

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

This past week, the city of Edmonton was bracing for some significant disruptions and shutdowns due to a planned strike by 6,000 public service workers. If the strike had occurred, it would have resulted in recreation centres being closed; a limit to the 311 service offered by the city; delays in issuing of building permits and inspections; and many other things, such as the closure of public libraries. Fortunately for the people of Edmonton, a tentative agreement with unionized workers was set in place, thus averting a major strike that would have sent waves of closures and restrictions throughout Edmonton.

Of course, tentative agreements mean that all the details are not yet in place, so management and union officials will sit down and take those proposals and fashion them into a contract that will be signed and ratified by both sides, establishing how their relationship will exist—at least until the contracts expire.

We live in a world of deal-making. “Let’s Make a Deal” is not just a game show—it is a way of life in business, in government, and even in inter-personal relationships. Offer and counter-offer are set forth; promises and guarantees are made; and finally agreement is reached that can affect mighty corporations in their mergers; that determine the relationship between you and the store where you buy your washer and dryer; or which govern the simple relationship between you and your teens in terms of the use of the car or their evening curfew time. Let’s face it: everyone is always on the lookout for the best deal they can get.

In our text today, God speaks to us of the deal of a lifetime. *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares 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.* God’s covenant with us is better than any collective bargaining agreement; it is greater than any offer by anyone, anywhere. It is, if you will, the deal of a lifetime, not only because it is the best offer that has ever existed, but because the covenant that God makes with us is the offer and assurance of life itself.

God gives us the deal of a lifetime. He makes a new covenant with us. A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more people that lasts forever. The terms were clearly understood and were not to be broken. The Old Testament idea of covenant was expressed as “cutting a covenant”. Typically, the two parties in the agreement would solemnize their agreement by passing between the pieces of slaughtered animals, sacrificed for this purpose. As they walked, they would take an oath: “May it be so done to me if I do not keep my oath and pledge”. How different that is in comparison to the typical deals or agreements that we are accustomed to in the world today. For one thing, the typical agreement or deal today is not as honoured nor as clear-cut as it was in biblical times. Contracts are often broken; warranties are violated as much as kept; agreements are forgotten or ignored.

When we look at the covenants between God and His people, we see that while God always kept His part of the covenant, the people often violated the covenant. God was their God, but they often forgot that they were His people. At times they chased after the false gods and idols of their pagan neighbours, much as we, too, forget God and get too caught up in the things of the world. We know what God wants of us; His word and commandments make that very plain. And yet we choose to go a different way. We break the covenant, even though God is always faithful to us. And since we do break the covenant, God would have every right to punish us because of our attitude towards Him and His covenant with us.

But that is why the words of our text today really are the deal of a lifetime. While God has the right to punish us for breaking His covenant, He chooses instead to make a new covenant with us. In His great love for us, God offers us life in all its fullness. Look at all that God promises to us. First of all, He says: ***I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*** For the people of Israel, this promise assured them that God was with them, that He was their king. The same is true for us. God is the King of Kings. He governs all things for the good of His people. That is why the psalmist says, ***“Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!”*** (Psalm 144:15, ESV) Bette Midler once had a song speaking of God watching us from a distance. But the truth is, God has a different agreement with us. He is our God. He promises us that He will be with us, to watch over us in every moment of our lives. He says that He keeps track of the very hairs on our head. And that surely means that He knows all the other things that affect us day by day, too. He is the one who knows how the inflation of this world affects our life. He is the one who knows how that growing tumour troubles our hearts. He is the one who understands the difficulties we are having coping with all the stress of life in this world. He is our God, and so He says to us: ***“and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”*** (Psalm 50:15, ESV) How blessed we are to know that we have the help, the protection and the guidance of the Almighty Lord of all at work for our good day by day. There is not one thing that you and I have to face alone, because no matter what, our God will be with us to see us through.

God also promises: ***“they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”***. God has made Himself known so that we may truly know Him! He sends His Spirit to help us know and believe in Him. There is an intimacy that God wants to have with us. He doesn't want us to see Him only as a great and powerful king, but as St. Paul reminds us, ***“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*** (Romans 8:14-15, ESV) When you and I come to God we are dealing not with a distant king, not with a major corporation, who sees us only as a number, but we deal with our Father, the Father who reveals Himself to us as a God of love and mercy.

But best of all, God says in His covenant: ***“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*** When it comes right down to it, this is the real wonder of this deal of a lifetime. By our actions, our words, and yes, even our thoughts, we continually break the covenant God would have with us. If we had to walk among the pieces of an animal lying on the ground and say, “May God do this to me if I should break my covenant with Him”, then what would become of us? We would be destroyed. But God has cut His covenant with us. He has sealed it in blood, the blood of Christ. In our dear Saviour, God Himself has taken the punishment we deserve. Jesus is the one who suffers for our covenant violations. He is the one who dies, even though He doesn't deserve the least of this pain. He is the faithful High Priest, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice as He goes to the cross for me and for you that God may redeem and restore us as His children. He does it in spite of the fact that we don't deserve in any way, shape or form all the kindness, love and mercy which God showers upon us day by day. In the power of the new covenant, that Saviour rises again, to give the full blessings of life to His people, to bring us at last to the wonderful glory of life in heaven, where we will really know God as He knows us, where we will see just how blessed we are because God has made us His through the everlasting covenant He has established in Christ.

Yes, this is the deal of a lifetime. God offers us everything—life, forgiveness and salvation. He gives us the fulness of His blessings, without cost, without obligation, simply because of His love for you and for all. God made that covenant with you at your baptism. There, He declared “I will be your God and Father, and you will be my child. I will bless you, forgive you and lead you through the uncertainty of this world. I will be with you wherever you go, and will bring you at last to the safety and glory of my eternal home. I will never forget my promises to you, and I will never go back on my word.” How blessed we are, to have such a God! In a world where people are always looking for a better deal, we have the best deal of all. God is our God. He forgives us and gives us faith to believe in Him and His promises. And He will give us the fulness of life with Him. That, my friends is the best deal of all. And you have His promise on that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.