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“Do-Over” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (03/17/2024, Fifth Sunday in Lent)

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Let us pray.  
Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable and I cite, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.  
Amen.  
Who here is familiar with Grace Slick?  
Show of hands.  
Grace Slick, anyone know Grace Slick?  
There was a, that was tepid, but we'll see.  
You may know her better than you expect.  
She was the singer for a band called Jefferson Airplane, which was famous for a song about Alice in Wonderland and Psychedelics in Feed Your Head.  
I don't know if you've heard this, but it was the 60s, Haydashbury, San Francisco, Garrett was there.  
She then moved on to, the band changed its name from Jefferson Airplane to Jefferson Starship and then just dropped the Jefferson entirely to Starship.  
That's where some of the, the rest of you may have heard a song that she released and was very popular with Starship in the 80s called, which still gets a lot of play today.  
We built this city.  
We built this city on, please don't sing it.  
No, you could always, always sing it.  
I love it.  
It was the joy behind me.  
It was amazing.  
We built this city on, rock and roll, that's right, that's right.  
I bring that up because in that same part of the country, Northern California, there are people building a city right now, not on rock and roll, but on secrecy and tech dollars.

There have been a bunch of billionaires that have pooled their money together and equippedically named Secret Company and have bought 52,000 acres of rural land in Northern California, with the hopes of starting a new city because San Francisco prices are too high, urban planning is not great, they're just done with the whole thing so they say we want to do over a new city and they are getting it done if the lawsuits don't pan out. Now this thing of a do over, this is what we Americans do. Our whole country is a do over. That whole system of a dynastic, hereditary monarchy in Europe and nobles and aristocrats, we got rid of that whole thing, we're going to start a new country where everybody is equal mostly and this whole thing is a do over. We're still going to see how it works, you know, the Jerry's out, still a young country. But not only do we do this with institutions, nations, cities, we do this in our own lives, many people want a do over, midlife crises are famous do overs, sports cars and second homes and Harley-Davidson's all exist for do overs and people's lives. I find that people get to a place where to quote Adam Duritz of the Counting Cros in 1996, he said life has become all oysters with no pearl and when you have hit that state, all oysters and no pearl, people then begin to think about starting over and a do over. And that takes many different forms. Some people join the church, some people leave the church, some people start a new relationship, some people change careers, some people quiet, quit, whatever the thing may be, people do this do over. Sometimes it's not something you choose, but something happens to you, a do over that comes upon you from the outside, a loss or a reversal of some kind. In our passage from Jeremiah 31, it sounds like God is having a do over. It says, the days are surely coming, it says the Lord, when I, God, will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, the house of Judah, it will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors. Meaning there was this whole system for the Israelites, the people of God. So now I want to do a new system, I want to do over, is that what's happening and how does that work?

God changed his mind or what's going on.  
I want to talk about this, I want to talk about what it means.  
And with John 12, our gospel passage, see if we can find some help for  
folks who maybe  
want a change.  
I don't know if you want to change, but I don't know many people that  
want to change in  
life.  
And this is what we find here.  
So let us begin, Jeremiah, we have this story, God is telling people  
there was an old story,  
this old covenant and I'm doing a new covenant, now old covenant, what  
was it?  
Well it was what you've been hearing throughout the season of Lent,  
we've been reading the  
Ten Commandments as part of our service, you've been hearing this,  
these are, the old covenant  
is a list of demands, things you do, and quite simply put, do these  
things that I tell  
you to do, God says, and life will be great, and there's also a list  
of things to not do,  
and if you don't do those things, your life will be great.  
If you don't do the things you should do, and if you do do the things  
you shouldn't  
do, then your life will be not so great.  
That's the old covenant, quite simply put, it's a list of rules, it  
was written on stone  
tablets and then on scrolls, and it was a great plan, and it wasn't  
actually that hard,  
it wasn't like multivariable calculus, it wasn't like reading  
Vittgenstein or anything like  
that, it was pretty simple, it was sort of to sum up, don't be  
terrible, keep your  
hands to yourself, be kind, don't be greedy, the only issue was,  
people failed, and we heard  
that also in this passage in verse 32, he says, we had this old  
covenant, it was a covenant  
that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord, so talking  
about this covenant  
like a marriage relationship, and God says, there I was at home  
waiting for you, I'd prepared  
a nice dinner and you were around at the slippery minnow, nervous  
laughter, because to laugh  
you acknowledge that you know that there was a bar in Waco named the  
slippery minnow,  
the second best bar name in Waco, the best is the crying shame, but he  
says, we had  
this covenant, this marriage and you broke it, and that's what happens  
with external demands,  
with the list of rules, with these covenants, this happens throughout

