sins - while not reported publicly - lay exposed before the all-knowing God. He knows of our unfaithfulness. We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We do not love our God with all our heart all the time, but so many times we run after the things of this world, we love things and people in our lives more than him. Because of our lack of love for God we make poor decision that hurt ourselves, hurt others, hurt God. We are unfaithful to our God. Where does that leave us? Are we left anxiously waiting when our time will come, when the other shoe will drop, when our reckoning, our punishment, will eventually come?

Behold! God speaks words of full and free forgiveness to undeserving sinners! In a time when the news of the day is so saturated with reports of wrongdoing and punishment, the voice of the LORD, speaks words that are of welcome reprieve. To sinners who are made aware of their shortcomings by his perfect and holy law he sets a covenant before us that is a sight for sore eyes. In the cross of Christ, here, our sins are forgiven. God loves you and is so committed to loving you, that gave his only son for you. God is faithful to the unfaithful and he keeps his promise to save. He communicates his unfailing love to you through word and Sacrament. In the waters of baptism, behold, your wickedness is washed away. God chose you to be his own, to be his child. In his holy meal of communion, know this! Your sins are forgiven. The body and blood of Christ given for you, to assure you of your communion with God. Behold! God speaks, and he says, ***"I will be your God, you will be my people."*** Thus, it is through these wonderful means of grace that God communicates his faithful love to those who are so often unfaithful. Listen as he makes this unexpected declaration to all his people, to you, ***"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."***

For a good amount of time during this season of Lent, the members of our congregation have been talking about elements of the Old Covenant. The high priest and the sacrifices have been discussed in some depth during our special Wednesday night services. And we have heard how day after day the high priest would approach the altar of the Lord with the sacrifices of the people. The high priest would even come with a special sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. But it becomes clear that the old covenant was never built to last, never built to truly save, however its purpose was to point to the only one who could save. No matter how many sacrifices were made on the altar, the people would keep sinning, more sacrifices would have to be made. The old covenant also included numerous regulations and the civil and ceremonial ways of the people. Laws and regulations that were far too numerous, too nuanced to keep. And while this covenant would set the people aside as a people dedicated to the LORD God, no one

could ever hope to earn God's favor by their perfect obedience to the old covenant. Instead the old covenant was designed point the people to the promised Messiah, as it pointed all people toward the Savior that they needed. And in the Messiah, in Christ Jesus, they would have a Great High Priest who would live a life of perfect obedience and who would give himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice of atonement on the altar of the cross. All sins would be paid for in full. Jesus suffered the punishment our many sins deserve. He suffered hell in our place. He endured the torments of separation from God so that we could be at one with God forever. For this was God's desire. This was his promise, this unforgettable pledge, this unexpected declaration. ***I will make a new covenant... I will be their God and they will be my people... I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.***

As God brings our attention to his faithful love, as he leads us to the wondrous cross where the Son of God dies for our sins, as he brings us to the empty tomb where death has died, and life eternal is sealed and given for us, how can we ever forget such remarkable love! Through God's gift of faith, through the Spirit working through Word and Sacrament this message becomes a part of us, as God bestows on us his gracious new covenant. Our hearts and minds are captivated by the cross as we stand in awe of God's faithful love. Our hearts and minds are captivated by the cross of Christ as we are renewed in our grateful service to our faithful LORD. <sup>33</sup> ***"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,"*** We give thanks to the LORD for his faithful love, for his unforgettable love, and we ask that he would keep writing that word on our hearts and on the hearts of many others so that we in faith may see Jesus and his love, so that many, many, precious souls, from the least among us to the greatest throughout the world may know the LORD God and praise our Savior Jesus Christ.

Behold! Listen! In the midst of a messy, unfaithful world God speaks his faithful word of salvation. To a world drowning in the noise of sin and dying under the crushing weight of punishment, God calls out and graciously grabs our attention with these unforgettable truths, with this unexpected declaration. He establishes a covenant of grace. Your God desires a relationship with you, and so he sends his one and only Son to forgive your wickedness and remembers your sins no more. He also promises to write his word on your hearts through his gift of faith, so that we may know the LORD, so that we may know his love and follow his ways in faith. No matter what is going on in the world, God faithfulness remains. Love and forgiveness, peace with God and the blessing of eternal life, this is gracious message that rules our hearts and lives, for this is the covenant that God speaks to us and graciously puts on our hearts and minds. Behold! Listen! To what God says and what God has done through Jesus Christ our LORD. ***I will make a new covenant... I will be their God and they will be my people... I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.*** Amen.