

Rev. Lacey Hunter
March 21, 2021 | Lent 5
Community Church of Sebastopol
Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34
"Written On Our Hearts"

Throughout Lent we have been exploring the theme of covenants—how we turn towards, practice and embody with all that we are, our promises to one another and to God. We are five weeks into Lent today, so maybe it a good time for a little review. What covenants has our wilderness journey taken us through thus far:

God brought the waters up over the world to return the world to goodness. Told Noah and family to bring onto the vessel what was needed for a new world free of evil. Put a rainbow in the sky to say this world is a new promise, ready for the possibility of freedom and of life.

God gave Abraham and Sara new names, names that could hold the truth of their bodies and the journey of struggle and resilience that they carried and that carried them. These new names, like a covenant, held the promise that generations will go forth together in the changing. No one will be left behind but each one known, your name, your fullness woven into the story of future.

God brought the people again through the waters and out of slavery. Etched into stone ten commandments, a covenant of what freedom could look like, a covenant of what freedom requires. As Pastor Rachel reflected, God said in this covenant that we must "honor the sabbath." Sabbath. Also known as sabbatical. Also known as the time of jubilee—the time when debts are canceled, people are freed, stolen land is returned, care is offered for the sake of care rather than profit, and all creation returns to right relation with God. When God said "Follow these commandments," was God saying, "As free people, promise to create more freedom."

And all of these covenants were broken. The people forgot the colors of freedom. Forgot their names. Forgot the formational power of sabbath. It is here in this brokenness that we encounter the prophet Jeremiah and a people torn between the exile they have lived and are living in and the oppression they have been a part of creating. And God says, "The days are surely coming, when I will make a new

covenant..." Not like the covenant you and your ancestors broke even though I was your partner in freedom. No this covenant I will put in you, I will write the ways of God on your hearts. Because this is how God moves in the world, this is how our God lives into covenants. Day after day God finds ways to get closer to us, like a song you cannot forget, a thump thump beating out a rhythm, joining with other rhythms. To be in covenant, to live as covenant is to live as a part of God's heartbeat,
beating out justice
beating out freedom
beating out life

Dwelling with these biblical covenants has made me think about the other covenants we make to one another in this community, the covenants we make as a church -- as members of the body of Christ -- beginning with our baptismal vows and the commitments we make in our new member covenant. I wonder what it means for these covenants to be in us, to be written on our hearts so much so that God's kingdom is reflected in every breath we take, in every beat of our heart.

In this collective baptismal covenant, when we say, "We will resist the powers of the world which demean people and harm the earth," we are writing the vision of God's freedom on our hearts. This freedom like a people covered and carried up by the waters of God. This freedom that we carry forth as more freedom. This freedom is a calling for a jubilee as we write new ways of living on the heart of the world. Gratitude in place of debt. Liberation in place of servitude. Community in place of property. Care in place of profit. In this baptismal covenant I hear our church's mission statement -- another covenant we make -- our promise to "put our faith into action." This mission, our promise to the world to help shape the world for God's glory. In these covenants we are writing the vision of God's freedom on our hearts.

In this collective baptismal covenant, when we say, "fully ourselves in Christ," we are writing the shape of God's love on our hearts. This love an echo of God's renaming covenant rising up in our throats, the promise of being known and knowing others a kind of freedom. In this baptismal covenant I hear our commitment to be an Open and Affirming congregation, another covenant we have made with one another. This love a promise to wave the rainbow flag as God once did, a visible sign that freedom for one meant freedom for all. This love says, "In this place

we promise to be fully ourselves. Please be fully yourself too. In this place, your name, the name God changed for you, your name dripping with water and all that rises up from your name, will be affirmed. Will be celebrated. Will be a sign of God's promise of freedom." In this covenant, we are writing the shape of God's love on our hearts.

In this collective baptismal covenant, when we say, "As members of the church of Jesus Christ, we intend to grow in the Christian faith, joining in the dynamic movement of God's people...", we are writing the transformation of the world on our hearts. This transformation proclaims that if, "God is change, we are change too." This transformation our capacity to be moveable, to be a people stirred by the needs of the world, ready to create with God as God has faithfully created with us for so long. In this covenant, we are writing the transformation of the world on our hearts.

In this collective baptismal covenant, when we say, "serve this community and the world in Christ's name," we are writing the care of our community on our hearts. In this baptismal covenant, I hear our church's Safe Church Policy, another covenant we make to one another. This care a promise to serve the whole of our communal body by centering those most vulnerable in community. This care says, "Here your body will be respected, your boundaries will be honored. Here your voice will matter. Here we understand the shape of power, call power by name and call out power when it oversteps. Here we hold our conflicts openly, honestly, for the good of community." In this covenant, we are writing the care of our community on our hearts.

In this collective baptismal covenant, we say, "we will embody the work and word of Jesus Christ." How is the covenant that we make with our kin who sleep in their cars in the church's parking lot an embodiment of what God has written on our hearts? How can this covenant reflect God's promise to co-create a world of community over property and profit?

In this collective baptismal covenant, we say, "we will resist oppression and violence, and show love and justice." What covenant of resistance and love would we be promising if we put up a sign on the church that said, "Stop Asian Hate," or "Black Lives Matter," or "Immigrants Are Welcome Here." How would these signs

covenant to creating more freedom, more equity? How is this covenant God's heartbeat alive in the world?

"I will write my ways on their hearts." This is how God moves in the world, this is how our God lives into covenants. Day after day God finds ways to get closer to us, like a song you cannot forget, a thump thump beating out a rhythm, joining with other rhythms. To be in covenant, to live as covenant is to live as a part of God's heartbeat,

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