

Pastor Jon's March 21, 2021 Sermon

I have been enjoying the March Madness Basketball Tournament over the weekend. I especially loved watching the Badgers hand it to North Carolina on Friday night, which happened to be NC's Coach Roy Williams first, first round loss ever in the tournament of 64. It's always nice to win, but when you win with such amazing hustle, excellent defense, and lights out shooting, it's even sweeter. What a fun game to watch.

So, as I was preparing for this sermon while watching basketball, I thought about our 1st Lesson from Jeremiah. God promised to write a new covenant on people's hearts instead of tablets.

Somehow during my lifetime, my love for Wisconsin sports has been written on my heart. Even living in Oregon for 12 years, I never changed my loyalties to any West Coast Teams like the Ducks, Beavers, 49's or Seahawks. I believe this loyalty came from my formative years of observing my parents and grandparents religiously root for WI sports. I also remember attending the Bishop's Charities Pre-season Packer game as a kid through an essay contest at our local paper. I remember going to the Brewers game at County Stadium with our little league teams and seeing our name on the scoreboard as a group in attendance. And the radio, I remember grandpa turning down the TV and listening to Jim and Max for play by play.

I will always love Wisconsin Sports and root for them regardless of how well they perform on the court or field. I guess you could say my love for the Packers, Brewers, Bucks and Badgers is unconditional... at least for now.

In our first Lesson from Jeremiah, who is preaching to people who are in the Babylonian Exile, that God is going to make a new covenant with them. This won't be like covenants of old that depended on the people holding up their end of the bargain... that the people broke by turning away from God and worshipping idols. Even though God was their husband, the people divorced

God. God was hurt that the people didn't keep their promises. So in this text, God is going to take matters into God's own hands. God will now operate with something called "grace" regardless of how well the people perform on the field.

This new covenant of grace will be marked by everyone knowing God from the least to the greatest and by forgiveness of sins. In Old Testament theology, the people's sins against God put them into exile to start with. In fact, God won't just forgive the sins of the past, God promises remember their sins no more. What a gift it is to have a God who is quick to forgive and has divine amnesia.

How different is God from us? How many of you can forgive and forget when you were hurt by others or wronged in some way? How many of you are still holding onto grudges or haven't forgiven someone? Are you holding out hope the person will come and say sorry or repent? Try handing the situation over to God and letting go. Pray for them by name. Let God work through the Holy Spirit to soften your heart and possibly bring reconciliation.

So, if God promises that one day, all of God's laws and ways will be written on our hearts, we won't have to say to one another know the Lord. Are we there yet?

If we are told to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, we seem to have a long way to go. There is still a need for people like me and you to remind others who God is. God is most clearly revealed Jesus Christ. According to Hebrews 1, "Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." As Christians, we believe that this new covenant Jeremiah is talking about has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

My heart is sick this week over what is happening with our Asian brothers and sisters right now. The shootings in Atlanta and the videos of Asian elderly people being randomly attacked by haters are a tragedy. This is not the reflection of God's glory... of Jesus love for the vulnerable...when people are attacked for their race or the way they look.

We all need God's grace. We still turn away from God and our neighbors. Today we receive this grace in the Word and Sacrament. Holy Communion is the new covenant in Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

May you accept this grace fully for yourself and share it with others.

Amen