

Dear People Blessed by the Lutheran Reformation,

Are you getting a good night's sleep? Jeremiah didn't until he heard the promises of the Lord in chapter 31. He says in verse 26, "**At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.**" Professor David Gosdeck in *The People's Bible: Jeremiah* comments, "*Jeremiah apparently received some of these promises in a vision while he was asleep...Jeremiah probably had few nights of restful sleep, but this night had been different. It was a night filled with promises of the Lord. Those promises brought him refreshment and peace and also quiet sleep.*" Why had Jeremiah lost sleep? The Lord had given him the task of telling God's people that their large city and their beautiful temple would be torn to shreds by the Babylonians. Every one who did not die would be made a slave. When Jeremiah proclaimed this bad news, the people were suppose to repent of their wickedness, instead they attacked the prophet, imprisoned him and threatened to end his life. Only the Lord's promises could give him rest.

As we celebrate the Reformation today we remember that Martin Luther found the Lord's promise of free salvation in the Bible. When he tried to proclaim and share this good news, he was attacked verbally, threatened with imprisonment and death. We can imagine that Martin Luther spent many a night sleepless and in prayer. It was those same promises that helped Luther to not only get some sleep, but to stand firm in his proclamation of the gospel.

I believe we are tempted to lose sleep over things such as terrorism, the economy and health care. As an election approaches we worry, "Will a new presidency help or hurt?" Perhaps a greater concern for Christians who stand on Scripture is: "Will future presidencies and congresses help or hinder our ability to worship and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus."

What we learn from Jeremiah and what Martin Luther learned is that the Lord not only stands with us, but his promises, and especially his promise of grace in Christ, reassure us and even help us to sleep. This Reformation Sunday as we turn to the prophet's words we **Rejoice in the Lord's Covenant of Grace**. We take a closer look at the Lord's word of promise and we see why we rejoice.

1. This New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant.

The Lord speaks of the **Old Covenant**. What is a “covenant”? It is a contract or agreement. The Old Covenant or contract was given to Moses and the Israelites. They would follow the Lord’s laws and rules and the Lord would do his part and bless them.

A. The Lord tells Jeremiah that he is making a new covenant and the reason is because the Israelites had struggled with the old covenant.

1. The regulations covered almost every area of Jewish life. It went into the tiniest details. There were precise regulations concerning sacrifices. The priest had to wash himself in the temple and put on a special linen garment. Then they only offered the choice part of the animals, the hide and intestines had to be burnt outside the temple. In a burnt offering the whole sacrifice was consumed by fire. With other sacrifices portions of meat could be kept and used for a meal. Any breach of these rules was a transgression and had to be atoned for. The sacrifices brought forgiveness for the worshiper, but they had to be repeated because they did not cover all sin. They did point ahead to the perfect sacrifice of the coming Savior. (Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 10:1)

2. The sad truth was that God’s people didn’t accidentally break a few rules, but they openly rebelled and sinned against the Lord. The incident of the Golden Calf idolatry happened before the Laws of Moses were even put into effect. They continued to break the covenant through idolatry and other missteps. They could not earn God’s favor by keeping the laws. It was clear

We cannot keep the regulations of God’s laws in the 10 Commandments. Do we always honor those in authority and give respect? God commands that we do. It is easy to do what we hear and see others doing and that is speaking disrespectfully of those in authority. That is just one commandment. We deserve only condemnation from our God.

B. The Lord does not want us to despair. He tells Jeremiah that he will set up a new covenant. This is a one sided agreement. The Lord God will do it all.

1. The Lord says in the last part of verse 34 **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** *“Wickedness”* is refers to “crooked ways.” It is all the bad things we do. When we do something wrong we are not walking the straight path of God’s commands.

“Sin” in this verse is the word for missing the “mark” or “target”. It refers to all the good things that we fail to do. Do we use the business of life and the times, to say, “I can’t go to now church, perhaps when things are better”? That is a sin.

2. The Lord says that he will ***“Forgive”***. “Forgive” seems to have the idea of sprinkling. The blood of the Jewish sacrifices were sprinkled in the Temple and on the people. It showed that they had been forgiven through the blood of the sacrifice. This reminds us of the blood of Christ which was shed at his death. We receive it sprinkled on us in the waters of Holy Baptism. There our crookedness and our failures are washed away. We also receive his blood and the forgiveness of sins in the Lord’s Supper.

C. Martin Luther grew up in a world where religion was all about rules. You had to keep the rules if you wanted any chance to be saved. Martin Luther never felt he had a chance. When Luther opened up the Bible, he found out that he was right. We heard St. Paul confirm it in the NT reading, **“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law.”** (Romans 3:20) The Bible also told Martin Luther what he didn’t know. **“And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.”** (Romans 3:24-25a) He was forgiven all of his sins freely in Jesus. This is the New Covenant that Jeremiah wrote about.

We are celebrating today because through the Lutheran Reformation we have Bibles that we can pick up and read ourselves. You can read in Romans that all your efforts to save yourself are useless. You can read that Jesus lived for you and died for you. You can rejoice because your salvation is a gift to you through faith in Jesus.

2. This New Covenant makes us new.

Martin Luther had joy, but it wasn’t just because he was going to heaven someday. God’s grace had made him a new man. He would live that way.

A. How was he a new man? He had a new heart.

1. The Lord tells Jeremiah, **“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** When the Lord pours out his saving grace on us, he changes who we are. Every one who knows Jesus loves him. But sometimes we have to grow. An example would be if you tell younger people, “Get ready we are going to church.”, they might drag their feet. If you tell an older Christian, “were going to church” they smile and get ready. Over the years the Lord grows our heart in appreciating his power and grace. As we come and hear the word, Christians of all ages can get excited.

2. As we grow in our love and understanding it does affect our behavior.

More and more we want to act as his people. Not only can we get more excited to go to church and hear the word, but it affects our everyday life.

As you know a national election is less than a week and half away. As they often do, emotions are running high. As often happens opinions are divided on candidates and issues. As your pastor and shepherd I want to encourage you to remember that you have a Jesus who promises to watch over you and his church. He will always be with us. He also promises he will eventually take us home to heaven. Knowing that grace of God can lead us to remain calm which will help those around us. Knowing that our God is gracious and powerful, we can pray daily for peace, a fair election and that the Lord provide us with strong government and good citizens. This isn't just election season, it is a season to express our faith.

The Lord in Jeremiah chooses to highlight one change in us.

B. He says that we now **“Know the Lord.”**

1. In the Temple in Jerusalem, men were allowed as far as the inner courtyard outside. Only priests went inside the Holy Place and most of them did not get to see the presence of the Lord. In the church in Luther's day, you didn't go to God directly, you went through the priests. You were encouraged to pray to the dead saints. They would approach God for you.

2. The Lord says under the New Covenant everyone will know the Lord. You know Jesus as your Savior. You can go to him directly with your sins. You can go to him directly with your prayers. From the “greatest” to the “least” we all know Jesus and we can meet him directly in prayer and in the Scriptures. We can still have a pastor pray for us and teach us about God, but it isn't the only way we can interact with Jesus.

Conclusion: Are you losing sleep over things going on in your life, in the country and sometimes in the world? Martin Luther is known to have gotten up early and spent several hours in prayer and in the Word of God. It helped him to focus his faith on Jesus and to live his life for him. Jeremiah who lived at a terrible time in history found a good night's sleep after he had heard God's promises again. You and I can sleep peacefully, and we can rejoice! Like Jeremiah and Luther we have received the Lord's Covenant of Grace. We have the gift of salvation in Jesus. That changes things! Amen.