

# A New Covenant

Wayne Waibel – 11/03/2024

We've got the combo platter working for us this morning...

The Old Testament lesson comes from the beginning of the book of Ruth – a book that many argue has no business being included in the hallowed pages of the Holy Bible. The Gospel reveals the first and greatest commandment of the New Covenant, and to top it all off – Reformation Sunday came and went with nary a mention last week.

All of these seemingly different tracks offer one thing in common. Each of them has to be appreciated within the confines of context because of how broadly they radiate out into a wider worldview.

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The Reformation took the prevailing worldview and knocked it right on its ear when Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the All-Saints' Church in Wittenberg on or about October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517.

With the advent of the Guttenberg printing press at almost precisely the same time, a media storm ensued that informed the general population the world over, and subsequently fueled the firestorm that became the undoing of certain Papal practices, to say nothing of authority.

On their own merits – Luther’s document was written primarily as a discussion guide to further dialogue that would address, arrest, and hopefully reverse some of the more oppressive and ill-conceived tenets of the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, executions, excommunications and actual wars broke out instead. Authority almost never surrenders.

Then we have a Moabite woman named Ruth choosing to defy her mother-in-law who commanded her to return to her own mother. Instead, she clung to Naomi and refused to be turned toward her homeland.

At this point in history there was no land more despised by the Jewish nation than Moab, so Ruth was intentionally going into a country where she would be marginalized because of her immigration status; further devalued as a widow with no children, to say nothing of being fully removed from any comfort of home.

And her vow to Naomi forms the basis of one of the most revered confessions of all time: ‘wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.’ The great grandmother of king David – the royal line that preceded Jesus of Nazareth was in fact – an enemy of Israel.

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Between the dumbing down of society in general and the random acts of ethnic cleansing that are still all too commonplace in our world, we have an understandably tough time resolving the context of the world we live in. How can so much injustice and ineptitude not only prevail, but dominate? Where is the sanity – fairness – humility – compassion? The short answer is that those commodities are not newsworthy, so they fly under the radar.

It's not that they don't exist, they're just not jazzy enough to make it to the various media outlets. They don't sell products or influence. From a very egocentric perspective – they hold no value, so they get no press.

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As the ruling elite were doing their level best to examine and ultimately trick Jesus into doing or saying something that they could easily execute Him for, there arose a singular scribe who was impressed with Christ's masterful responses enough to offer a serious question solely because he knew that Jesus would have the definitive answer. And so, a new covenant was established that did not supersede the old - but clarified and deepened it.

And Mark has Jesus open His answer with the Hebrew Shema – 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' A phrase that the vast majority of Jewish rulers had stopped using for some time.

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

And the context that matters in that simple directive is this. To love one’s neighbor is to embark on a journey that leads to a way of life wholly determined by an unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. That’s the beginning that informs the end.

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Each of us exists because of other people. Were it not for the Reformation which effectively created an entirely renewed theology, the Catholic Church itself would not have undergone the painful changes necessary in order to make it relevant and essential to an ever-increasing number of people in this day and age.

Were it not for a peasant girl from the wrong side of the tracks with an abiding love for a woman from a strange land, the royal line leading to David would never have been.

God works with us through relationships. It is through the care we extend to and receive from one another, that we encounter the gifts of God. Amen.