

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.

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I often read magazines back to front – I'm not sure why, but I do.

Some folks read the last chapter of a mystery novel so that they know the end before they even know the plot.

Today, I will start this sermon with the end of the story by wondering what it means to be a husband.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, St. Paul gives this description.

... husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.²⁸ ... husbands love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself.²⁹ No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church.³⁰ And we are members of his body.

To be husband is to seek the welfare of wife, even to the point of dying for her.

To be husband is to seek to make wife holy, beautiful, and pure.

To be husband is to care for her physical wellbeing as well as her spiritual life.

The Lord God of Israel has a covenant relationship with his people like the intimacy of marriage

– I will be their God and they shall be my people.

- I will be their husband and they shall be my wife.
- I love my people!
- I care for my people,
- give my life for them,
- speak truth to them to make them holy and pure.

But in spite of all that the Lord God invests in this relationship with his people, they are unfaithful –we are unfaithful:

- Cheating on God over and over,
- Seeking our life and happiness in false gods,
- idols who cannot be intimate with us at all.

The Lord God has every reason to give up on us,

to let us go and have It our way,

To shake the dust off his feet and find another people to love.

But God doesn't.

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The country singer Waylon Jennings was a hard-living man – an outlaw.

Like many musicians of the 1970s, He was addicted to drugs and drink, and his life got out of control.

But his wife of 33 years, , Jessi Colter, would not leave him.

She kept the covenant of marriage in which she promised to be faithful for better or worse, in sickness and in health, until death parted them.

And God would not give up on his people, either.

Instead, our dear Lord draws even closer to us.

I will make a new covenant with my people, says the Lord.

A new covenant restores the holy intimacy between the Lord and his people

This covenant destroys the blemishes of sin and rebellion against God's word.

This new covenant is not given on stone tablets that can be thrown down and broken,

or defaced on courthouse lawns,

or torn down altogether.

This covenant is etched onto human hearts.

In other words, God makes his people fall in love with him all over again.

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This new covenant begins in Roman-occupied Judea, around the year 6 BC.

In Bethlehem, a baby cries.

In the Jerusalem temple, two old people rejoice to cuddle this child, the salvation of the world.

The powers of evil see this boy and are terrified.

This Son of God who makes the bride beautiful and holy

- heals the sick,
- makes the lame to walk,

- the blind to see,
- and the dead to live.

Multitudes fall in love with him as he eats with them.

And then – as a good husband lovingly protects his bride from the ravages of sorrow and woe, the scars of abuse and betrayal,

– to present her as holy and unblemished before God,

This God-come-close gives his own life for her.

Jesus is the new covenant of God that is written on our hearts by love itself.

Who can look upon Jesus

- –anguished, tortured,
- hanging on the cross,
- with the cleansing words of forgiveness on his lips as he breathes his last
- – **and not fall head over heels in love?**

Jesus is God's new covenant – or new testament, as it is sometimes called.

Jesus allows himself to be known – by our five senses, but also in the depths of our being.

This new covenant is not only new

because it comes in human flesh and blood for us,

but also because our wrinkles and blemishes

– the acne of sin and evil in our lives

– **are completely removed and replaced with perfect beauty by his resurrection to new life.**

Now intimacy with God depends entirely on God being good to us

– the goodness of Jesus the Christ.

Waylon Jennings kicked the drug habit cold turkey, out in the desert, enduring agonizing detox of his own determination.

But he freely admits that he could not have done it without Jessi being by his side.

The covenant of marriage “saved” that outlaw.

The covenant of new life in Jesus Christ saves us outlaws.

Jesus has gone cold turkey for us to detox us from our sin.

And he is risen from death

to make his pure and eternal Spirit course through our veins, so that we live his life now.

He feeds us with his own body and blood

so that we have his life of mercy and grace to live today.

Don't you just love this Savior?!

Who else but God would go to such great lengths for us?

So let us dress our lives each morning with the bridal gown of Christ's love, given to us in Baptism.

Let us put on the adornments of his compassion and mercy.

**Let us be the beautiful bride that Jesus gave his life for
– and rejoice in the loving intimacy of God's gracious new covenant.**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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