

Prayer of the Day:

Lord Jesus Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion you give us your true body and blood as a remembrance of your suffering and death on the cross. Grant us so firmly to believe your words and promise that we may always partake of this Sacrament to our eternal good; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (I Corinthians 11:26 RSV)

Sermon Text:

Palm Sunday was glorious, if not unexpected. The cries of "Hosanna" filled the air. Jesus was greeted as the King we have always known Him to be. Palm branches and cloaks littered the path as He made His way into the city.

Now, however, things have changed. Israel had largely turned away from the covenant God had made with their forefathers. In our lesson, Jeremiah tells us that Israel had broken that Old Testament covenant given at Sinai. They had failed to keep the law. Monday and Tuesday have provided ample proof of that fact. The cursing and withering of the fig tree on Monday wasn't just a weird event in the life of Christ. It was a living picture of the inability of the people of God to produce fruit in their lives. They had not kept the Commandments of God given in tablets of stone in the impressive displays of Sinai. They had turned instead to an empty formalism and a farcical and pharisaical outward display of manmade laws and customs. The temple was a perfect example of this now. Instead of the glorious symbol of the new covenant that was as old as time, it had become a den of thieves. Moneylenders and money changers sought to fatten their bellies and take advantage of the sacrificial system that was supposed to point to Jesus, even as the animals were bought and sold on ground that was meant to provide a place of prayer for the Gentile converts to Judaism. The crack of Jesus' whip had exposed the false and wicked worship of people more concerned with earthly treasure than heavenly security. Of course, that got the rumor mill swirling.

People unhappy with a thing very seldom work to better it, but rather gossip and whisper, tearing down rather than building up, pulling apart rather than pulling together. By Thursday, the deed was done. Judas had lined his pockets with the silver that ultimately stained his soul. The Pharisees and the temple guard stood at the ready even on this day of

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ "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. ³² 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. ³³ "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," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." – NIV84

the Passover, the Old Testament celebration of God's liberating might as the blood of the lamb saved them from the angel of death. Irony is it not?

Yet this night is not about defeat. No, far from it. It is about the fulfillment of words older than Sinai. It is about a New Covenant long forgotten but uttered first in the Garden of Eden after Satan's lies had broken the Old Covenant that, at the time, consisted of only one command. So in the upper room, it all begins again. Jesus kneels down, yes even as Peter protests, and serves, washing feet even as He prepares to cleanse our souls. As they recline at the table, recalling how God passed over the houses of Israel while laying waste to Egypt, He takes the bread and breaks it passing it around with words greater than history for all history points to them, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19)"* So also with the cup of blessing, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."*

And the words of Jeremiah, words inspired and given by God Himself, spring to life anew ³¹ *"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. ³² 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. ³³ "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," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Forgiveness, that's what He has been driving at. He will be the lamb whose blood marks the doorframes of Christian hearts and minds, cleansing us from sin, defeating death even as it defeats Satan and Hell along with him. Forgiveness smeared on the cross's timbers marking hearts and minds in baptism as the Spirit connects us to Him. Forgiveness as the meal which transcends all others gives us His very body and blood under bread and wine that we might be made new.

O brothers and sisters, this is what Holy Week is all about. Please ... please don't let it become an empty formalism where we give our three hours of worship with little thought to the countless hours that surround them. Breathe deeply the air of forgiveness and everything that it means for you ... no, everything it makes you! Note Jeremiah's words, *"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."* This forgiveness does for us, to us. Freed from living law to earn something from God, I will live His law because it pleases Him, because it is good for me, because I have been forever changed. Perfect? Not this side of heaven but this doesn't mean I'll stop trying, stop living, stop chasing after the one who has done so much for me. Yes, that's the little word "for" or "because" it all happens *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Ah dear Christians, take it in, take it all in. The old familiar services, the pageantry of these holy days, the heart-rending history, but do not miss the deeper meaning. For in these events the Scriptures are being fulfilled. To these events the Scriptures all point. In these events, God provides *A New Covenant for a People Made New "For HE has forgiven our wickedness and remembers our sins no more."* Amen.