

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Fifth Sunday in Lent

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says 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. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

The prophet Jeremiah experienced the invasion and defeat of his nation when the Babylonians invaded, levelled Jerusalem, and captured thousands to march them into exile. Among those exiles was Jeremiah himself. I don't think we can really imagine how deeply the experience of defeat and exile shattered the faith of the ancient Israelites. How could God have so utterly abandoned them?

What we see in the book of Jeremiah is a man coming to terms with this experience and finding his way through to the other side. And what comes through is the emerging awareness of Jeremiah, that, in fact, God had never abandoned them. Instead, Jeremiah came to know that it was Israel who had abandoned God and that their suffering had largely been the result of their own reckless decisions and not the capriciousness of a fickle God.

Here in this passage, he reminds his people that not only had God not abandoned them, but that God loved them deeply and still wanted only what was best for them. Even better, what we see in this passage is that the creativity of God continues as God searches for new ways to lift us up and help us be the people God intended from the very beginning.

Jeremiah writes these words inspired by his deep devotion; “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.” Here is God's promise of His enduring presence; the love of God is written on our hearts; it exists within our deepest selves.

Through Christ, this promise has been extended to all people everywhere, so that no one is excluded from the circle of God's love. To find God we don't need to undertake arduous journeys or seek the directions of sages; God resides within us, each and everyone of us, and awaits only for us to recognize that no matter where we go, God will be there for us, to love us and to never abandon us.