

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.

Once in a moment of time the Almighty God, Lord and creator of all, took a weary and beaten people by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. Once in a moment of time the Lord lifted all the burden of slavery and all the violence of the Egyptians off of this people. Once in a moment of time the Lord led this people to the holiest place on earth, Mt. Sinai, where the Lord of all carved into tablets of stone words for them to live by.

Can you imagine what was in God’s heart on that day – the joy, the hope, the excitement of what this people could be? The Lord would give them a land flowing with milk and honey – a beautiful and productive land. The Lord would protect them from their enemies, and provide guidance and help in every difficulty. And the people would be grateful. And live in peace. And be faithful to the words the Lord had carved out for them for guidance and for life. And God and God’s people would be sign for all the earth. And the nations would all come to worship the God of Israel. And there would be everlasting peace.

But God’s plan failed. It was a good dream, the right dream for the future of the world, but it did not take into account the way people were, and are. So even though God did God’s part, God’s plan ended in disaster.

Instead of faith and obedience and worship the people responded with lawlessness. The rich took advantage of the poor, the religious and political leaders were just in it for themselves - parents did not guide and instruct their children. Instead of trusting in the power of the Lord the nation thought its future would be guaranteed through its military might and alliances until finally God scrapped the whole plan. God sent the Babylonians to conquer the chosen people and lead them off into exile.

Over.

Done with.

Yet in the very moment when it was all crashing down, the Lord spoke this word through the prophet Jeremiah: *“The days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It 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. “But this is the covenant 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. No 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.”*

Then after nearly six hundred years the promise which Jeremiah spoke was fulfilled. On the night of Jesus betrayal Jesus took the cup and gave thanks and gave it for his disciples to drink saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Forgiveness. What a strange foundation for a relationship. Forgiveness.

They shall all know me from the least to the greatest for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

Forgiveness.

This covenant is not based on our obedience or our performance. God did not want to scrap this plan like all the rest. Forgiveness is what God promises to do. It almost sounds as if right from the start God does not have much faith in us. God could have promised, “I will love them, or guide them, or empower them,” but Jesus established the new covenant with blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

When I was growing up I thought my parents were most interested in my successes - A's on my report card - base hits in my little league games. Over time that way of thinking of their love being attached to outcomes became quite a burden. Every time I saw their eyes light up with joy over my successes I would feel the added

burden of the need for even greater successes. Every time failure loomed or shame, my fear was of what they would think, how they would be disappointed. How strange that this new covenant is God saying, “I will be known to you in your moments of failure, in the times of your shame, precisely when you do need forgiveness.”

And in that moment you will know God’s love for you – for the *you* that is and not just for the *you* that could be or might be or should be. At his Last Supper Jesus passed his cup to disciples whom he knew would betray him and deny him and abandon him that very night. For them was his blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins.and for you. Amen.