

GOD'S COMMITMENT TO HUMANITY

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Newbegun United Methodist Church

March 18, 2018

Rev. Dr. Roger Braun

One day, (many, many years ago when cell phones were dumb) I called my cell phone company with a question and they asked the inevitable question: "While we have you on the phone, may we review your calling plan and see if we can save you money?" Usually I say, "No thanks," but this time I capitulated. The agent then said, "Wow! I can't believe you are still on this plan." She said. "You have been on this plan for several years. Our rates are much lower now. We can offer you more than twice as many minutes per month for about half the price. And we can eliminate your roaming fees altogether." I accepted their offer, and, sure enough, when the next bill came in it was dramatically less than it had been before. For years I had thought that the old plan was the best and most acceptable, but then there came a new plan, built upon the old one – and the new one was much, much better.

In the same way, God made a covenant with his people, and then, after a period of time, God offered them a new covenant – built upon the old one but it was much, much better than the first. The old covenant was centered in the Law of Moses; the new covenant is centered on Jesus. It is not that the old covenant was bad, it was working its way up to Jesus, or, as Hebrews 8:6 says, the new covenant is a better covenant because "it is found on better promises." Now centuries before Jesus, God instructed his people that this was going to happen; that the new covenant was growing

out of the old one; and that this covenant would be better and different. The new covenant will be based on grace, not law. The new covenant will be for all people, not just one chosen people. Now I want you to understand something important: The fact that God would make a new covenant with us tells us something more about the nature of God. God made a new covenant with humanity, even though humanity could not keep the first one. Verse 32: “They broke my covenant even though I was a husband to them.”

This is where my cell phone contract analogy goes off course. The phone company offered me a new contract because I had faithfully kept the old one. If I hadn't kept the old contract, if I hadn't paid my bill, they would not have offered me a better deal, they would have turned off my phone. God made this covenant with humanity in spite of the fact that we were not able to keep the old one. That tells us a lot about God. Jeremiah 31:31-34 he tells us exactly what kind of God he will be for us.

For example, Jeremiah tells us that God is a God you can believe in. God is a God that wants to be personal. The foundation of this relationship is not build upon racial heritage, or political connection, it is built on faith. And faith takes a personal commitment. Just obeying the law is very impersonal. You can do the law and not have your mind or heart involved. With the new covenant it is a personal matter, a matter of the heart. Verse 33: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” Now this is the odd thing. When God gave the Law of Moses to the Israelites, he did not give them any help. They were on their own strength and wisdom to obey all God had commanded. I don't know why that was. Maybe God was trying to show the Israelites that without him they can do nothing. Maybe the Law was to show them how

weak they were and would humble themselves before God. Whatever the reason, they were on their own, with disastrous results. With the new covenant comes a source of power to help us humans. Anyone who accepts the new covenant also receives the Holy Spirit to live in the heart and guide us into the way of truth. John 14:17 says, "You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." John 16:12 says, "When he, the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. In John 16:7 Jesus says, "It is for your good that I leave you. Unless I go away the Holy Spirit will not come to you; but if I go then I will send the Holy Spirit to you." God is a God you can believe in because we can know God personally and have a relationship with God based on faith.

I love this verse from Jeremiah 31:34. It says, "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. Here God is telling us that he is a God you can believe in because God is not known by a teaching found in the head, but a knowledge lodged in the heart. It's a matter of the heart; he is a God to believe in.

In Jeremiah 31 we find a God we can depend on. Verse 33 tells us exactly the kind of relationship God wants to have with us. He says, "I will be their God, and they will be my people." God is saying: You belong to me and I'll belong to you and you can count on that! In verse 36 God says, "I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to do away with the laws of nature." Verse 37 says, "Not until the heavens can be measured and the foundations of the earth explored, will I consider casting them away forever for their sins." In other words, we can depend on God to be there for us, no matter what, forever and ever. Since we accept the new covenant, then we belong to God.

You see, there is a reoccurring theme throughout the entire Bible: God takes care of people. Even when they fail, God takes us back and provides for us. In any and all circumstances you can depend on God for this. As you read the Bible it tells us over and over, even in the desperate of times and the darkest of hours, God is a God we can call on and depend on.

And then, Jeremiah 31 tells us the God is a God you can turn to. When you come to the end of yourself, when you have nowhere else to turn, you can turn to God. If guilt is eating you up, if regrets are holding you back, you can turn to God. If you can't find peace within yourself, if you can't find a place to rest anywhere in your life, you can turn to God. If you have failed once, twice, or a thousand times, you can turn to God and he will never turn you away. Verse 34 says, "For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more."

This is the new covenant God made with all humanity. In this covenant God makes himself available to all of us. He is a God you can believe in, from the heart. He is a God you can depend on – he will take care of you. He is a God you can turn to – even when there is nowhere else to turn. The new covenant is not like a law forced upon you. It is a promise that one has to accept. It is before you now and this is God's commitment to you. Will you accept? Amen.