

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
March 29, 2009
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 and John 12:20-33

Sermon Title: "Our Side of the Covenant"

(open with prayer)

Our side of the covenant is simple and pure. The brief history of the people of God was this.

1. People wanted to be God like, to live eternally and with all knowledge. (Eden)

RESULT: To know everything was to know suffering. Life and death are cyclical. It's no picnic being powerful.

2. People pretended that their power didn't effect the earth and each other. (Noah)

RESULT: Do over. Serving God and not being God is the greatest reward.

3. People wanted to be on the winning team and formed alliances with names and borders with fences. (Abraham)

RESULT: The journey of faith is primary, not the acquisition of the truth and power.

4. People thought it was OK to be a slave and be subject to the whip and torture of the overseer. (Moses)

RESULT: Liberation from slavery and a set of rules to live by so that oppression and injustice could never take over again.

5. People acted as if God given them everything and that they were the best people ever. They became the oppressors. (David)

RESULT: Their pride and self-righteousness destroyed them and every last vestige of their power. They were driven apart and many were back in slavery situations.

This is the five step history of the people of God, from the beginning of time through the exile. Roughly 2000 years, and the people of God have been repeating it over and over again. Jeremiah's words come to us in this context. "I will be their God and they will be my people." The way to relationship, and remember, its always about relationship is to understand that God is not in any temple or statue or land. God is not in position or status. God honors you, loves you, and God is in you. That does not mean that anyone of us or that all of us are God, just that, when we breathe deeply, feel the warmth, touch our souls, and recognize beauty, we are at one with God. God has seen us, loved us, forgotten all our sin, and is in our hearts.

This is the simple and pure faith of our side of the Covenant. We have been given everything we could possible need to know joy and the freedom to pursue it. Woody Bartlett wrote a whole book about this kind of freedom of love and faith. In it he writes, "Having the law of love firmly engraved in one's heart is an adventure in freedom. And as many can testify, having the love of God written on one's heart is the essence of freedom. It is the freedom to act spontaneously, knowing that one's actions will reflect what fills one's heart."

Basically, when faced with any sense of stress, or fear, or anxiousness, the response needs to be heartfelt. Our responses to those things in our lives that cause tears and pain can come directly from God. Those responses include loving, serving, being with, noticing the budding trees and the bird's song, forgiving the rising tide and the swirling wind. Our side of the Covenant is a response to God entering into our lives. It becomes the source of our relationship. It is

why the mission teams from wealthy congregations travel to impoverished communities. People that seem to have nothing have often found a way to connect to joy. The response to God's presence is the ability to sing, laugh, cry, and know that, in the words of Julian of Norwich, "all will be well, and in all matter of things, all will be made well."

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus also preaches on this intersection of God's love and our freedom. Jesus invites the crowd into a new understanding. He steps out of the cycle of power and violence and destruction. Lose your life so that you may gain your life. Serve so that you may be served. Allow others to love and serve you, but be mutual and grateful in all your loving. The voice of God will come and glory will surround us when we fulfill our side of the covenant.

Invitation: It is time to respond and be in that holy conversation. If it is your first time here or if you are part of the pillars of this congregation, there is always time to pause and remember that God is within you. The new covenant that will bring reconciliation is that God will be in your heart. What relational thing will you do in response to that relational love? What are you going create, build, and heal with that freedom? Who will be your partners? How will serve and love the people around you? How will you allow them to serve and love you? There are three options:

1. Take the piece of paper and respond in prayer to God's gift of love on your heart.
2. If you came with a member of your family, a spouse or child, turn to them and make a covenant together in response to this gift.

Or,

3. Find someone who you may not know all that well and make a new covenant. Breathe life into a new relationship and share with one another your phone number, e-mail address,

or another way in which to continue building on this love.

As you prepare to be in this covenant building process, and as we begin the process of welcoming new members to RUCC, I am reminded by a recent new member who said of our church, "I am coming to RUCC because you all are living out your faith and not just talking about it. That is the only kind of community I want to be a part of."

Enjoy one another and your sharing of this new covenant.

AMEN.