

Christ Was Broken

Vicar Philip Casmer

“Promises are made to be broken.” You are probably familiar with that quote. That’s the way I learned it. The original author is Aesop, the sixth century fable-writer. When he spoke this quote the first time, however, it was a little different. He said, “Enemies’ promises are made to be broken.” That’s a little less bleak than the quote we have now isn’t it? At least those breaking the promises are enemies – that’s what we expect from them. I find it a little ironic that usage has changed this quote. Maybe we’ve changed it because experience has taught us that promises are not often kept. Isn’t it true though, that when we break a promise, we’ve acted like the enemy? We haven’t done what we’ve said. Basically, we’ve lied. Maybe that’s why the quote changed – we don’t like to think about who we really are.

Jeremiah told the people of Israel and Judah exactly who they were – they had made themselves God’s enemies. They had made a promise to God, but they hadn’t kept it. We have done the same: not always kept our promises to God, not done what he has asked. So, through Jeremiah, God had to make another promise – one in which Christ was broken, to repair the broken covenant, and to inscribe the new covenant on our hearts.

Christ Was Broken to Repair the Broken Covenant

After the people of Israel had been liberated from Egypt and led by the hand through the desert, they waited at the base of Mt. Sinai as God’s presence thundered in black cloud and danced in fire on the mountain. He had just revealed his will to these people. In Exodus 24, Moses spoke God’s will to God’s people “and they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do.’” They agreed to God’s covenant. A covenant was usually an agreement between two parties. It included blessings and curses for the participants should they fail to keep their promises. Israel would follow all of God’s decrees and commands and God would bless them.

But then Moses ascended the rumbling mountain for a forty-day note-taking session with God. While the ink was still wet on the covenant, Israel

broke their promise. “Hey, Moses is taking a long time up there...” (God himself is still roiling and thundering around the mountain) “Aaron, make us a god we can follow, ok?” A little more than a month under their promise they broke it. Moses came down the mountain, with the writing of God in stone, and Aaron offered the worst excuse of

Excuses and broken promises was all God could get from these people.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

all time, “They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” They offered excuses and broken promises more times than we can probably count: marrying non-Israelite spouses, offering worthless sacrifices, and worshiping idols. Excuses and broken promises was all God could get from these people.

These are the people Jeremiah served, Israel and Judah, who had abandoned the Lord and disregarded every warning Moses had given them. Jeremiah’s message was judgment. But God calls them to repentance in love, “I was a husband to [you].” He led them by his own hand out of Egypt, gave them a land of their own – always kept his promises, never broke his end of

(Continued on Page 2)

OUR MISSION

As God’s disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God’s Word in its truth and purity.

By God’s grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

(Continued from page 1)

the covenant. And Israel invited into its spiritual bed selfish desires and false gods – they were spiritual adulterers.

It would not be hard to make the argument that today we are no different. In fact, I would challenge you to prove otherwise. It's true: we aren't under any law like Israel – no animal sacrifice, no flaming mountain and dark thunderclouds. Yet we do fall under God's will. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" still stands. And we haven't been perfect. In fact, "no one living is righteous before [God]" the Psalmist says. We, unrighteous people, have not kept God's law. We've broken promises. When we become members we promise to live and act according to God's will. Have you always done that? Have we always been steadfast in the faith, or have we strayed now and then? Have we been diligent in the use of Word and Sacrament or tired of both at times? Have we led a godly life, or indulged a little on Friday night? Have we always supported God's work with time, talents, prayers, and offerings, or hoarded all of the above for ourselves?

Christ Was Broken to Inscribe the New Covenant in Our Hearts

In 1850 Nathaniel Hawthorne published a book called *The Scarlet Letter*. The leading lady, Hester Prynne, is found to be illegitimately pregnant. Her Puritanical punishment is to be badged "adulteress" with a scarlet "A". I hope you like scarlet. That same badge blazes out from each of us like a beacon. Our adultery – our satisfaction of sinful selfishness sticks. It foreshadows the blazing hellfire – the punishment for our unfaithfulness – that we deserve.

But our perfect spouse has reconciliation in mind. He wants to repair the broken covenant. In amazing grace God says, "Because you couldn't keep my laws I'm starting over with someone who can." When God says "a new covenant" he means that he's going to repair our damaged covenant so that it will be kept – but not by us. Christ is the covenant keeper. We "cheated" on our husband – we invited selfishness and unfaithfulness into our bed just like Israel. But Christ was the perfect spouse. In the words of Peter, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22)." Or the writer to the Hebrews, "once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:9)."

No promises were broken in this relationship. Instead, salvation was won when the perfect spouse, Christ, removed that letter, deep scarlet with our adultery, and placed it on himself. He was broken because of our broken covenant. You see, God doesn't simply forget sin – he punished it in his own Son with beatings, and scourges demanding deep scarlet blood. There on the cross is where we find our God saying, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." No more guilt, no threat of punishment. In our broken Savior we find a covenant repaired.

Christ was broken so that we could have forgiveness. He was broken to change us, to take the new covenant– the message that we are sinners, the message that we have a Savior, and the label that we are God's children and to inscribe the new covenant on our hearts.

"I will be their God, and they will be my people." Those were God's words. But on God's part "will be" really isn't the whole story. The whole truth is that God has always been our God. He has always kept his end of the covenant and he doesn't break promises. Because he is faithful and gracious, we are God's people even though we have acted very much unlike his people.

In our broken Savior we find a covenant repaired. Christ was broken so that we could have forgiveness.

