

“You will know me...” Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Do you know what is one of the hardest things for us, sinful human beings? To believe what the Gospel means for our lives. To believe the full implications of the Gospel. How could that be? Don't we all believe the Gospel?

To some extent. Some days more, some days less. Our today's reading from the book of Jeremiah is very helpful as we reflect on how unbelievable and life-transforming the Gospel is and as we invite the Holy Spirit to convince us that it indeed applies to each one of us. To you, too! See how we go.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” What is the Lord Yahweh announcing? That He Himself will make a new covenant with His Church, will all His chosen people.

This is worth pausing. Who is the true God? Who is He? He is the Creator of everything, of all things visible and invisible. Still today it is Him who holds everything in His creation together, every day and every minute.

And who are we? O yes, that's right. We are His creatures. Creatures! Designed for greatness and glory, but now – fallen and corrupted, enslaved by our idols and passions, deprived of God given supremacy and subjected to sin and death.

Rebellious and spiteful towards our Creator. Rightly deserving His rejections. Does our God owe us anything? By no means! We already live and breathe by His grace and mercy alone. He doesn't owe us anything.

He is the Almighty Sovereign. We His disobedient and ungrateful creatures. And yet – He offers to make a covenant with us! Do you know what covenant is? It is like an agreement, a solemn and a very strong agreement.

Historically when two parties entered into covenant, it was the less important party that had to agree on all sorts of stipulations. The rulers, the royals, the kings would say: “I rent you the land, or lend you money, or whatever, and you... you are obliged to do this and this and this, and if not...”.

The covenants were used to protect their interests and bind their subjects to obedience. Now, our relationships with our Sovereign – it would make sense if He just said to us, His little and funny creatures: “I have created you. I give you your daily bread, your life is in my hand, this is how you are going to live, and if not then... those are going to be the consequences.”

But here?! It is our holy and Almighty God who says: “I am committing myself to you. I will do this and I will do that. This is my solemn vow.” Our God binds Himself to this promise. He commits Himself to us. This is incredible!

All human designed deities reflect our fallen nature. They are capricious. They are unpredictable. We can never know what they will decide or do. Just like us if we suddenly had unlimited power. We would feel free to do what we want.

But our God, our Father, He commits Himself to us. He says: “I give up my freedom, I enter with you into this solemn covenant, you have my word. You can appeal to my promise, and I will never ever revoke it.”

This is incredible! As contra-intuitive as it gets. Now, what sort of a covenant is He making with us? “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Let’s try to understand this. This is nothing less than God promising that He will create in us new hearts. He is not simply promising that He will reveal us the truth.

He is promising that He will write His Torah, that is – His instruction that He gave on the Mount Sinai, including His law and His Gospel, on our very hearts. It won’t be for us some external information anymore.

No, our Lord promises to create in us new hearts, and these new hearts will love what our Lord loves, they will love His Commandments and we will desire to live to please Him. We could say, that our wills will be changed so that we will long for what is truly good and acceptable and perfect in the eyes of our God.

Our Lord keeps His promise. He puts His Word in us, and He does it in more than one way. He speaks to us His instructions in His written Word – the Bible, and in His spoken Word – as we listen to preaching and teaching.

And even more, He feeds us with His Sacramental Word in the Holy Communion, and as all this happens, the Holy Spirit creates new hearts in us. Blessed are those who gladly listen to our Triune God!

Then Yahweh continues: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... they shall all know me... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” This is where we get to the very heart of the Gospel. “

Open you ears, open your hearts! Pray that they Lord would fill you with His understanding! “I will be their God, and they will be my people, for they shall know me.” This refrain resounds throughout the Bible, both in the OT and the NT. We can hear God Yahweh saying these words already in Genesis.

They are repeatedly mentioned in the book of Exodus, as God Yahweh gives us the Ten Commandments, and as He gives us the gift that we call the Divine Service. And they are mentioned at the very end of the Book of Revelation.

When John is shown the marvellous vision of New Heavens and New Earth: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

The Triune God will be our God. Your God! Which means that from Him we will “expect all good and to Him we will take refuge in all distress”. The Triune God Himself will define who you are, He will give us our new identity.

