

Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire.

When I was raising my daughter, Linnea, and she was first heading out on her own to go to a friend's house, or to a rehearsal or to a party, I would always call out to her as she walked out the door, "Make good choices!" As I look back on that parting phrase, I realize that all that time I was making a theological statement. Our choices form who we are as individuals and as a people. God has given us the freedom to make a choice among many options, and we need the strength and guidance to make good choices.

God's guidance came with the original covenant with the people of Israel in the form of the 10 commandments. God tried to stay close to the created human beings by giving a list of (mostly negative) guidelines: don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery... and none of us measured up. (At the very least we all covet or are jealous of someone else.) We are free to make good choices, but we often misuse our freedoms. The intent of God's commandments was to create a reminder/ a pact with the people to behave well.

In the hopes of shaping their kids' behavior, there are other send-off comments that parents offer to their departing offspring, like "Don't be late." Honestly, any one of us is more likely to resist the concept of "don't be late," and may actually slow down the return just to show our independence. (This tactic is often accompanied by the phrase, "you're not the boss of me!") These are thoughts that weaken us and our relationships. We push back against the individual commandment "don't be late," just as we push back against the community rules and regs that Moses brought down from the mountain on stone tablets. For parents, an alternative to those weakening sending words is: "Hurry

home!” In other words, “you will be missed, you are wanted, this is WHERE you belong.” It is an inspiring guide: Hurry home.”

Maybe this alternative is the NEW of the new covenant that God wanted to bring to the people through the prophet Jeremiah. The new covenant was delivered in positive, inspiring terms: “I will be your God, You will be my people.” And this covenant was not written down externally, but permanently instilled in our hearts. We belong to God and we belong to each other. This is an inspiring promise from God so integral to our relationship with God, that every beat of our heart is a reminder: I am your God, You are my people. Every beat. Put your hand on your heart. Every beat: I am your God, You are my people. [keep hand on your heart] When we know in our hearts who we belong to, we are likely to tell the truth, to honor commitments, to care for our parents, and to stand up for each other. We don’t need a laundry list of dos and don’ts, we only need to know that Yahweh said, “I will be your God, You will be my people.” We won’t even have to be reminded, it is already written on our hearts.

It is important to note that this promise God has given to us is a two way street. There are two sides to the covenant – God and people. Furthermore, it is not God and person! This is a covenant with us as a community; it is a promise to us as a gathering, not a series of individual vows. As a people of God, we are not intended to go about fulfilling our side of the covenant on our own. We are not intended to be independent of each other OR of God. We are intended to do this covenant thing together, becoming all the more **Dependent** on one another. I guess ideally it would be **interdependence**, where we take turns leaning on each other in the journey of faith. I will be your God; You will be my people. All of you.

Still, we need to be reminded of the promise, the covenant, and our relationship, don't we? My very favorite send-off to children I actually didn't hear until I was an adult, or I would have used it myself. As kids are heading out into the world, this favorite send-off is, "Remember who you are." By the time children are old enough to be going out on their own, they are old enough to have a developed sense of Self. Children have the self-awareness to say, "I am a person who makes good choices; I am a person who belongs in this home; I know and will remember who I am."

God is a persistent parent, always trying to find the right thing to do and say so that we children will listen and get it right. When we falter, neglect, hurt and forget, which we always do, God offers yet another covenant that says, not only can I change your thinking (through the 10 commandments), and change your will (through writing on your hearts), I can transform your entire being by becoming one with you.

God promises to us: not only change, but transformation. God does not make things go back to the way they were, as though we had asked, "Make my heart great again," but God "creates a new heart" within us. This is not restoration, but something completely new. In Psalm 51 we heard, I need to be completely made over. I need a completely new heart – I need to align my entire spirit with the Spirit of God.

God offers us yet another new covenant that does exactly that. It is Divine Love in human form. Jesus, a gift from God, is an embodied moral consciousness for all people. Jesus is the ultimate sign that nothing can separate us from God's love – the apostle Paul said, "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities,

nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

Our divine parental figure is the one who has been calling out to us for millenia as we head out the door into the world: Make good choices, Hurry home, Remember who you are. When we hear God’s voice calling out, we are inspired to remember who we are and to whom we belong / we remember that we are loved and completely transformed so we as a people can Be the spirit of the covenant gifted to us.

Amen.

Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

Indeed, **I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.**

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret
heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than
snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from
me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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. 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. 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.** 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.