

*Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Luke: 1:30-33*

*Subject: God's Covenant With David*

*Theme: What's New?*

Reformation Sunday; Oct. 25, 2020; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Happy Anniversary, church! This week was the Fall convocation in the Grand Canyon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In years past it's been a time for local pastors, deacons, and synod staff and council to get together to do some continuing education and get updates about serving in this church together. This year is not like years past of course, so we were online from 9am-5pm. That's a long Zoom meeting. But we got to hear from Rev. Mark Allan Powell, a great New Testament scholar, author and professor, along with Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, where she's is the Bandy Professor of Preaching. She gave great insight as she led a conversation on what it takes to proclaim God's word, and the privilege of preaching. Especially as we face so much uncertainty, loss, and upheaval, and we long for a 'new normal' - Dr. Brown encouraged us to look instead for 'God's next.'

As we celebrate the anniversary of this congregation today, we can wonder about that together. *What's new?* I think of 'God's next' as the new thing that God is doing. We're growing into it, and the growing pains are rough at times. We're looking for something new, while we remember all that has happened in the past.

This is also the day we remember the Reformation - over 500 years ago - a time of re-centering of God's Word for God's people. *More* than a revolution, it was a time of revival and rediscovery of the power of the Word in the hands of people of faith. To grow

in faith and understanding, and become new, they needed help - their Bibles had been in Latin for years, and outside of the universities and churches, no one could read it. They needed faithful preachers to interpret the Word and connect it to their lives, to teach them, and lead them. We need that too. Most of us have the privilege of being able to read our Bibles for ourselves. We get to read it at our house before bedtime. We can read it for ourselves in daily devotions, or in emails, or even by listening to podcasts, or watching online videos. I took it upon myself to read the four gospels back in September. (Confession: I got a little bit behind. I'm still working through it - I'm almost there!) As I read these familiar texts, there are parts that I feel like I'm experiencing in new ways, along with others that give me comfort to read again and again.

For King David, Nathan was the preacher and a prophet, who interpreted the Word and spoke for God. They had just settled into Jerusalem, after David's homecoming, when he danced in front of the ark of the covenant in praise and worship. (Ew, David!) After settling in, the King seems to realize that this box is just not good enough for God, and wants to do something - to build something new for God. Theologian Sarah Koenig from Seattle Pacific University question what David thought he was doing in offering to build god a house. Was he trying to give thanks for all that the Lord had done in the past? Was it a great effort to do more so that God would do something more for him? Could it be to show neighboring countries that Israel was God's chosen people? Or maybe he felt guilty that the King had it so good. The King's house is special - it's strong, it's solid, made out of cedar wood and stone, to last a long time. Shouldn't God have a house like that? Makes sense. So Nathan begins by telling

the king to 'do all that you have in mind.' God has given David the throne, protected Israel, delivered them from enemies, and brought them into the new land. It sure seems like whatever David does, pleases God. But later, Nathan hears another Word from God, and has the privilege to preach it to the King. God never asked for a house - God chose to move among the people, and that it would be David's son Solomon, who would build a house - a temple for God. But God would do even more - God was going to make David a house - meaning a dynasty - and that his descendants would lead God's people forever. This new thing God is doing is even beyond what David could have expected, more than he deserved, or asked for.

This promise is new - and David did nothing to deserve it. he didn't have to say the right prayer, make the right sacrifice, pay the right amount of money, or be particularly talented, even though he had some pretty smooth dance moves.

It's good to look back and remember. When someone dies, we remember them, all the good times in our lives together, and the ways they made a difference for us. We can look back at the days when we were younger and experienced the highs and lows of life, and see how they formed us to be who we are now. We can look back at our history to learn the lessons of the past so that we can grow as people, as a community, and as a nation. but if we only hang on to what has come before, we may miss out on the new thing God will do, that is beyond our imagination, more than our expectation, and even better than we deserve.

Could the ones who built this church so long ago imagine that we would worship from our living rooms and kitchens, in our pajamas (or less), ordering food from our phones, and be connected across the world the way we are today? Could that their

children and grandchildren would be going to school from home connected to machines all day? Would they even imagine that we would be facing economic shut downs, fires, storms, racial tensions, and a global pandemic?

This year, we've been pushed out of comfort zones technologically, economically, socially, and politically. Maybe 8 hour Zoom meetings are not the best thing to come out of 2020. But maybe there is something new - something that God is working on and working through that is changing us for the better. Have you been more intentional about checking in on neighbors and connecting with people who are isolated? Have you been more focused on home or work, or health and wellness? Have you paid more attention to prayer, study of scripture? worship? giving? What's new for you? God is still working. The Word is still alive and active.

This Word led the people of this church over the decades to welcome strangers and refugees, to feed people, to build not just a house but a home for those who felt disconnected, isolated or alone. We walk in their footsteps. They heard that Word of grace and walked humbly here in the heart of the city and we still do the same. Today, we hold those same core values of welcome, faith, and service. We are the same and yet something new.

God likes to remember too. God looks back and reminds David of the times God has been present, like when God was with Moses leading the people out of Egypt. And when the Lord moved with the people through the wilderness, and raised up leaders for the people. And like that time when God called Jesse's son out of a pasture with some smelly sheep to become King of all Israel. David didn't do any of that. And yet, God was

willing to make an eternal promise, for the sake of the people, for David's family, and for the world.

This promise to David becomes for us, the promise of the One who saves us, not because of anything we have done to earn such great love and mercy, but because God is good. God chooses to give us more than we can imagine, to do the thing we cannot even begin to ask for, because we don't know we need it. God sends us another kind of shepherd, who is God in the flesh, to do something *totally* new, to give us real life. Jesus' death on the cross makes *us* a house bigger than we could envision, and gives us a future, and a life worth living.

What's new may not yet be revealed to us. By our nature, we most often want what we know, that thing that used to be, what's comfortable and easy. God knows we need not a new normal, but whatever is next, and we will not face it alone. God walks ahead of us, with us, and behind us, forming us for what's new. We long for control and vision to see it, so we suffer. But as God's people in this place, the best we can do is be faithful, to be centered and to stand in the Word, to hear it proclaimed, to have eyes and ears, arms, and hearts open for the next thing God will do, and know that whatever it is God's Word will lead us through.

Amen.