

Jeremiah 31:31-34

John 12:20-33

About a year ago, Kayla and I took on the responsibilities of home ownership. Proudly we purchased a mobile home that had good bones, but that needed work also. The most major area of repair needed was the bathroom.

It was almost a complete remodel. Literally at one point, the floor and a good portion of the walls were stripped right down to the studs so we could start over and rebuild it properly and safely.

Due to a variety of reasons, it was a longer than anticipated process. It was frustrating at many times, especially for me as the non-construction person in our household because I could not understand why we had to do things in a particular order or in a specific way.

I couldn't grasp the bigger picture to comprehend it because plumbing and drywall and all the other construction type words that go here are not my frame of reference. And I wanted to just quit and throw in the towel.

I felt like I was hitting rock bottom. But that's ok, because Kayla's got a strong enough reference point in this area to guide and lead me in helping out, to lift me up, and the project got finished.

I share this story with you because it coincides a lot with the scripture from Jeremiah today and where the Israelites were coming from. Jeremiah was a prophet chosen by God to share God's vision and word to the Israelites.

The Israelites were now in exile, they didn't have the reference point that God had, they couldn't see the big picture and they were hitting rock bottom, giving up on God--then they cry for help so that they may be rebuilt as a nation. This is the human condition: we cry for help in our low times and God, in God's own infinite wisdom and mercy, pulls us out because we are so trusting.

I can remember a time when I was a child that I got hurt playing kickball in our backyard. As the youngest child in my family, it seems I got hurt a lot trying to play with the older kids. But this particular time, all I remember was being hurt, crying and running in the house to leap into my father's arms. I wasn't bleeding or needing medical attention, but I knew that I would be ok again by running back to my dad.

So it is with God. And for most of us, these times of running back to God, our Heavenly Parent, provide opportunities to strengthen our faith, to grow in our relationship with God, to shed fears and doubts, and return to what was meant to be – the covenant.

Covenant. It's a strange word. We don't truly use it much these days. In simple terms for today, it is merely an agreement. And in the passage from Jeremiah today, Jeremiah is telling the Israelites of a New Covenant that is to come. And this New Covenant is none other than Jesus. So let's take a few minutes looking at this New Covenant.

There are three promises in this covenant. The first promise is "I will be your God." This is a covenant initiated by God. God is reaching out to us and proclaiming the promise that God will never leave nor forsake us.

There were several other covenants before this one, including the covenant with Noah that God wouldn't destroy the world again by flood and the covenant through Moses in which God provided the ten commandments for the people to follow – which of course they continued to break and even sometimes offer signs or sacrifices of repentance.

But here again in this covenant we see God reaching out to us, longing to bring us more closely into relationship with God's self. God continued then and continues now, hallelujah, to seek an intimate relationship with us – available to us every second of every minute of every day of every year!

Do you hear me? Every second of every minute of every day or every year God is reaching out to me, to You, to the person sitting next to you, to the person living next to you and so on!

And unlike the previous Old Testament covenants, this New Covenant coming, Jesus Christ, gives us a direct link to God. You don't need a sacrifice or a priest as an intermediary. Jesus, as Hebrews refers to him as the High Priest, is the sacrifice that was needed.

God knew we couldn't offer a sacrifice worthy enough on our own, so God provided that for us – giving God's very own Son. God did that – for us.

That brings us to the second promise of the covenant: “and you will be my people.” God is calling us as God's very own. God is seeking our faithfulness, calling us to be intentional about our faith, proactive in how we respond.

And who is to be God's people? Jesus Christ tells us that all who believe in him shall have eternal life, no matter what groups we may belong to because of race, gender, past wrongs, sexual orientation or identity, or criminal records – remember Jesus told even another criminal on a cross that he would be with him in paradise.

My friends, we ARE brothers and sisters in Christ. We are God's people! On God's behalf, Jeremiah proclaimed it long ago and it still rings true today.

And the third promise of this new covenant is that it will be written upon our hearts. This new covenant, that which binds us together, is written within us. It is a part of us, of who we are, part of our very identity. I could no more not have this new covenant than I could have my lungs to breathe.