But here comes the best part. How will He define who we are, and how will we know Him? “As He forgives us our iniquity, and as He remembers our sin no more.” This is how! We need to get to the very heart of this.

We will know the Triune God as our God. But it is not just about knowing that there is a god. Everyone knows that. It is not even about knowing that the true God has revealed Himself as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many know that.

It is about knowing Him. Biblically speaking, the word “know” describes the closest and the most intimate relationships. When you truly know another person, when you know their heart towards you, when you without any fear can fully entrust yourself, your life and everything into their hands.

We will know the very heart of our God the Father and our Brother Jesus. How? “As He forgives us our iniquity, as He remembers our sin no more.” This is not just some religious sounding statement. This is huge! This changes everything.

Let’s see how. We will know Him, and He will define who we are through the forgiveness of our sins. What does this mean? The Scripture teaches that because Jesus has taken away our sins, God the Father looks at us with favour.

Now with the help of the Holy Spirit we have put on Christ, and as our Father looks at you, what does He see? He sees you as His beloved child. For He sees you through Jesus, as holy and as innocent and as beautiful as His Son Jesus.

This means that as Christians we need to embrace a very different self-understanding. Given by the Gospel. This is what I meant when I said that it is very difficult to believe. For this just sounds too good. Just listen...

Because we are created for divine greatness, we all crave for significance. We want to be someone, to be recognized, to be valued, respected, appreciated, honoured, treated with dignity. Who do we usually hope to receive this from?

Usually from people around us. The more significant they are, at least in our eyes, the more they can lift up our self-image, or put us down. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son – He is the Supreme Power and Authority, the most glorious Being.

He looks at you, and He delights in what He sees: “You are my precious. You are supremely significant for me. I rejoice in the hope to one day embrace you and share with you all that I have. You are dearer to me than my own life.”

This is how Jesus sees you. When others sin against us, put you down, treat you unjustly, slander you, ignore or reject you, they cannot destroy who you are in Christ. The Gospel makes us immune to their judgment, both to their praise and their critique. For our very core identity is in Christ.

Our strengths and self-worth come from the Triune God, from how He sees us. No one in this world can change that. No one can take it away. No one! Not even we ourselves. This is how our God defines who we are, our self-image.

Others can't destroy it, and neither can you. Other may be treating you well or not so well. But often it is us ourselves, who are our harshest critics. We who know what sort of stuff happens inside us.

We know how ugly our inside world can get, what thoughts and passions dwell in here. Besides we continually compare ourselves with others. So often we fall short to our own expectations. How could we think highly of ourselves!

But listen to this! God our Father knows us and He knows our hearts, better than we do. He knows and remembers every one of our thoughts and longings, every hateful word and embarrassing action.

Nothing is hidden from Him, even things which we have long forgotten, and still – He sees you through Jesus! He sees you clothed in Christ, radiating and glorious, in all the majestic beauty that you will have in the age to come.

Even your worst sins cannot separate you from the love and affection of your Father who is in heaven. Nothing can make you less valued, less accepted in His eyes. Nothing will make Him turn away. Nothing will change His attitude.

And that is what ultimately matters. When the Holy Spirit convinces us that this is true, we are free. No human being, no created thing, not even our thoughts can change how our God sees us. No one and nothing can take it away.

You are this magnificent creation of God, destined for eternal glory, chosen to reign with the Risen Jesus forever! Sure, we still are to strive to fight all the ugliness of sin in our hearts and our lives. We are to strive to lead holy lives, empowered by God's own Spirit.

We are to strive to serve our neighbours self-sacrificially. That is all true. And our new heart desires to do that. But regardless of how much we succeed or fail, remember – your core identity and significance in the eyes of our God doesn't change. And if we truly believe this, our lives are transformed.

Divine acceptance leads to divine joy. Divine joy leads to fulfilling and meaningful life in service to others, and then we just can't stop but witnessing to the world about the excellences of our magnificent God.

I pray that you believe this Great News. I pray that the Holy Spirit convinces each one of you that this is indeed true. I pray that you are blessed to know this God as your God and can enjoy this new life in Christ in all its fullness.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! Amen.