



God is a Ball Hog – Touchpoint for October 27, 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV) A New Covenant

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 I will remember their sin no more.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Behold the days are coming when I will make a new covenant...This is the covenant I will make:

I will put my law in their minds...

I will write it on their hearts.

I will be their God...

I will forgive their wickedness...

I will remember their sins no more.”

God is a ball-hog. When it comes to our salvation, God doesn't play well with others. God doesn't share. If being saved were a ball game, God would be a ball-hog.

Did you ever play a sport that involved a ball? Did you ever play with someone who hogged the ball the whole time? Did you like it? Neither did I?

Yet when it comes to our salvation, our healing, our wholeness...God is a ball hog. Our reading for today makes it clear. God keeps saying, “I will, I will, I will.” The only time we are mentioned as doing anything, we break the covenant.

So, what do we do with a God who takes things into God's own hands? What do we do with a God who doesn't wait for us to act? What do we do with a God who initiates and completes our salvation without any help from us?

Before we can begin to talk about what great 'good news' this passage is—these verses are—I think we need to acknowledge they are a threat to us. Because you see, they don't allow us a say. God has simply decided in Jesus to take our salvation into God's hands and secure it. God will not wait for us to be ready, to be open, to be inclined. God has simply decided to take control.

Now losing control is not something I like to do. Giving it up is even worse. Heck, I won't even give up the remote control for my TV. Why would I give up control of my salvation?

So what do we do with a God who takes things into God's own hands? What do we do with a God who

doesn't wait for us to act? What do we do with a God who initiates and completes our salvation without any help from us?

Perhaps a better question is: what DID we do with a God who controlled our salvation? Well, if we go back to Genesis, we see in Adam and Eve that we ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Why? Well, we wanted to be god-like. We wanted to have the final say over good and evil, right and wrong. We wanted to be god of our lives and world.

God then initiated a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, and later with Moses. Guess what we did with those covenants? We broke them.

When that didn't work too well, God decided to step in in Jesus, to establish a new covenant. He started healing people who didn't ask to be healed. He started forgiving people who didn't even ask to be forgiven. And what did we do? Well, we hung him on a cross and said, "You can't do that. You are not the kind of God we want." You see, we want the final say. We want to be in the driver's seat.

What's that awful bumper sticker? "God is my co-pilot." Really?! How big of us! How magnanimous of us! How honored the God who created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead must feel for us to let God sit next to us and be our CO-pilot. Can't you just picture God doing a Snoopy dance in heaven at the thought?

For Luther, this was our great sin...our great bondage.

From Adam and Eve on we have wanted to be in control. In the words of the cliché, we cannot "Let God be God."

Yet here is the 'Good News,' here is the great insight of the Reformation: God is bigger than you and me. God does not call off God's almightiness to save you and me. God calls on it.

After we hung him on a cross and put him in a grave. God simply came back 3 days later and said, "What are you going to do now to stop me? Peace be with you."

This is the new covenant. God has simply decided not to remember our sin anymore. Nowhere is this more clearly acted out than in this meal—Jesus' last supper. Jesus even uses the words 'new covenant' to talk about what is going on here.

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you, and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembering of me."

Now to better understand what this means we need to get a grip on the word "remembrance or remember." We think it means memory, but it is so much more. The Greek word it comes from we get our word amnesia. And amnesia is much more than memory, than forgetting or remembering. Amnesia is a disconnect, a separation from... I don't have amnesia if I forget where I put my car keys. I have amnesia if I forget I have a car or forget how to drive. Those who have loved ones who suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's know the painful difference between having a parent, friend or spouse who is forgetful and one who has amnesia.

So, it would be better to understand this word remember as re-member. To reconnect.

Re-membering that which is broken, that which is divided, that which is dis-membered.

Re-member as the opposite of dis-member.

That is what Jesus is doing in the night in which he was betrayed. He is re-membering his disciples.

That is what Jesus is doing here this day. He is re-membering us.

Jesus at his last supper, gathers together the members of his clan, his tribe, his followers.

