



Week five
Transforming
Hope

Transforming Life

a **Lent Course** for 2012

produced by the Diocese of St Albans

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The Bible Reading

Lent 5

Jeremiah 31.31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It 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. ³³But 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. ³⁴No 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.’

You may prefer to save paper by only reproducing pages 2 & 3 and using bibles to read the passage.

Jeremiah 31.31-34

Some Reflections

The prophecy of Jeremiah was composed some 2,600 years ago. The world then was unimaginably different from our world today. And yet Jeremiah's desire to know God, and Jeremiah's need to live in God's way, is absolutely identical with our desire and our need.

A couple of weeks ago we were reflecting on God's rule of living, as it was crystallised for the people of the Exodus by the Ten Commandments. It's a rule or rhythm of living which brings freedom and joy. But as Jeremiah recognised, on its own it is not sufficient. We need more, because a law which is outside us can take us only so far.

So Jeremiah longs for, and speaks of, a "new covenant". This echoes forward in time to the teaching and presence of Jesus Christ. "The New Covenant" is exactly the phrase the early church used to describe what we now call "The New Testament". Jeremiah's covenant is "new" because it springs up from God's life within us - from the God who is "closer to us than we are to ourselves" (St Augustine). As we enter more deeply into relationship with this true God, any sense of reluctant obedience falls away, and the desire to transform our community becomes our heart's desire.

The bubbling and overwhelming joy of God's saints is their most compelling trait. Think of Desmond Tutu, or of Mother Teresa, and

despite their total commitment to the poor and to all victims of injustice, you will think of their laughter first. It is only possible to combine a passion for transformation with joyous hope if the wellspring comes from within.

And Jeremiah has more to say. A community of the heart is a community of equals, living in mutual confidence and mutual forgiveness. The picture he paints is not one of grumpily independent people - "I don't need anyone to tell me what to do and what to think". It is a picture of secure individuals in community, every one of whom knows that they are fully loved by God. Such a community is able to teach and to learn together.

The Church at its best is a community like that. Of course we very often fall short of this vision of courageous and courteous interdependence. The frightened and fallen self seeks either to become a slave and to follow others as if they were God, or to stand in solidarity with no one at all, criticising everyone and loving no one.

Hope for a transformed community flows from this inner security and confidence in the God who is close to us. In the strength of that covenant people have changed the world. And so can we.

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Questions for Discussion

How do we as a group, or as a congregation, measure up to Jeremiah's vision of a new-covenant community?

How could we share this way of living with our wider community so as to transform it into the image of God's Kingdom?

"The bubbling and overwhelming joy of God's saints" - is that a good description of the people of God where we are? If it is, how can we let that joy overflow to our neighbourhood? If not, what can we do about that?

Ideas for Action

Each person to jot down

- ◆ One thing that has struck me
- ◆ What one thing am I going to do?
- ◆ What one thing will I pray about this week?



Prayer

Spend some time initially in corporate silent prayer.

- Reflect on the transformation which God brings.
- Pray for communities around you and further away.
- Thank God for every sign of hope and transformation.
- Seek to hear what the Spirit might be saying to you about how you can be part of God's transforming work.

Close

Finish by saying this prayer and then the Living God's Love prayer together:

Teach us, Lord, to recognise your voice within us.
Not to mistake it for our own desires;
not to ignore you when you guide us.
Teach us to learn from others,
and to share with them the wisdom you give.
We make this prayer
through Jesus our living Saviour. Amen.



Living God, draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
to live your love
with generosity and joy,
imagination and courage;
for the sake of your world
and in the name of Jesus. Amen.