the Bible, it happens  
throughout life, if you have ever been to a swimming pool and seen  
that list of demands  
by the pool, no running, no glass containers, much shower before  
entering pool, and that  
chief of commands, no horse play, it literally says no horse play, it  
might as well say  
and no shenanigans either, and Tom Foulery is right out, but it  
doesn't work, the reason  
I know it doesn't work is because they have lifeguards, they have  
people with whistles  
to blow when you are running or when you are horse playing or whatever  
it is, if the sign,  
if the external list could get it done, you wouldn't need the  
lifeguards, whenever there  
is a written external demand, the old covenant, the written rules seem  
to produce resistance  
and rebellion, studies have shown when there is no speed limit sign  
posted, people tend  
to drive slower, when there is a sign, people think I can go five  
over, I'm special, rules  
produce resistance, tax laws, cause people to look for loopholes, how  
can I get around  
it, and this is what happened with the old covenant, always, people  
wanted to find ways  
around it or just to resist it entirely, just put it out of their  
mind, and so God says  
I'm going to do a new thing, and this new covenant will not be another  
list of rules,  
it will be something where the law is now written on your hearts, it  
will be an internal  
thing to you, where you actually want to do the thing, you now want to  
love your neighbor,  
you now want to love God, you want to live a life that is fruitful and  
not because anybody  
is making you do it, because it is something you should do, but it  
actually comes in turn,  
I mean, wouldn't you love that, wouldn't you love to wake up in the  
morning and want  
to do the calisthenics and to eat the fiber and to read the Bible and  
be nice to the people  
who you live with and to be not anxious all the time, I mean, that'd  
be great, if it  
were just written on your hearts, you didn't do it because you had to,  
but you actually  
wanted to, and God says that's what He's going to do, He's going to  
write this on the heart,  
and how do you do that, how do you make, how do you make that happen,  
how do you get  
inside someone's heart and fix it, I've only seen it happen in two

ways and usually  
these things come together in people's lives, the reason somebody will  
make a change on  
the inside is because of suffering and love, when things get so bad  
that you can't bear  
continuing on the path you're on, that's when change begins to enter  
in, and often in that  
situation, when love arrives, especially when it feels undeserved,  
that's when change  
begins to happen, and many of the times that I've seen this happen,  
those two things come  
together, there's a suffering that has produced a need for change or  
desire for change and  
love within that situation, let's me give you an example, pore hamplot  
in the series called  
louder milk, which is getting a sort of new run because it's now free  
on streaming services  
that you pay a lot of money for. The person louder milk is played by  
Ron Livingston of  
office space fame, and Ron is playing somebody who is an addiction and  
sobriety counselor,  
and he hosts this recovery group in a Catholic church, and he is  
prevailed upon to go meet  
with the daughter of a woman, the mother says you need to meet with my  
daughter, she is  
kind of off the rails in deep in addiction, and I'd like you to go  
meet with her and see  
if you can fix her, if you can write these laws on her heart, because  
I've lectured her  
and I've tried to get her to change, and she won't change, so I'd like  
you to go and do  
it. So he goes, and what you find is she is a woman living in filth,  
in squalor, in  
pain, in suffering, and louder milk does what her own mother want to,  
which is to go  
to her where she actually is, and goes to her where she is at her  
worst, goes into the  
ditch where she is actually. And in that position, in that place where  
he shows up, he is able  
to then offer help, which is of a sacrificial nature to sort of give  
of himself in a way  
that astounds her that he would actually care, that he would see how  
she's living and  
see what she's sort of done, and yet in that place he wants to offer  
real help and grace.  
And it's not small scene, it's not hallmark card, it's very real, it's  
very gritty, but  
he's there for her. And that is the thing, I find when people are  
suffering, and when  
people are loved in that place, that begins to write the law on our

