

1 April 2010
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Precious Words: For You”

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 20:7-20

[This is (mostly) a sermon I preached three years ago. In preparing for this day, as I went back and read this sermon, I like it so much that I decided to proclaim it again - with a few small changes.]

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed to God’s people that **“the days were coming . . . when the Lord would make a new covenant”** with them. But like everything else that Jeremiah prophesied, the people didn’t much care. They had more important things to do, more important things to worry about, more important things to give their attention to than this crazy prophet who never said anything good to them, but kept telling them to repent and return to the Lord.

They were a people of God turned worldly, with their own prophets telling them what they wanted to hear, and *using* God instead of worshiping Him. This is what God means when He says **they broke His covenant**. It wasn’t just that they sinned, or broke a few rules here and there – it was that while He was to them a faithful husband, providing for them and caring for them, they were adulterous and unfaithful. They turned their back to Him. They ignored His Word. They were unfaithful to Him.

And so God would give His idolatrous bride to the false gods she prostituted herself with. He would not force her to stay with Him. And so He withdrew His husbandly protection and allowed the armies of the nations to conquer them and take them into exile. For if other gods they want, then other gods they shall have.

But God took no delight in this. No gloating, no “I told you so!” In fact, even before it happened, God planned to bring back His bride. He would not, *could not*, abandon her forever! For though He withdrew His protection, He could *never* withdraw His love. No, **a new covenant** I will make, God says. Not like the old one. I will not just *give* them my Word, *I will put it in them*. I will **renew my vows** to them and they to me: **I will** be their God, and **they will** be my people. And last (but certainly not least): **I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**

And though God's people ignored these words when Jeremiah first spoke them, how precious would they later become! For what unfaithful husband or wife, returning to their spouse, would *not* want to hear those words: *I forgive you. And not only forgive you, I will forget it. I will never bring it up again!*

Well dear brothers and sisters in Christ, **tonight those words are spoken to you!**

To you who (like the people in Jeremiah's time) get so caught up in the things of this world and life that you have little time for God and His Word. To you who have sinned in thought, word, desire, and deed. To you who have been unfaithful and sought your life, pleasure, and good in the things of this world. Repent and return. For tonight, your Lord comes for you and says: *I forgive you.*

For tonight is the night of Jeremiah's **new covenant**. This is the Passover above all others that Jesus desired to eat with His disciples. The Passover that would change all Passovers. Tonight is the night when the bridegroom will lay down His life for you, His bride, that death *pass over* you and descend upon Him. Tonight is the night when *He* will be exiled, and *you* brought home; when *He* will be broken, that *you* may be made whole; when *He* will be condemned, so that *you* will be forgiven.

Tonight is the night when Jesus not only gives you His Word, **but puts it in you**. For before He lays down His body and blood on the cross, He lays it on the Table, for His disciples to eat and drink. **This is My body. This is My blood.** The Word made flesh put in us, that we may live in Him. And be again one flesh with Him. All your sins forgiven, and forgotten. Tonight is the night.

And while our Lord promises to forgive and forget, He call on us to *remember*. Not our sin, but all that He has done for us. *His faithfulness*. **Do this in remembrance of Me.**

To remember the grace of God that is uncaused, unasked-for, unprecedented, and unlimited.

The grace of God in coming down from Heaven and being born a man.

To remember the grace of God in finding the lost sinner, welcoming the outcast; healing the blind and the deaf; the leper and the lame; raising the dead, and having compassion.

And to remember that all of this is for you.

To remember the grace of God in that what I did not deserve, God provided.

What I did not ask for, God gave.

When I did not seek, God came.

To remember that God would not, *could not*, abandon you and me. But came for us, and renewed His vows to us: **I will be your God, and you shall be my people.** Not just for a time, but forever.
Take eat. Take drink.
This is the new covenant. **For you.**

Tonight, that new covenant in His blood is here for us. Indeed, it is here for us every Sunday. For we need it. The siren song of satan and sin is strong, but the love of our Saviour even stronger. Calling us back. Forgiving our sin, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness. *And never bringing it up again.*

And so tonight our Lord goes as it is written of Him.
It is the night on which He was betrayed – handed over to sinful men.
But He *wanted* that, for is that not what He does for us here?
Handing Himself over to sinful men and women.
Then it was to be consumed on the cross;
now it is to be consumed by us.

But for the very same reason:

To forgive my iniquity and remember my sin no more.

How precious those words!
Promised through the prophet Jeremiah some 600 years before Jesus came.
Tonight delivered.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.