Judas, a member of this group is going to betray him. Dis-member himself from Jesus.

Peter, a member of this group is going to deny him. Dis-member himself from Jesus.

James and John are going to turn into Sleepy and Snoozy.

And the rest are going to turn into cowardly lions. And “Yes”, I realize I am mixing my children's fairy tales, but hang with me on this. The rest of the members are going to fall asleep and then run away from Jesus—dis-member, dis-member, dis-member.

And in that night, Jesus takes bread and wine, and says, “This is me. I'm going to put me in you. I'm going to re-member me to you even as you dis-member yourself from me.”

This is what he does with us today. We dis-member ourselves from him every day, every week, every month of every year. And yet, in this meal, here he is—re-membering us—re-connecting us to him.

Amazing, isn't it? That the Son of the God of the universe, on the night in which his disciples were going to disassociate, disconnect, dis-member themselves as his followers... On that night he gives them an act in which he might be re-connected, re-associated, re-membered to them.

Amazing, isn't it? That the God of the universe does not feel complete, whole, fully membered unless God can be re-connected, re-membered with you and me.

Now most ball hogs will take their ball and go home by themselves once they've won their game and proven how much better they are than you. But God is a different kind of ball-hog. God isn't content to just take the ball of salvation and go home. Instead, God includes us in a new game. Not the game of “having to save ourselves” but rather the game of “having BEEN saved”.

God won't take the ball and go home until God has re-connected, re-associated, re-membered Godself to you and me. God isn't content to take the ball of salvation and go home unless God can take us with to engage in the game of “having BEEN saved”.

This is the game we now play. The game of “having BEEN saved”.

St. Paul says it well in Philippians when he calls us to “work out our salvation.” Now many people take this to mean that we have to figure out, or solve our salvation. We have to make it happen. But that is not what Paul means. Paul means to live out our salvation.

It's like this, when I go to the gym—OK, when you go to the gym—you don't go to find or create muscles.

You already have them. You go to work out your muscles. And in fact, the next morning when you get out of bed after working out for the first time, you actually discover you have muscles that ache that you never knew you had.

Working out our salvation is like that. Every day we discover anew the ways the grace of God, the salvation of God, is at work in our lives, to put it in theological terms. The issue isn't what we are going to do with our free will, decide whether to accept Jesus or not for our salvation. Rather the issue is what are we going to do with our FREED will...f-r-e-e-D will. Now that God has secured our salvation, justification, meaning, purpose, however you want to language it, we have been FREED from having to save ourselves. We have been FREED to live for others. We don't have a free will. We have a FREED will. That's the game of "having Been saved" we are called to play, to live.

But so often, we just don't get it.

You know, sometimes I think the patron saint of modern-day American Christianity should be Hiroo Onoda. Does anybody know who Hiroo Onoda was? Hiroo Onoda was the last Japanese WW2 soldier to surrender. The last one to surrender.

Does anyone know when Hiroo Onoda surrendered? It was 1974. Does anyone know when WW2 ended? 1945. Hiroo Onoda surrendered almost 30 years after the war ended.

It's one of those odd memories I have from childhood, not really connected to anything else. But I actually remember sitting at the breakfast table with my dad—a veteran of the Pacific theater—as he read the story in the Arizona Republic in 1974. I can still remember him shaking his head, laughing and saying, "What an idiot. Doesn't he know the war is over? It's done. Finished. How stupid can you get?"

How stupid can you get?

Well, 2000 years ago Jesus hung on a cross and uttered these words,

"IT IS FINISHED."

And way too many of us keep fighting a battle long since over.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the game of life is forever changed.

In the new covenant Jeremiah talks about in our reading, in the new covenant Jesus initiates in this meal,

In all of these things, the game of life is forever changed.

The game of life defined as "Having to save yourself" is over, done.

"IT IS FINISHED."

There's a new game in town—the game of "having BEEN saved."

PLAY BALL!!!!

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Kyrie Eleison

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic church)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life. The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.