Remember the remodeling story I shared with you at the beginning, the completion of our bathroom is very much like this new covenant: the main structure is still there, but with all new interior a new atmosphere is created, much like a new attitude or new way of looking at things. And so often in our lives, God meets us in our brokenness and makes us whole again.

Jesus gave us a new way to look at things. And the people were desperate to hear and learn from him. In John's gospel text for this morning, John tells us that there were some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

Their quest? "We want to see Jesus." Please note that upon their arrival in Jerusalem they did not ask... "where's the temple?" Everyone could see the temple. They wanted to see Jesus. People today still want and need to see Jesus.

Today, people are not asking ‘where’s a church’... Churches are visible all over the city. They are wondering “Why are you so kind? Why are you so accepting? Why are you so honest and trustworthy.” Hopefully, your answer “I’m a disciple of Jesus.”

According to Donald Posterski in his book Reinventing Evangelism “People in our culture need hard evidence that following Jesus really makes a difference. Living the Christian life is like a 3 legged stool. If one leg is missing there is no support.”

People then and people now want to see Jesus. Are we hiding Jesus from others or are we sharing Jesus. This reminds me of the song I learned as a kid about keeping Jesus in a little box. The first verse goes:

If I had a little box to keep my Jesus in, I’d take him out and (kiss, kiss, kiss) and share him with my friends.

We need to share Jesus – with our friends, with our families, with everyone we meet. We need to let go of our own egos and insecurities and fully live in the light of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We want to see Jesus. The people who said these words that day probably didn’t expect what would happen next. Jesus reminds the people that the time of his death is coming soon.

However, like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies that then produces many seeds, so will it be in his dying. In his coming death, Jesus will bring life to all who believe in him.

If we want to see Jesus, we've got to be willing to journey these steps with him as we get closer to the agony and death of Good Friday until the glory of the Easter morning when because of God's unfailing, uncompromising, undying love it is Christ who conquers the grave once and for all.

Listen again to Jesus' words "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

And later when Jesus says Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

The voice from heaven came down and proclaimed, "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again!"

Brothers and sisters in Christ – it doesn't get any better than this! God has glorified God's name, God's very being, and will glorify it again!

And if God will do all that, do you think God's done with us already in our lives?? I don't care if you are young or old or wherever in between.

I'm telling you – no, in God's name I am declaring to you – God's not done glorifying Jesus' grace, mercy, hope, understanding, forgiveness, compassion, faith, vitality, and strength.

Let's also not forget the fruits of the spirits from Galatians 5:22-23 of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control!

Whew! That was a mouthful of adjectives and then some! But the truth is that I could go on and on even further because in my life, hopefully in your life too and our life together, God's glory is still being revealed.

Is God's glory still being revealed?

That new covenant from Jeremiah still holds true for us today. God will be our God and we will be God's people. And this new covenant is not like the others which were written on paper. This new covenant is written upon our very hearts. The new covenant is Jesus Christ.

Let us seek to glorify Jesus in all we say and do. And I know that concept is easier said than done. Sometimes events happen in my life and I react instinctively in a certain manner, maybe even say some words I shouldn't if you know what I mean. And then later I think to myself,

now Karen, why'd you do that? Was that really necessary?

But in examining my self in these ways, I continue to grow closer with my lord and savior. I continue to strive to honor that relationship that I have with my God. And this is one way that I continue to seek to glorify Jesus.

I'm not perfect, I'm not even close. But the good news of this new covenant is that I don't have to be perfect in order to enter into having a relationship with God. If that were the case, none of us could do this. That burden is too great for us to bear. That's why, in God's wisdom and mercy, Jesus took that burden for us.

This Lent, we journey together. We have only one more Sunday before that Holy Week. Let's use this week to examine our hearts and minds and prepare them to see Jesus, to see God's glory and the willing sacrifice that was made for us. Then, and only then, will we truly be able to see the magnitude of these events; because through the sacrifice and his conquering of death, we will see Jesus again. Open our eyes, O God, we want to see Jesus. And in all things, may we glorify the name of Jesus, now and always! Amen.