

**Invitation:** *Christ invites to his table all who seek him, who desire to be made whole and seek to live in peace with one another. All are invited and all are welcome. Come, for the meal is ready!*

Hymn: Thou, who at thy first Eucharist, didst pray (1-2) 559

Prayer of Thanksgiving: *The Lord be with you: And also with you. May we open our hearts. May we know your presence. It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and every- where to give thanks to you, God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. (we continue in prayer) Come to us, Spirit of our Lord of love, and let the bread and wine before us bear your life to our life, nourish us with his vision of hope, and unite us in one body of peace. We remember his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await his coming in glory; Renew us by your Spirit, inspire us with your love, and unite us in the body of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### Communion

**Following communion** *We thank you, Lord, that you have fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all creation. So strengthen us in your service that our daily living may show our thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Hymn: Thou, who at thy first Eucharist, didst pray (3) 559

*We have gathered in God's holy presence, the One who etches grace on our hearts. This is the place where God has transformed us into disciples. We glorify our God, who yearns for justice, not just for a favoured few, but for the least of our world. This is the place where God will write compassion on our souls. We give thanks to God for unceasing grace; we remember God's promise to be our God – and we God's people!*

Postlude

# WELCOME TO...

## The Presbyterian Church of Saint David

October 16, 2016  
COVENANTING GOD



Call to Worship: *The Lord is making a new covenant with the people of God. Here in this place, Christ writes the law of love on our hearts. We are children of the living God. Together, let us worship the Lord of Love!*

Hymn: To Abraham and to Sarah (1) 478

Opening Prayer: *Meet us here. Breathe your Word into our souls; engrave your covenant of love upon our hearts. Teach us faithfulness and compassion so that our lives may reflect your love and justice to the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, this is our prayer. Amen.*

Hymn: To Abraham and to Sarah (2) 478

Confession: *Gracious God, We come to you broken – from that which confines us: the prejudice buried, weighted down with fear distorted self-protection breaking me, breaking you. And, so we come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people. Compassionate God, God of covenant, God of love, We come to you tired, yearning for peace and harmony. Loving God, we offer up our suffering and come to you seeking to be made whole. For you, God, put your love within us; you wrote it on our hearts, that we may be your people.* (silence) *Gentle God, God of covenant, of Love, Glorify us through Your love. Draw us to you, into you. Anoint us with your peace. Write your compassion in our hearts that we may love as you love. Amen.*

Declaration of Absolution: *The Lord comes to us with a new covenant, saying: “I will write my law on your hearts; I will forgive your wrongdoing and remember your sins no more.” Sisters and Brothers, your sins are forgiven; be at peace.*

Hymn: To Abraham and to Sarah (3) 478

**Scripture: Jeremiah 31:30-34** 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.

Hymn: We are God's People (1-2) 472

#### **The divine initiative:**

**The prophet** writes a hopeful message at the time of the Exile and issues the promise that God will create a new covenant with his people even when they are banished from the covenantal land. It comes in the midst of despair and impossible circumstances.

The Exile was seen as punishment for living in defiance of God's law. Now the prophet issues a message of hope in the time of just reward and offers the promise of compassion when there is suffering all around.

The layers of meaning here relate to the concept of covenant in the Old Testament and the way in which it developed in different forms, and in association with different people, from Noah, Moses and Abraham. God is seen as a God of grace and love whose patience is manifested in the biblical narrative. Here the prophet offers the hope that the people may be able to live in covenant with God and turn away from their past sin and their lives of deviation from righteousness.

Growth, survival and prosperity are promised in the restoration of the people, in a time of darkness and Exile, when the Temple was destroyed. Pivotal to the new covenant offered by God is the supreme gift of forgiveness.

This is a positive passage in a book which is often characterised as one that is depressing and judgmental. The message of encouragement and grace therefore is all the more impressive. It highlights a break in a persistent tradition of thought in the narrative of the Old Testament that the children suffer for the sins of their ancestors. Now individuals are to be responsible for their actions and lives living in congruence with God's will or in defiance of the implications of the covenant. **(sermon starters)**



Hymn: We are God's People (1-2) 472

The new *covenant* that Jeremiah offers refers back to that which was forged between Yahweh and the Hebrew people in their liberation from bondage, “when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.” But the issue of the day was that they broke that covenant, resulting in their new bondage in Babylonia, and now God is promising to try it again, this time placing it within them and writing it on their hearts.

**This is the only Old Testament passage where "new" modifies "covenant." What is "new" about this covenant is disputed. This covenant is explicitly said *not* to be like the one that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Jeremiah 16:14-16; 23:7-8). The new covenant is linked neither to Mt. Sinai nor to the exodus! The return from exile is a newly *constitutive* event for Israel and the new covenant is an accompaniment integral to that event. This covenant will be made by God "after those days" (Jeremiah 31:33), after Israel's return from exile.**

What this constitutive event entails for Israel was spelled out in Jeremiah 24:6-7; God will build and plant them and "give them a heart to know that I am the Lord" (see Jeremiah 32:39), replacing the “evil will/heart” so characteristic of Israel’s life before exile (see Jeremiah 13:10). The old covenant formula of relationship still applies, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33; 30:22; 31:1). But Israel will now be constituted as the people of God in a new way. God will give them a new heart so that they will know the Lord, indeed *all* the people will know the Lord. God will be their "husband" (*ba'al*, Jeremiah 31:32; recall Israel's seeking other lovers among the Baals), evident in the phrase, "know me" (Jeremiah 31:34), but what that knowledge means for Israel will change (see Jeremiah 32:38-41).

[Terence E. Fretheim](#)