

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla
Fifth Week in Lent—March 16, 2024

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Sermon Title/Theme: “The New View”

The husband sat next to his wife who was lying weakly in a hospital bed in hospice care. Her battle with cancer had been long and hard. The once full and rosy face was now thin and pale. Chemotherapy had left the patient without hair. He leaned close to her and whispered “You’re so beautiful.” Perhaps she was not beautiful by many physical standards, but to him and to many others who loved and admired her, she was beautiful. A view through the eyes of love affects how we see everything.

God looked at Israel through the eyes of His love and His covenant promises and saw their beauty. God looks at us through the covenant completed in the cross and shares with us

“I will be your God and you will be my people . . . I will forgive your wickedness and remember your sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31)

Part I. God’s new view of us

I was raised in a Christian family. I attended worship weekly. I attended a Lutheran school. I knew one hundred plus Bible stories and the six chief parts of the catechism. However for some reason the Biblical pieces never fit together perfectly. As a college freshman at Concordia, Seward, the Old Testament professor explained the word “covenant” and suddenly it all came together. The key word in today’s Old Testament lesson is “covenant.” Understanding that term and God’s covenantal relationship with Israel and us not only unlocks the Old Testament and God’s New Testament fulfilment, it helps us understand and celebrate God’s relationship with us. When God said to Adam

and Eve “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.*” (*Genesis 3:15*) he made a promise—a covenant—with them. When God put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His relationship with Noah, it was a sign of a covenant. When God said to Abraham “*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.*” (*Gen. 12:2*) he made a covenant with him and repeated that covenant through the generations. In spite of the sin of Adam and Eve, in spite of the lies and mistrust of Abraham and his family God took a new view of them. He saw them as His family. When they were in slavery, God remembered His covenant and freed them. When they constructed the idols of their neighbors, it was the covenant that God remembered that kept Him from destroying them. Because of His covenant He brought them back from captivity in Babylon. He had promised to be with them and to bless others through them. The word “covenant” in today’s reading from Jeremiah ties together the stories of the Old Testament: “*Behold the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.*” (*vs.31*)

No matter how spiritually ugly they looked, God viewed them through His promise. Like the faithful husband, he said again and again “I will continue to love you. You will always be beautiful.” Jesus the bridegroom looks lovingly at His bride, the church.

“How do I look?” Have you ever asked that question of your spouse, your parents, or your friends? Depending on their relationship with you (at that particular time) they may give you an honest answer. If we were to honestly ask God, “How do I look?” His honest and just response would be “You look horrible. You look like the prodigal son who came back to his father after working in the pig pens. You are dirty. You are unworthy to step

into my home.” The law serves as that mirror that God puts in front of us to honestly see ourselves. We don’t look good!

But God has taken a new view of us. *“For I will forgive their iniquities and I will remember their sin no more.”* The Good News of the Lenten season is that God looks at us through the cross of Jesus. Today the sign of the cross was made upon the forehead and upon our heart of Bohde. Water was poured over his head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. God’s view of Bohde and all of us changed in our baptism. All of the blessings of salvation become ours. God’s covenant relationship with us becomes personal in our baptism. Coming to the Lord’s Table, our Lord welcomes us “this is my blood of the new covenant.” His body and blood received in faith strengthen our relationship with Him. He views us as His children. Every loving parent always sees their child as beautiful. God the father sees His children as beautiful because in Christ we are part of His family.

As God’s children we are covenanted and consecrated. We are purified and made clean. We have been made new. We are set apart to serve Him in the contexts of our life.

Part II. God’s view affects our views

How others view us affects our relationships and response. Some of you may be familiar with the words of Dorothy Law Nolte entitled “Children Learn What They Live.”

“If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn; if a child lives with hostility, he learn to fight; if a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty; if a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate; if a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.”

Children often live out their experiences. God’s children live out what they have

received and experienced in the contexts of the covenanted and consecrated relationship with Him.

God's view of us affects how we live in Him. Celebrating that God sees us as His children, we live freely and confidently in His grace. "For they shall all know me;" We know him not as the harsh and just Judge but as a loving Father. We see God not as one who is angry at us, as one who imposes His will on creation, or inflicts punishment, but as one who cares for us and seeks what is good for us. We can trust God and trust His will for our lives.

God's view of us affects how we live with each other. Confident in the covenant with our Heavenly Father, our covenant relationships--spouse to spouse; parent to child; child to parent; brother to sister—take on new dynamics. The "table of duties" of Ephesians 5 and 6 are preceded by the words, *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Because God no longer remembers our sins, we are quick to forgive one another and to put the best construction on everything. The struggling couple found themselves in the pastor's office discussing their relationship. The husband complained, "Every time I do or say something wrong she get 'historical.'" The pastor corrected the terminology, "Don't you mean 'hysterical.'" No, she tells me what I did wrong ten years ago, five years ago . . . it's 'historical!'"

Imagine if in the workplace, in the home, and especially in the church if we could be "covenantal" in our relationships and like God begin anew every day "remembering their sins no more."

This new “covenantal” view not only affects how we view others but how we view our possessions. A father purchased a meal for his son at a fast food restaurant. The father reached over to sample one of the boy’s French fries and said, “Mind if I have one of these?” The son gave his father a stern look and said, “No, those are mine.” He didn’t want to share, didn’t want to give even a single French fry to his dad. Un-amused by the boy’s reaction, the father had three immediate thoughts about his son: (1) he doesn’t understand that I bought these fries and gave them to him; (2) he doesn’t realize that I could take all those fries from him or bury him in fries; (3) he doesn’t know that I can get my own fries and don’t need his.

The “parable of the French fries” reminds us: we often fail to see where our things come from, not recognizing the true source; we frequently think that we’re in full control of our possessions, forgetting that God is in control of us and our things; we forget that everything is God’s and that we need Him but He doesn’t need us.

Christian stewards confess their greed and misplaced priorities. We confess our idols of fame and fortune. We strive for a relationship with Him and not with our things. We manage wisely what God has given us. We are privileged to share generously, freely, and joyfully.

We are in this wonderful covenant “father-child” relationship with God; he has provided us with every spiritual blessing; he has provided for our physical needs. God in Christ has a new view of us. We in Christ are blessed to be cross-eyed—seeing Him who endured the cross for us in the relationships and contexts in which He places us. Enjoy the new view for Jesus’ sake. Amen.