**Reformation 2017 – Commemoration of 500 years of the Reformation**

## Jeremiah 31:27-34

27The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. 28And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. 29In those days they shall no longer say: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” 30But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge. 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.

**BACKGROUND:**

Jeremiah as a text appears to be a verbatim recording of the prophet’s utterances offered up during the reign of the last 4 kings of Judah. Appearances however can be deceiving. The content of the book is diverse and loosely organized without any firm narrative or plot.

Following the catastrophic fall of Judah to the Babylonian empire in 597 BC the book of Jeremiah takes shape as it is written during this time of exile. The book details the life of the prophet in great personal detail, not as a means of biographical history, but as a means for telling the story of God’s saving grace embodied in specific persons, events and activities. The book invites the reader into a world marked by confusion, fear, hope, despair and joy, a world of seriously conflicting and ambivalent emotions.

Note that there are significant textual variants between the LXX and MT. The NRSV is a translation based on the MT.

The pericope here under consideration is found in what is sometimes called “the Book of Consolations” detailing a vision for the new covenant that will in turn call forth a New Jerusalem and a New Israel based upon a new relationship that YHWH initiates and sustains via both Law and Promise.

**VERSE BY VERSE:**

31 In those days - A specific time of new beginning

The days are also specifically the days following Israel’s defeat and captivity by Babylon which to any and all appears to be the Last and Final Word for Israel, a word of certain death, demise and destruction. In THOSE days, YHWH speaks a word, a new covenant, that calls Israel out of death into life, not by military victory, but by God’s own covenant promise.

New Covenant – Between YHWH and all Israel – This is nothing less than a truly radical change, God’s new way of bringing forth new expectations as to how Israel ought to live in relationship to God – We see this same radical shift by Jesus in his Last Supper Covenant imagery.

New Covenant – THIS is the only place in OT Where term occurs!

House of Judah – Perhaps an expansion to all of Israel NOT merely the Northern Kingdom.

32 – Covenant of Mine “because they broke my covenant” This covenant will be different from the covenant made by YHWH after Israel was set free from slavery from Egypt, each being colored by the events which precede it and necessitate it.

Though I Was the Lord their God could translate I Was their husband cf Hosea where Imagery of God as Husband/Israel as wife is used in prophetic speech.

33- On their hearts – ie on their mind or will

NOT on stone tablets – covenant moves from an external system to an internal one

Some find here the basis for “natural law” that Law which can not, Not be known J. Budszyckowski

The continuity between old and new covenants is that all promises remain intact because YHWH the covenant maker has always and will always remain faithful to his word.

34 – Know the Lord = an intimate loving knowledge, not the result of being taught, a matter of heart not head alone. Such “knowing” is only possible because YHWH removes the obstacle of Sin cf 31:34b/33:8 and guarantees freedom to become what the covenant promises/

All people – not merely those properly instructed or those fully living the covenant.

THEOLOGY:

In light of the holy nation who have failed in their trust and obedience toward God, who find themselves defeated and defined by their defeat YHWH speaks a word of promises that brings them to life and makes of them a new people…. How might the churches today on the cusp of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation examine our own failings, the ways in which our “teachings” may have mislead us from God’s own missional purpose for the church, and hear anew the word of promise that is written upon our hearts calling us to become a new church for the sake of the world….God’s church, God’s Holy People, God’s New Jerusalem….Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Christians together in heart felt prayer, praise and thanksgiving??

Knowing that our celebrations and commemorations grow out of our living relationship with God is both the Law that reveals our deep sin and the Promise that draws us into God’s new future.