

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The German philosopher, Theodore Adorno, one of the gurus of Critical Theory in the last century, was no fan of Christianity, but he came to the conclusion that for a religion to be of value, it had to be more than just an invention of man. And any religion concocted from the mind of men, he says, would be a religion that is lofty, yet something man can grasp; a religion that is demanding, yet something man can manage and attain.

This describes every religion in the world except one. Whether we speak of Islam, Buddhism, Mormonism, or whatever, all of these are lofty and demanding; yet they are all achievable by man's efforts, and can be grasped by man's understanding.

The only religion that sits by itself is the Christian Faith. The God it presents is utterly beyond our understanding...trine, three in one (to begin with), and so much more. And what the Christian religion teaches and demands is utterly beyond our grasp. It demands perfection to the letter, and this we cannot attain. And it demands faith, and this also is something we cannot achieve on our own. All this does not prove Christianity to be true. It's a faith, not provable, but believed. But per Adorno, Christianity is the only religion that is of value because it's the only one that man did not invent and concoct.

Our Jeremiah reading for today bears this out. God is going to make a new covenant with His people. Why? Because they broke the previous covenant. He didn't; they did. He was faithful to His covenant with them. And all they had to do was to let Him be their God. The burden was His. He would love them, care for them, protect them, lead them, do everything for them. And their part of the covenant? Say, "Yes! Sounds good to us! Let's do this. You be our God, and we will be Your people. You be our Shepherd, and we will be Your sheep and follow after You."

But they smashed this covenant to smithereens. They broke every rule in the book. They refused to let God lead them. They whored after other gods. They turned their back on God's love for them. It was impossible to break that covenant any more, any worse, than they did.

Now the human mind, at this point, would think, "I'm done with them! I'll find somebody else to love. I'll look for a people, a nation, that will let me be their God. I'm so over these covenant breakers! I'm washing My hands of them." This is what a human would think and do in such a situation if he was God.

And so it is utterly beyond the human mind to even consider doing what God actually does. "I'm making a new covenant with these My people," He declares through Jeremiah, "Not like the old covenant which they broke. But this new covenant will be based entirely on grace. This new covenant will stand, therefore, no matter what. It cannot be broken no matter how much, and how great, My people sin against Me, because every time they sin, I will forgive them."

This is what separates the Christian Faith from everything else out there. This is the Gospel. And this Gospel could never come to the mind of a man. It is utterly foreign to how we think.

Five hundred years ago, Luther notes in His 1518 Heidelberg Theses, that God's love is fundamentally different from man's love. God's love does not find its object but creates it. That's not how we love. Human love finds its object. We love people because we find in them something to love. You marry your spouse not because you detest the person, but because you find something attractive about the

person. Can you imagine a young man saying, "I'm going to find the meanest, most unattractive, most detestable woman I can find and marry her!" That just doesn't happen. True, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But it's because we see something that is beautiful in a person, even if another does not see it, which draws us to that person.

This is the opposite, however, of how God loves. There was nothing beautiful about His people. Nothing that should attract Him. Nothing which would draw Him to them. God loved them in spite of themselves. Would you cuddle up to a stinking, angry skunk that was hell-bent on spraying you over and over? God did! This accurately describes His people.

And it accurately describes us. There is nothing in us, or about us, which attracts God to us. Our sins against Him have a horrific odor, far worse than the smelliest skunk. But we don't like hearing this. We reject this truth. "There must be something good in me, something good I have done, that causes God to want to be my God, that draws Him to me." We cannot get out of our thick-headed skulls that God must love us because we are lovable.

Friends, we must repent of this wishful thinking. It is a deception of Satan. For if there is anything in us, even the tiniest speck of beauty, that draws God to us in love, we don't need Jesus; we don't need a Savior to bring God and us together. We'll do it ourselves.

When we see ourselves as anything more than wretched, miserable skunks, we leave the Christian Faith and join in with all the false religions in the world. They do not have the Gospel. They have no use for it, for they are not a basket of deplorables.

We are. And this truth hurts. But this makes the Gospel all the more sweet. God loves you in spite of yourself. He loves us when we were His enemies. This is what His covenant-breaking people became...His enemies. But God chose to call them His beloved. And this is what He calls you.

Now a covenant must be sealed with blood. And so we turn our eyes to the cross and see God Himself putting this new covenant of grace into effect by shedding His own blood for sinners. God doesn't hold His nose at our stinking sinfulness. He breathes it all in. Our stench He takes into Himself. Jesus becomes sin for us, and we become the holy ones, the forgiven ones of God. This Gospel is not comprehended by the human mind; it is believed in the heart, for it is the Holy Spirit who works faith in the heart to believe this good news.

You, my friend, are part of this new covenant. Only now it is called a testament...the new testament. Jesus' last will and testament. You who are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection are given the very blood that sealed this testament for you. At the altar, Jesus assures you that you are one for whom He died; that you are forgiven; that His blood was spilled for you, because here He gives that blood to you.

And your part in this new testament? Receive it with thanksgiving. Do it often to remember and proclaim His death for you. The burden belongs to Jesus. He did everything for you to win your salvation. He baptized you to make you His sheep. And as your God and Shepherd, He loves you, cares for you, leads you, protects you... And His Spirit works in you to create the response of obedience, thankfulness, and joy. Amen.