

SERMON: "GOD OF THE AGAIN"

SCRIPTURE: JEREMIAH 31:1-6; MATTHEW 28:1-10

DATE: SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Jeremiah 31:1-6 (NIV)

"At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."

² This is what the Lord says:

"The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the wilderness;
I will come to give rest to Israel."

³ The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

⁴ I will build you up again,
and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.
Again you will take up your timbrels
and go out to dance with the joyful.

⁵ Again you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

⁶ There will be a day when watchmen cry out
on the hills of Ephraim,
'Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the Lord our God.'"

Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

When I was a kid there was no such thing as a VCR, PVR or binge watching with Netflix. The possibility of taping a TV show or watching it at another time wasn't even thought of. We were happy when colour TV arrived.

In those days shows were shown once and then rerun maybe one more time in the summer months---maybe. You couldn't watch it whenever it suited your own personal schedule. It was shown at a certain time. If you missed it, you missed it.

The world has changed.

Our children and grandchildren are growing up with new technology. They can find almost any show now and watch it again and again.

When our kids were young they had their favourites. There was a Disney movie called "So Dear To My Heart" but we always called it "Little Black Lamb". I used to be able to recite whole scenes from memory.

I was always amazed at the ability of our kids to watch and enjoy the same shows over and over again. Frequency didn't seem to put them off. They had their favourites and they couldn't get enough of them.

It's actually been a long time since I've even thought of "Little Black Lamb". I kind of miss it. Maybe I'll look it up online when we get home so I can watch it again.

The word "again" speaks of repetition and fresh beginnings. In our Old Testament lesson the word "again" is used literally again and again and again. In 6 verses that word comes up 3 times.

From verses 4-6 we have important promises made by God.

They were promises to a people in exile.

They were promises to a united Israel---no longer to be divided North and South.

They were promises of God's love and desire for an everlasting relationship.

They were promises of restoration and new beginnings.

Again, Israel would be rebuilt.

Again, there would be joyful celebration and dancing.

Again, God's people would return to their land and enjoy its fruitfulness.

It was all based upon God's love and grace---God's deep desire that God would be their God and they would be God's people.

God had saved them before when God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

God had looked after them before when God had sustained them in the wilderness journey of 40 years.

God had given them fresh starts before when the wilderness journey came to an end as they entered the Promised Land and received all its blessings.

Commentators point out that this passage is all about promise. It is God giving promises and only promises to Israel. There are no instructions to hear---no conditions to meet---no laws to obey---no requirement for the people to renew the covenant with God.

It's all about what God will do for them---again!

Every Sunday we gather together to celebrate---we celebrate, again and again, what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

All the love---all the grace---all the promises that God made to God's people found ultimate fulfilment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Easter event is about the love God has shown to the world once and for all, yet again and again.

Once and for all, yet again and again!
A bit of a paradox.

One of many Christian paradoxes.

The Easter event---the resurrection of Jesus happened once.
The victory of Christ over death, sin and Satan is perfect, complete and final.

Once and for all, God has proven what God thinks of the world.
Once and for all, God has shown through actions---not just words--just how important the world is to God.

By allowing the sacrifice of God's only Son and by raising Christ from the dead, God has offered love and grace to us to the absolute extreme.

Once and for all, we have the proof of God's love.

Yet---we are blessed by God's love and care, again and again.

Each and every year we celebrate Easter's victory.
Each and every Sunday we offer God our praise and our lives as we worship together in a "little Easter"---for that is what Sunday worship is---a "little Easter" each and every week.

We come together in this place again and again and again because God's victory continues to have an impact on us.

Our lives continue to need God's love and care.
We continue to need the reminder of God's victory.
We continue to seek out renewal, restoration and fresh beginnings with the Lord.

Al Bryant tells of hearing an interesting statement from a sailor he knew.

The sailor remarked,

"How is it that almost every animal except man renews its beauty and youth at particular seasons? Birds moult their plumage, snakes slough their skins, even the cockroach casts off its old covering, and all come forth bright and beautiful as in the days of their youth; but we grow uglier and more discoloured every year, and the same skin must serve until our dying days."

The sailor was right about our physical limitations.

But, as human beings, we have the wonderful gift of being able to renew our spirits and, by doing so, renew our lives.

What Easter did, once and for all, allows us the power to come to God and be renewed again and again.

We might end up with wrinkled skin but we don't have to have wrinkled souls.

When we make our commitment of faith to Christ, we iron our souls---fresh and smooth.

When we recommit ourselves to Christ after drifting a bit, we iron our souls.

When we recognize God's hand touching our lives with new hope, we iron our souls.

When we seek a new beginning in life with God's help, we iron our souls.

Again and again and again---God offers us fresh starts, renewed relationships and even rebuilt lives.

Fresh starts and new things are on our agenda in the next little while. As God has called me to retirement, so too God has called St. Timothy's to a new stage in its ministry.

For us all, this will mean periods of adjustment.

Periods of anxiety.

Periods of beginning again.

Periods of stretching and growing as people of faith.

Periods of uncertainty.

As one of our kids told me the last time we moved, "We don't like change!"

But as more than one person has also told me, "Change can be good."

Whenever we make changes in our lives they have an impact on family and friends.

We don't make changes in a vacuum.

We don't make changes alone.

Our God of Easter assures us of guidance.

Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us what can be done when we focus upon Him.

The Holy Spirit offers us strength and hope.

Our God of the again walks with us.

We needn't fear a future of new beginnings and fresh starts. Christianity is all about new life---living the adventure of a journey, committing and recommitting ourselves to the One who created us and loves us as if we were God's only creation.

Not knowing what lies ahead, we trust that we will get where we need to be because we are never on the journey by ourselves. Our God longs for us to be excited about what lies ahead. We need only remember that God is already there.

There can be wonder and awe in change---in renewal---in recommitment. Fresh enthusiasm and energy can develop.

Easter promises us that potential.
Worship each Sunday reinforces it.
The touch of God's hand in our everyday lives proves it.

And it happens again and again and again.

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