hearts, the lectures didn't work, the manipulation, and the guilt ribs didn't work, but showing up to someone who's suffering and providing undeserved love, that seems to be the thing. So, old covenant, list of rules didn't work, new covenant, what would make the law on our hearts be written there so it was implanted within us, suffering and love. And this is where we find Jesus Christ entering the picture. Now, there's a little mini Hebrew lesson you need here, bear with me. In Jeremiah 31, you didn't see the name of Jesus listed anywhere, but he's there, and he's there because of how a covenant is made. You heard red, I will make a new covenant, but the verb in Hebrew is not actually make, it's cut. Anytime you read in the Old Testament make a covenant, the actual verb in Hebrew is always cut, you don't make a covenant, you cut one, because a covenant is not just a promise to people make to each other, a covenant is always sealed with a sacrifice. This is the culture in which it all came up. And the idea was, if we're going to make a promise to each other, this sacrifice seals it because we're saying, in essence, in the symbolic language of the time, if I don't fulfill my end of this bargain, may this thing happen to me that is happening to the sacrificial animal. So sacrifice always involves the shedding of blood and this cutting of a covenant. So for God to say, I will cut a new covenant with my people that implies that there is a sacrifice. And this is where we see what Jesus Christ is doing in John 12, because he is speaking to the people between Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry in Jerusalem and his death on Good Friday. It's taking place in that week. And he's saying, I'm here to be that new covenant sacrifice for you. He says it when he talks about being lifted up, he's talking about the cross. And this may all be sort of cryptic and I get that, but it will become revealed as we walk through the next few weeks of Palm Sunday and Holy Week in Easter. But my point to you is that Jesus Christ is the one who comes to cut this new covenant and he himself is the one that offers himself to be this place where our suffering and God's suffering meet. Our great need for love and God's unconditional love come together in the wounds of Christ.

And you heard it in the him at the beginning, lift high the cross and then the gradual hymn, and I survey the wondrous cross where it did ever such love and sorrow meet or thorns composed of Richard Crown. This is the kind of thing that the new covenant is cut in Christ's own sacrifice.

Now, I'm going to say this and I'll land the plane. Many people don't like this.

Emmanuel Kant hated it, Nietzsche hated it, and many sophisticated urban people today hate this.

If you're educated in light, and this is gory, primitive, barbaric stuff,

what are you talking about, blood, sacrifice, and atonement and all that,

we're sophisticated people today, right? We don't need this kind of stuff.

What is this sort of primitive stuff you're bringing here?

Exactly.

We sometimes don't like this idea of sacrifice.

It seems outdated and weird, some sort of theological construct that one would be sacrificed for

the good of another. We don't like it until when we do.

You have only to look at Iron Man, sacrificing himself, Robert Downey Jr.

for the others. You only have to go back to Spock and the wrath of Kant to look at someone

sacrificing himself for others. It seems that there is this thing in our literature and our culture

and movies is deeply ingrained thing, and I'll tell you, it gets really real when you meet people

who actually have a need for grace, mercy, forgiveness. When people really want that existential

cleansing of their soul, the removal of burdens that they can no longer carry, I was talking to

some friends recently about an article about prison chaplaincy, people that do ministry in prisons,

and these ministers were saying often in their suburban educated congregations,

these ideas about atonement and sacrifice are seen as old timey sort of things that we don't

really need today. But he said, you know, the most amazing thing when I go into the prisons,

it's all the people want to talk about. People who have real need for forgiveness,

this is not an abstraction, there's a real need for someone to be the substitute, someone to take

my sins upon them and to put them away forever. And when you are someone who has come to that place,

as I said, of great suffering and a great need for love, then this message of a Savior who cuts

in himself the new covenant, this becomes something that you are interested in, that you want to talk more about, that you want to hear more about. And if that is you on any level, if you are someone who'd like a change, if you're someone who would like the law to be written on the heart, if you'd like to have life be different, this means you are in the right place because this is exactly what Jesus has come to do. And this table to which we will go and the meal that we're about to eat is about reminding you of that again. And as you eat this bread, as you drink this one, this is Christ for you. I mean, how primitive and barbaric to eat some bread and drink some wine, some sort of religious ceremony. What is this? Is there going to be a drum circle afterwards? But isn't the thing, symbols are the most real and meaningful, powerful thing there is. Many of you wear one on your finger, and that's real and powerful. Many of you stare at that cross, and that's real and powerful. Many of your children hold an animal, and that is a symbol. What is it? It's stuffing and fur, but it's real and powerful. This one, Christ, is the one who is this sacrifice in whom the new covenant is cut. In your place of suffering, you find love, in your place of need, you find grace. And the secret is, it was never a do-over. This was the plan from the very beginning. Christ was crucified from the foundations of the world as revelation. But what that means is that at the heart of the universe, at the heart of God, the beating of that heart is love for you. Amen.