

Romans 3:19-28 10.28.21 Reformation Pastor Bill Uetricht

I must admit that whiners get on my nerves. People who whine just about every little thing are an irritant to me. So, I suspect that I am going to get on my nerves today. I am going to whine. Today represents the 36<sup>th</sup> time that I have preached on Reformation weekend, and each time I have been given the same Biblical texts. Ho hum! I want something new. I am tired of the same old same old. Reformation at its core seems to be about newness, and this old preacher gets nothing new. Ho hum!

Ho hum! Another experience with Jeremiah and Jeremiah's God who is promising to make a new covenant with the whole house of Israel, not just one part of it, but with the whole nation, the southern part *and* the northern part. By the way, the northern part, Israel, didn't even exist when Jeremiah spoke his words. Not only do we have to hear these words again, but they seem out of touch with reality. Ho hum!

And another experience with Paul and Paul's God who does a new thing in Jesus Christ, gives people a right relationship with God, a relationship that is not based on anything they do, but simply on trusting what God does. Ho hum! This is such Lutheran talk. I and other preachers like me have been saying this forever. I want something new to say! Ho hum!

And ho hum, another experience with John and John's Jesus who says there is a new thing in Jesus, freedom from bondage, the kind of bondage that all those who sin know. Again, I've heard this all before. Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! It's the Lutheran mantra. Ho hum!

Now, get a grip, Bill! You want something new? Well, A new covenant, a new relationship, a new freedom. How much more "new" can you want? But here's the problem. You and I live in a culture in which newness is generally associated with novelty—the latest toy, the most recently developed gadget, amazing and fresh technology. The

Apple company has made a mint on the reality that you and I often fall at the feet of novelty. Their marketing schemes include big release days for their latest phones. And we have bought into their schemes. We have stood in lines or sat next to our computers, waiting for the moment when we can buy the latest.

But how new really is the latest? And how lasting is the latest? Every new piece of technology that we get these days seems to last fewer days than did the previous latest and greatest. Planned obsolescence, culture observers call it. Our landfills are overwhelmed with televisions, computers, printers that we once thought were amazingly new. Now, they are amazingly old. Sometimes the latest and greatest is nothing but the old disguised in fresh garb.

“I want something new” may mean simply that I want something novel. Newness and novelty are not the same thing. Now, I think I am right in desiring the new. The spirit of the Reformation is clearly newness. Martin Luther was profoundly disturbed by the oldness of the church that he was a part of. His work took the church to an entirely new place. Luther, broken as he was, was one of the most transformative characters in the history of the world. The world was never the same because of his work of newness.

But that newness he brought came about because of his confrontation with old texts, what for me sometimes feels like the same old same old. What we have from the Bible today is not novel, but it is that which truly can bring about real, authentic newness.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.” The days are surely coming when *God* will make a new covenant. The truly new comes from something larger than us. It generally does not come from Republicans or Democrats, Socialists or Capitalists, contemporary or traditional musicians. The truly new is a breath of fresh air from the Spirit of God.

And the truly new does the remarkable thing of uniting people, the north and the south, Israel and Judah. People who have been torn apart by the whims of history and by years of hatred are brought together by the promise of God, the new thing that God is about. There is nothing older, more ho-hum than separation, division, hearts that are turned away from love and compassion. The truly new appears on the scene when people are brought together, when old grudges are eliminated, when new possibilities are anticipated, when we live in light of something bigger than the ravages of the past, “when God forgives their iniquities and remembers their sin no more.”

The truly *same old same old* looks like people who can never move beyond what the past dished up. If you want more of the same old same old, continue to live in the bitterness and the anger that you’ve been living in. You’ll get more of what you’ve already got! Now truthfully, I don’t expect you to be like God and “never remember their sin anymore.” I am not sure that we can forget. Perhaps that is not humanly possible. But if we want to stay stuck, lose ourselves in the quicksand of the ho-hum, of more of the same, then we ought to resist the newness of forgiveness. Now, I am not suggesting that this forgiveness stuff comes easy. It does not. Sometimes it might be a life-long journey. But true newness doesn’t happen when we are content in being buried within the ravages of the past. And in the God met in the old, old scriptures, the same old same old, we discover one who is busy bringing forgiveness, life and world-changing forgiveness.

And that forgiveness is not earned or achieved. Jeremiah doesn’t say that God will forgive when Israel gets its act together or when they have groveled enough. No, God’s new covenant comes as sheer gift. And that is what Paul is saying in that old scripture from Romans: “For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; [all] are now justified by his grace as a gift.”

Paul's big issue in the early part of Romans was to figure out how people who were not thought to be a part of God's covenant, the Gentiles, could become a part of it. And his conclusion is that they can become a part of the club in the same way that Jews do, through faith, through simple trusting in God's gift that comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ and his cross. God is up to something radically new thing in Jesus Christ, Paul would have us know, while pointing out that this new thing is in connected to the old, "attested to by the law and the prophets." This new thing makes which has deep roots makes it crystal clear that we are justified, made right with God, by God's grace, and not by what Paul calls the "works of the law."

You want to hear something old, something truly ho-hum. You are justified by what you do. You are justified by your clean house, your job, your technology, your cars, your nationality, your ethnic background, your service in the military, your service in the church, your exercise program, your diet, your perfect family, your political platform, your right religion. That's old stuff that brings death and disunity. Even when that old stuff is dressed in new garb, it's still old stuff.

But God is up to the truly new. God gifts you with righteousness. God *gives* you worth. *God* justifies your life. You want something new? Well, here it is. Here is the gift that places you alongside every other human being. Here is the gift that keeps you from boasting, the gift that enables you to be a part of true community. Here is the gift that makes life not burden, but joy. Here is the gift that sets you free.

"Then Jesus said to the Judeans who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and the truth will make you free.'" You know what's really old, what really is ho-hum? Bondage! Every kind of bondage—political, physical, mental, or spiritual. And what's really older than old is our lack of awareness of

our bondage. (Just talk to family members of the addicted to know this is true.) Who us addicted? Who us in bondage? We are Americans. We are from the right family. We take the right supplements, do all the right things. “We are children of Abraham; we’ve never been slaves to anyone.” Ya, right!

“Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” If you sin, you must have to sin. You are a slave to it. Quit lying to yourself, to your family, Quit lying about your country, life and the world. You don’t need to. Do the truly new thing. Tell the truth. Meet the truth. In the gospel of John, the truth is a person. His name is Jesus. In him there is freedom, freedom from bondage, freedom to face the past, freedom to move beyond the past’s control. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. And when you have freedom, you will have that which is truly new.

I don’t feel like whining anymore. Whining is so...yesterday, so ho-hum, so much a part of the same old same old. God is up to something new, brand new. And amazingly, that newness can come us to through the phenomenally old, the frequently repeated. I don’t want to whine. I want to sing, to rejoice, to participate in the newness that God is bringing about.