

A city in trouble. With the nations raging and the kingdoms shaking and the earth moving all around. That was Jeremiah's somber viewpoint: A large portion of his people marched away into exile, His home city Jerusalem having been sieged and destroyed---*think of the images we've seen of Raqqa or Mosul or Aleppo*--The earth around Jeremiah had moved, the mountains of his homeland shaken in the depths of the sea.

And yet, amidst this, the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah with a powerful message of hope: "The days are surely coming," says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant*" with my people. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." Life all around seemed one way, "But now," God said to Jeremiah, "I will make my people a promise they can feel it in their guts: I will be God for them, and they will belong to me." "People may not have known me before," says the Lord, "but now, they shall all know me in the deepest core of their being."

A community in trouble. With division fracturing it apart. The Jewish-descended followers of Jesus thought all should follow the law of Moses to be in proper relationship with God. Yet the Gentile, or non-Jewish descended Christians, hardly knew anything about these religious rituals, let alone felt it necessary to follow them. The community in Rome was on shaking, trembling ground over this legal question.

Paul had quite a conflict on his hands: a seemingly intractable divide. The circumstance was not unlike the disagreements that polarize our modern body-politic and the Body of Christ: to follow the centuries-old status quo; or to recognize that something new is afoot.

“But now,” Paul boldly wrote the Romans, “But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed.” But now, the righteousness of God is found in Jesus Christ.

Before there were Jews and Gentiles, the law-abiding and the law-less, But now, “There is no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But now, “apart from the works prescribed by the law” “we are justified by God’s grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

A church in trouble. Faithful believers fearing for their salvation. The waters of baptism raging and foaming with indulgences to pay for one’s forgiveness and salvation. The mountains of Christ’s church trembling from the abuse of the sacraments.

Martin Luther certainly saw the church of his day marching away into a sort of exile. He saw the damage wrought by the division between the church of his day and the lives of the people, and devastation of the church contorting the gospel of Jesus Christ, and conning the people it was called into being to serve.

Luther too knew the deep personal anxiety that comes from a legalistic system of working for one’s salvation. Luther was personally acquainted with the perpetual unease that accompanies rewards-based righteousness. He was well acquainted with the fear that grows inside when one is told to perform prescribed rituals to earn God’s love.

“But now” he read from Saint Paul. But now, we are justified by God’s grace *as a gift!* With these words of scripture, Luther read and believed and confessed that he was no longer captive to sin, but now, eternally, the recipient of God’s grace. Before Luther had punished himself in a quest for religious perfection, but now, he was free FROM the legalistic system of salvation. but now, he was free TO serve God and neighbors with joy and gratitude.

But now, he and the Reformers said through their writings, “It is taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace for Christ’s sake, through faith.” (AC 4)

We still have a world where the nations rage, and the kingdoms shake and lives melt away from disease, disability, and death.

We still live in a world full of conflict and division, where public leaders argue about whom to include and how and whose culture and common life has polarized into opposing ideological positions.

We still inhabit a world where people’s hearts quake from judgment, where many people abandon God altogether, where the religious people struggle to find God in the midst of our complex lives.

But Now. It's been for well more than 500 years that God has been speaking words of "But Now" ... But now, today, is the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. And today, we receive these bolds words of "But now" again, because they still describe who we are and whose we are and how we are that: we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God, yes, **but now,** because of Christ, we are also God's own, beloved people who **now and daily** receive God's love and salvation solely through Jesus Christ.

"But Now," God says. "But Now," there is--*as there has always been*-- Jesus Christ.

And but Now, in Christ, there is a living, trustworthy source of security in our midst.

But Now, we are justified for Christ's sake alone by grace alone through faith alone.

But Now, Jesus, the Lord of Hosts, the Son of God, is literally, in our household with us, and Son has a place there forever.

And but now, we have --*as we have always had*-- the Truth of Jesus Christ
And it is the Truth that makes us free.

And being free, we become the people of the "But Now," which is for Right Now. Because whatever devastation is in our life today, wherever there is conflict and division now, whatever we are striving and earning and

stressing to obtain, God is bringing the true, bold, life-changing “But Now” of Jesus Christ to us right now.

To close with the words of our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, * “We are not called to be the church of the past nor the church of some distant future but to be the church of **right now**...We are the ones God is using at this time, in this messiness...We are broken and sinful creatures, but we are also redeemed creatures.” For we have the only justification and righteousness that really matters: that by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But now, “Can we start to live like we believe that?”

AMEN.

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REFORMATION SUNDAY

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

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