



Sunday March 21, 2021
Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Pastor Tony Acompnado

Forgive and Forget. It's a simple phrase that each of us has heard at some point in our lives, but one I think most would agree is easier said than done. These suggestive words tend to roll off our tongues with relative ease, and if we're being completely honest then we have to admit – they don't always roll out of our hearts quite as easily.

Unless of course, you're my wife. For as long as I have known her, my wife has always had an uncanny ability to do just that – forgive and forget. I don't have a clue how she does it but given the number of mistakes that I've had to ask forgiveness for throughout our twenty plus years of marriage – I have to say that I'm deeply grateful for her and her seemingly superhuman ability. For many of us though, the word *forgiveness* is a very heavy word to speak – and an even more difficult one to practice.

Well on this fifth Sunday in Lent that's exactly the message we encounter in today's reading from Jeremiah. And while this sentiment to forgive and forget is good advice we're encouraged to follow, today's text from Jeremiah gifts us with something far beyond ourselves – an intimate reminder of the power of God's grace as *God* chooses to forgive and forget.

So, today as we honor our Lenten journey in search of a better relationship with God, I'd like us to try something together this morning.

First, I'd like to you to take a moment to think about and hold on to one difficult memory of something you wish that God would forget – maybe it's something you said, or something you did, maybe it's something you regret or are ashamed of – and maybe it's something you've been struggling with guilt over and carrying around for quite some time.

Next, I'd like you to think of and hold on to one thing that you wish *you* could forget – maybe it's a time you were slighted or hurt or betrayed or disappointed – and maybe this heavy burden continues to weigh on you.

As you hold onto these things in your mind, I'd actually like to invite you to imagine that you're holding them in each of your hands. And in just a moment, I'd like you to close your eyes as I read today's text about God's intentional forgetting again – and as you hear these words, I want you to open your hand and let go of the thing that you wish God would forget, because most certainly, God already has.

³¹ 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. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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.

And now that you've done *this*, I want to challenge you over the next week to try and let the other thing go as well. But please don't think for a moment that I'm minimizing how difficult this may be for you to do. I only have hope that you will try – because in doing so, by the grace of God you will be set free from being imprisoned to that difficult memory.



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See, God insists on not only forgiving our sins, but forgetting them altogether for the sake of a new and better relationship with us. Each time we look into the mirror and see hopeless or unworthy, God reminds us of his unfailing love and forgiveness. He takes away the disappointment. He removes the guilt. And at the cross of our Savior Jesus, he shows us the true extent of his love. A crucified God offers us a view of God who shows his perfect love by deciding to suffer for humanity. Such a God meets human beings in the struggles of time and circumstance and ultimately liberates and redeems. God is constantly seeking to reconcile with us.

“The days are surely coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant...” God’s covenant is unfailing. It won’t let us down, especially as we live in a world full of disappointment. In the promise of this new covenant, God will bring newness out of destruction. God will bring hope where there is no hope. God will bring life out of death. And God will make a way where there is no way.

In God’s promise God states that no longer will the relationship between God and God’s people be one where the people just know “about” God, rather the people, from the least to the greatest, will know God – with all the intimacy the word entails. God will wash away the people’s sins once and for all and remember them no more. It is in this renewed relationship with Christ that we find the power to live among all the brokenness which we encounter each day, and the bottom line is that it is Christ’s love for us which enables us to carry on.

Throughout the season of Lent, we are called into moments of deep honesty – to reflect upon and turn away from all the ways in which our lives have fallen short of what God desires for us. It is a time for emptying ourselves so that we are prepared for the good news of Easter – but here, in *these* words from the prophet Jeremiah we are immersed in hope as we are reminded by God’s grace filled promise to us.

For every moment this world reminds us that we aren’t good enough or that we don’t have what it takes – Jeremiah reminds us that in an extraordinary act of grace, God chooses to let go of every memory of our faults, our mistakes, and our turning away from his will.

My dear friends, it is in this gracious act of love that God says to each and every one of us – I love you in spite of yourself – and because of that love, your worthiness and the worthiness of all humanity is secured. Today we hear of God taking the initiative to renew God’s covenant with God’s people – for us, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”* What makes this new covenant with God possible is what had always been true, but simply needed to be learned again. Thanks be to God. Amen.