*Sermon Text for January 5, 2014*

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Jeremiah 31:31-34, I Peter 1:22-25

“Covenant Renewal Service”

We’ve seen Isaiah where we have prophecy after prophecy of the coming of Jesus. And we had images that remind us of Jesus’ coming and what it is going to be like when Jesus returns. Jeremiah also speaks of what it is going to be like when Jesus returns and here he focuses on the new that covenant that Jesus brings. It is a covenant that will be written on our hearts. The image that he gives us is that of a bride, that’s us, and God being the husband.

But the defining aspect of this covenant, what makes it a covenant worth the promise, look at vs. 34: I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. The covenant that we have as 21st century Christians is the one which Jeremiah alludes to. No cute stories today. Today, this first Sunday of the year we will begin it as we do every first Sunday of the year with our covenant renewal service.

It is the covenant written upon our hearts by the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed upon the cross for all of our sins. But in order to live in this covenant in 2014 we have to first recognize that we are sinners. Look at me, all of you. We all deserve condemnation. We all deserve to die without the grace and love which is given to us by Jesus by his great sacrifice.

We are sinners in the hands of a loving God, but sinners we are. This covenant that Jeremiah alludes to gives us a new life in Jesus, in spite of our sin. In I Peter the author in vs. 24 reminds us of our frailty, we hear again that we are made of dust and to dust we shall return. As we enter the New Year on the heels of 4 beloved who have gone into paradise, remember all flesh is like grass, the grass withers, the flower fades.

But in I Peter we hear that in spite of our sin, in spite of our frailty, look at vs. 23, you have been born anew, through the living and enduring Word of God. We are going to renew our covenant before God today. This is our 3rd year doing this together. For most of you it is familiar, but for many of you it is and its liturgical emphasis could feel uncomfortable and unsettling. If nothing else it keeps you awake. This liturgy, this service is geared to those who take seriously their relationship with Jesus Christ.

In 1775 John Wesley used this format for one of his services and credit goes to him for the content of this service. He in turn got the idea from a Puritan Richard Alleine 100 years earlier. Each year this service would be done during a New Year’s Eve watchnight service. Wesley, who began the Methodist movement, found this service rich and meaningful as he expressed in his journal “Many mourned before God, and many were conforted.”, and “It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing”. Again in his diary he remarks “It was an occassion for a variety of spiritual experiences. I do not know that ever we had a greater blessing. Afterwards many desired to return thanks, either for a sense of pardon, for full salvation, or for a fresh manifestation of His graces, healing all their backsliding.” As you can see this can be a powerful service if you let it be.

If you would take out the booklet which is in your bulletin. Notice that the heart of this service is found in the Covenant Prayer. This prayer requires persons to commit themselves to God. This covenant is serious and we must take it seriously. At the beginning of the prayer I will pause for a few moments to allow people to kneel if they so desire, or to bow your head in respect to the Almighty God and to the step which we are about to take together in this prayer. We will be held responsible for that in which we take part, good or bad. Approach this service with reverence, seriousness, and an open heart to God.

You will notice that each bulleting contains a copy of the covenant service. On the last page of the service you will find a space where you can put your signature and the date. I want to encourage all of you to read through, pray through this service. If you feel that you are able to recommit or commit yourselves for the first time to the promises which are written in these pages then sign it, mark the date, and please call me or let me know that you have done that so that I can pray for you and so that we can talk about what is involved in this recommitment, or this commitment.

It is now the year 2014, we will be taking together the first Lord’s Supper together of the New Year. But even more importantly today in this service you will be given an opportunity to right those wrongs which you may have committed in the past year and start completely fresh and new in this New Year. How fitting it is that we will be able to recommit our lives to Christ and then together take part in the sign of that new commitment in the Covenant of the Lord’s Supper. We will also have represented an opportunity for you to remember your baptismal covenant by taking a blue bead from the font and take it home as a reminder of the covenant that you made today.

Let us now renews our promises before Almighty God.

Covenant Renewal Service

Sunday January 5, 2014









