3-18-18 RR: Psalm 51: 1-12

Jeremiah 31: 3-34 Hebrews 5: 5-10 John 12: 20- 33

**SERMON**

**A NEW COVENANT**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

**Summary: If it is to be not my mind or life but Christ in me, what am I but an empty tomb from which Jesus comes to go out into all the world?**

Before the passage where Paul wrote about Jesus succeeding Melchizedek, he remarks that no one chooses the office of High Priest by an act of will; rather, this is given by God. Then, while everyone is scratching their heads trying to remember Melchizedek, Paul goes on to speak of Jesus’ prayers and devotion. He says that, even though he was God’s Son, Jesus learned through his suffering to be obedient to God.

For once, I stopped worrying about Melchizedek and considered Jesus. I think of Him as born obedient, born perfect. Yet to be human, Jesus had to experience learning and growing. It pushes my faith to hear: “When he was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.” Jesus matured as he asked questions at age 12 in the Temple, when he spoke to the woman at the well, when he heard a Samaritan mother seeking healing for her daughter and comparing herself to a dog begging for scraps. Finally, Jesus fully matured as he suffered on the Cross.

This is summarized when Jesus prays, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” To use a parable, as Jesus always did, I can prepare a perfect apple pie, but it won’t be perfect until it is baked. God gets all the ingredients together for us to be made in the divine image, but we keep choosing our own agendas, ingredients, and understandings. As the Psalm implies, these choices separate us from God from the time of our birth. We need a new heart and spirit, God’s heart and spirit, within us.

Jim made a remarkable analogy in Bible Study the Sunday before last. We were studying the emotions of Christ and how human they were. Gwen had asked the awesome question, “How do you think Jesus felt about being divine?” My mind was a blank, I confess and even Don was looking to Jim.

Then, Jim totally floored me. He said, “Jesus probably felt something like Sheryl did approaching her transition.” Wow, I never considered that. Jesus understands me at my most personal level. He was one thing, human, and yet called to become something other, divine. Jesus must have lived with a kind of spiritual dysphoria. I, at least, had other women for role models. Jesus had only God. But, because Jesus was faithful, all of us now have a role model of what it is to live as we are intended: in the image of God.

Becoming the image of God, like becoming a high priest, is not something we can do for ourselves. That’s why immersion baptism represents both death and rebirth. Salvation, when we at least grow into it, completes our lives as the Cross completes Jesus: by having God’s will, not our own in charge. I think this is what it was Paul was getting at when he says that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ Jesus in him. The Pascal mystery, the mystery of the Cross, is that it was not just Jesus on the Cross for me, but God.

For Jesus, the pie is baked. On the Cross, “It is finished,” Jesus says, and then he hands his life to God – and our lives with him. He is perfected. My own pie isn’t cooked yet. I’m justified by faith in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit works in me to sanctify what is justified. So far, as you all know, I am only half-baked.

Too often, I display my will and not God. When the baking is over, I won’t have to learn and teach about God. Wherever I am, there will be God and Christ. So it is for saints who have gone before us. So it will be for me, for you, and for our children’s children until God is done. So, let’s depart to do his will, for what are we but empty tombs from which Jesus must leave to go out into all the world?