

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit

SERVICE AT HOME: 2nd January, 2021 Covenant Sunday.

Preparation

Please take a moment to be silent, and to be present with God in your own way, bearing in mind it is Covenant Sunday.

Call to Worship

On this day of covenant, of remembering the wonderful promise that is made to us, and what we pledge in response, we come to sing and to pray as we enter the New Year.

On this day we remember that Jesus gave his all for us, to make amends for anything and everything that we have done that is not perfect and we pledge what we must offer in return.

Amen

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine – StF 548

<https://youtu.be/S3TGrRKf4H8>

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of His spirit, washed in His blood:
*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of nature burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love:
This is my story, this is my song,....

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest –
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love:
This is my story, this is my song,.....

Frances Jane van Alstyne

Prayers of Approach

Loving and faithful God,
we come into your presence rejoicing.
We come to sing your praise,
we come to hear your words of power,
we come to share your all-embracing love.

Be present with us in this time together as we come to worship you.
Called to be your people on this covenant day,
called to walk the way of Jesus,
we come with the offering of ourselves
and seeking your words of comfort and challenge.

Living Jesus, we praise you because you show us that God is love:
love which reaches to all people;
love which does not count the cost of loving;
love which never ends.
Forgive us when we love ourselves and not you.

Amen

Read Ephesians 1: 3-14

Read John 1: 10-18

Reflection

When training as a Local Preacher, I chose to do my final session essay on the concept of covenant – something I have always taken very seriously. The main thing I have always been acutely aware of is that it is a two-way thing, that we have an enormous promise made to us, but that there are expectations of us in return – to be God's people.

Two sides to the bargain: in the two readings for today we are left in absolutely no doubt as to what is there for us. In John, verse 14: "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*". In that Local Preacher training we also had to think and write about which our favourite Gospel was, and mine is very definitely John, where you get none of the traditional nativity story – shepherds, stables, wise men and so on, but this thought-provoking

and, for me, inspirational writing about “The Word”. Even here in v11 we are reminded that *“He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him”* – straight away a reminder that Jesus was rejected .

In the letter to the Ephesians, we have the promise expressed more precisely. Verse 7: *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.”* What more could we ask for? Whatever we do, however we go wrong, we are promised that all will be forgiven for us if we truly repent. Whatever, yes, **whatever** we do.

That is just too good to be true, is it not? It is true, though. This is about unconditional love – remember John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* God so loved the World! That means all of us, the people in the world, even you and me, whatever we may have done – unconditional.

It is for everyone, but there is from God an expectation that we should play our part. How else, after all, is he to accomplish his Kingdom here on earth, which is what we pray for every week, every time we say the words of the Lord’s Prayer. This is what the Covenant is about – the oft repeated concept of *“I will be your God and you will be my people”*. How can anything of the Kingdom on earth be achieved if it is not us being God’s – Jesus’s – eyes, brain and hands here on earth. This is about striving for what is just!

We have just heard of the death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a man I saw today described as a “moral giant”. I would never want to do **party** politics from the pulpit, but it was Tutu who said *“those who say that the Church and politics do not mix are reading a different bible to me”*. Politics with a small ‘p’ in some way affects every part of our life every day, from parking restrictions to COVID booster jabs, from bin collections to Brexit – the small things just as

much as the big things. It matters how we live our lives every day, whatever we do.

Chris Bryant MP has figured large in the news in recent months because he is the Chair of the Parliamentary Standards Committee, the group which has had to deal with a lot of the sleaze stuff which has come to the fore. He’s now an MP, but before that he was an Anglican Priest. He is a man of principle, he remains a Christian – he gave up the priesthood because of his homosexuality when life on that basis just became too difficult. There was an article about him in the Financial Times recently where he commented that his main Christian focus is the here and now which for me means the Kingdom, again, that we pray for every week **on earth** – he remarked: *“I don’t care about pie in the sky when you die, I believe in our lives today.”*

That might sound a bit extreme. This is, though, very much not about rubbishing the *“pie in the sky when you die”* stuff, which is, after all, God’s side of the covenant, the wonderful promise. But it is about emphasising our side of the bargain – *“you will be my people”*. John, in verse 17 says: *“..... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*.... and that is actually here in this verse that John for the first time identifies Logos – ‘The Word’ – as Jesus Christ, identifying Jesus as the embodiment of God here on earth.

But grace and truth –the ‘truth’ there is perhaps about the teachings of Jesus during his short life on earth, the three years or so – only three years! – of his ministry where his teachings, his example, were such that they have come down to us and to millions upon millions of others around the world as a shining example of how to conduct ourselves, an example of truth, of tolerance, of inclusivity, of fairness, of justice. He challenged, he asked difficult questions, he made people think, just as this is all still meant to make us think today. We are, after all, the only way that God – Jesus – can influence anything in our world today.

This is why the Methodist Church, alongside all the other Churches, is concerned with challenging injustice and supporting its victims, whether it be about refugees, about the poorest people in the poorest countries, or the dispossessed and the disadvantaged in our own country. This is a concern we share, too, with all the major Faiths.

Jesus accepted, emphasised and built on the Old Testament teachings we have today, which were after all the corner-stones of the Faith he practised, of which he was a teacher, a Rabbi. The Old Testament prophets consistently emphasised justice and righteousness. Through that, we know what is good, fair and just - and that this matters for all the people of this, God's world. This is what we need to work towards, to strive for. This is what being God's people is about.

Amen

Confession and The Covenant Prayer:

God made a covenant with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law.

Jesus Christ renewed that covenant in his life, work, death and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power, and united in love and obedience.

In this covenant God promises us new life in Christ. For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God. We wish to renew this covenant

But first we must confess our sins and seek forgiveness for all these shortcomings:
for our slowness to follow Christ and his ways,
for the poverty of our worship and the selfishness of our prayers,
for the evasion of our responsibilities,
for our failure as good stewards of your creation,
for our tolerance of injustice and the speed with which we are willing to condemn.

Silence for a few moments.....

But we know that, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins. Therefore to all who truly repent, this is his gracious word: "Your sins are forgiven."

AMEN. Thanks be to God.

And now, although we are probably reading this alone or in a small group, we can also renew our covenant promise, remembering all the tasks which Christ has for us, some easy, some difficult. We make this covenant of God our own, we seek to do your perfect will, we offer ourselves joyfully anew to you.

The Covenant:

I am no longer my own but yours.

*Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;*

put me to doing,

put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you,

or laid aside for you,

exalted for you,

or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

*I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.*

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

*And the covenant now made on earth, let it be
ratified in heaven.'*

And now, as we have entered this covenant not for ourselves alone, but as God's servants and witnesses, let us pray for the Church and for the world in which we seek to do your will:

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church: make us all one, that the world may believe.

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world:

Establish justice and peace among all people.

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief or trouble: deliver them from their distress.

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory: bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace to make these prayers, answer now your servants' prayers according to their needs; In this world grant that we may truly know you, and in the world to come graciously give us eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Now a hymn to perfectly reflect the Covenant:
Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Will You Come and Follow me – StF 673

<https://youtu.be/zk6IUalJ3sk>

1. "Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?"

2. "Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare,
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?"

2. "Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the pris'ners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?"

3. "Will you love the you you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?"

4. Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Dismissal and Blessing

Go into a world which needs the love which our
faith cherishes and seeks to spread.
Go into a world which needs the pledges that we
make today to serve, to do what God needs us to
do in God's world for God's people.
And may the blessing of God;
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
be our way, our truth, our life
now, and always. Amen.

* * * * *

Service prepared by David Wrighton.

Church Copyright Licence No 30794