Because Christ was broken in our place God now says, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." You could also translate "write" as "inscribe." At Mt. Sinai, God wrote the first covenant in stone. At Golgotha he inscribes the new covenant on our hearts. The old covenant, with its laws and regulations, was written by the finger of God on stone. The new covenant, the good news of God's love and grace, is inscribed on your heart by sharp nails, scarlet with Christ's blood. This isn't a superficial label. God etches the new covenant into our hearts. "We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18)." Transformation is changing, a total change that doesn't wash off or fade away – God engraves his love into our hearts by the Gospel through faith. During his ministry Jesus described it like this, "The Kingdom of God is within you." We are God's subjects, his people, inwardly and outwardly, because on the cross Christ "draws all men to himself."

A covenant like this leads us to "Love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind (Matt 22:37)." Instead of a scarlet badge and the promise of death, new life is planted in our hearts. And "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt 12:34)." God's law is a part of us, inscribed on our hearts. It's our new badge – one that lets us live as God's people out of love for Christ broken for our sins. We don't follow a covenant; we are the covenant. There are no ceremonial laws, no sacrifices, because "it is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1)." Now we simply "offer our bodies as living sacrifices...as [our] spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1)." We offer our time, talents, prayers, and offerings in support of our God's work as forgiven children. We abandon the sinful nature and are drawn to the cross of Christ. We sing it in some of the most beautiful words in verse four of hymn 387: To pledge my labor willingly, which shall so sweet a service be that angels well might envy me, Christ crucified,

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

I come. And well they should envy you, who are badged with the blood of Christ and inscribed with God's covenant to serve out of love.

A covenant allowed someone to "know" someone – it was a binding contract that they would do as they promised. "They will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. Because of God's great love, Christ was Broken for our broken promises. But he did it to repair the broken covenant, and to inscribe the new covenant on our hearts. Promises were made to be kept – and that's what God does.

Philip Casmer is serving as vicar at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.



This Week's Announcements

EASTER FOR KIDS- On Saturday, April 1, Apostles hosted an Easter for Kids activity day under the theme "Walking with Jesus". Kids learned about their risen Savior, made crafts and snacks, and had fun. Visit www.apostlesmt.net to view the photo gallery.

EASTER INVITATION- Please feel free to take an invitation to send to a friend or family member. They are located in the Narthex and include information for Good Friday and Easter worship.

ALL-OCCASION CARDS- Cards, including Easter, confirmation, baptism, and graduation, are provided at cost for the congregation as a service of the Ladies' Guild. They are located on the shelves in the northeast corner of the fellowship room and are available on a self-serve basis. Any Ladies' Guild member will be glad to help if needed.

WELCOME THE NEW MEMBERS- We are blessed by the Lord that he has lead many into the fellowship that we enjoy here at Apostles Lutheran Church. Greet the following individuals as your bothers and sisters in the Lord during our potluck dinner after church: Paul, Ali, Jack and Julia Manning (transferred memberships from Orlando, Florida); Melanie Smith (welcomed through profession of faith); Cedar Woodson (transferred from the WELS congregation in Lewistown); Amanda Connolly (welcomed through adult confirmation) and Robbie Connolly (baptized member); Becky Hill (welcomed through profession of faith); Patrick Woodson (baptized member); Kabrina Lindeen (baptized member); Peter and Samuel Townsend (baptized members).

MIDWEEK LENTEN SERVICES are at 7:00 p.m. every Wednesday until Holy Week. This year we follow the theme, "Seven Times He Spoke" as we move through Lent. Come, worship our Lord during the week this Lenten season. Come, focus on the terrible price of sin and the wonderful payment made. "Seven Times He Spoke" and each time it was for you.

EASTER LILIES- Let's help beautify our church on Easter Sunday with an array of Easter lilies or other plants. We are no longer able to provide order and delivery service making it necessary for individuals to purchase their own lilies. However, if anyone needs help with purchase or delivery, please call Juanita Holmberg. If you are willing to help, please sign your name on the "Lilies for Easter" sheet posted in the narthex. Please place your plants with your name taped to the back in the kitchen on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. The lilies may be taken home after the 10:30 service on Easter Sunday. If you have any questions, please contact Marlene Hedin.

MONDAY NIGHT SERVICES- Regular Monday night worship services will continue throughout Lent.

WORSHIP FOLDER AND ANNOUCEMENTS- More announcements are available in the bulletin insert, which is available online, along with the sermon and the worship folder.

Lenten Prayer – Condemned

Pastor Daron Lindemann

Heavenly Father, there is so much violence and injustice in the passion of your Son, our Lord. We cringe at the blood, and we confess we are not innocent. We admit that, because of our sins, his blood is on us as much as it is on the Jews themselves and Pilate. It is our responsibility.

But the blood of Jesus is holy blood, Father; let us find in it our cleansing and purity. The blood of Jesus is innocent blood; let us find in it our freedom from guilt. The blood of Jesus is human blood; let us find in it our death and condemnation that is required for sin and provided for us and everyone by our Substitute and Savior.

We pray today for a person we know who feels overwhelmed by the curse of guilt because of a sinful decision or unchristian mistake. Bring that person to us in some way, dear God, that we may in loving kindness share your forgiveness with that person. Cleanse that person's conscience, free that person from condemnation, and work living faith and repentance in that person.

(Continued on Page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Heavenly Father, keep us from sin today that we may imitate you as your dearly loved children. Guard our consciences from selfish and sinful desires. Give us courage to look out for the interests of others with sacrificial love.

And let Jesus' blood be on us, not to condemn us, but to save us according to your promise.

Amen.

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
Billings, Montana

Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes Sunday at 9:15 a.m.
Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m.
Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a **Bible Information Class**.

More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.

Christ Was Broken

Inside: This Week's Sermon

OUR MISSION

As God's disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God's Word in its truth and purity.

By God's grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
3140 Broadwater Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

Mail To: