

Scripture Lesson for March 21, 2021 – 5th Sunday in Lent

The following scripture reading from Jeremiah is one of the most well-known and is also considered by biblical scholars as one of the most misunderstood texts in Jeremiah. The text refers to “A New Covenant” that God will write on the hearts of the Jewish people, to make the covenant live within them, making them God’s people.

When we read this it is important to understand that this new covenant does not cancel or replace God’s covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, and despite what some Christians might say, also does not “foretell” of the new covenant that Jesus shares with the disciples at the “Last Supper.” Rather the new covenant that is spoken of in Jeremiah specifically renews and restores the relationship between Israel and God.

We read today from The Message, so, just to give you a “heads-up,” when you hear the words “God’s Decree,” that is Eugene Peterson’s translation of the Hebrew words that the NRSV translates as “says the Lord.”

A Reading from Jeremiah 31:31-34 A New Covenant (The Message)

³¹⁻³² “That’s right. The time is coming when I will make a brand-new covenant with Israel and Judah. It won’t be a repeat of the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant even though I did my part as their Master.” God’s Decree.

³³⁻³⁴ “This is the brand-new covenant that I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them—write it on their hearts! —and be their God. And they will be my people.”

A Reading from the Epistles: Hebrew 5:5-10 (The Message)

⁴⁻⁶ No one elects himself to this honored position. He’s called to it by God, as Aaron was. Neither did Christ presume to set himself up as high priest but was set apart by the One who said to him, “You’re my Son; today I celebrate you!” In another place God declares, “You’re a priest forever in the royal order of Melchizedek.”

7-10 While he lived on earth, anticipating death, Jesus cried out in pain and wept in sorrow as he offered up priestly prayers to God. Because he honored God, God answered him. Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do. Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believingly obey him.

Introduction: The Gospel Lesson: A Reading from the Gospel of John 12:20-33 (The Message)

This reading from the Gospel of John places Jesus in the City of Jerusalem, at a time when the Jewish people were gathering and preparing for the festival of Passover. Many of these pilgrims, including some from as far away as Greece, had heard of Jesus and his many miracles, and wanted to meet him. But Jesus was focused on what he needed to say about life and death, the why's and how's of his own imminent death, and his death's ultimate purpose: to bring people closer to God. Let's now read from the Gospel of John to hear what Jesus wanted us to understand in those final days walking on earth.

A Grain of Wheat Must Die

20-21 There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: "Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

22-23 Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, "Time's up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24-25 "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.

²⁶ “If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you’ll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment’s notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

²⁷⁻²⁸ “Right now I am shaken. And what am I going to say? ‘Father, get me out of this’? No, this is why I came in the first place. I’ll say, ‘Father, put your glory on display.’” A voice came out of the sky: “I have glorified it, and I’ll glorify it again.”

²⁹ The listening crowd said, “Thunder!” Others said, “An angel spoke to him!”

³⁰⁻³³ Jesus said, “The voice didn’t come for me but for you. At this moment the world is in crisis. Now Satan, the ruler of this world, will be thrown out. And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will attract everyone to me and gather them around me.” He put it this way to show how he was going to be put to death.

From the Beatitudes: Matthew 5:8

We continue this Sunday to pair some selected Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, with these ancient stories about God’s unrelenting Love and Jesus’s life and teachings—with the hope that we will discover an even richer source of blessings during this Lenten season.

NRSV: ⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The Message: ⁸ “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.