



Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Happy New Year!

Ok so maybe I'm a little late to the party in offering in this annual salutation, and given our present circumstances you might be tempted to respond by saying "What's happy about it?".

Generally speaking I think most people were happy to see the back of 2020. In anticipating the dawning of 2021 there was a lot of hope, and boy did we need it!- But now that 2021 is here, and we find ourselves back in a nationwide lockdown we realise that little has changed. Whilst we have the hope of the Covid vaccination, we have to accept the fact that it will take many months before the roll out of it is complete. The financial losses, the failed businesses, the fear of unemployment, the concern for those in education and the immense strain which all these things has placed on relationships - will doubtlessly continue for a while yet!

If in saying 'Happy New Year!' we suggested that all the problems of 2020 would magically disappear with one tick of the clock - then we deceived ourselves; however if in saying 'Happy New Year' we suggest a shift in our focus, to what is passed and what can be, as we put our hope in Jesus, then no matter what this New Year brings - we can be optimistic.

In Habakkuk 3:17-18 we read;

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour"

What confident hope the prophet had. A reality-based optimism centred on who God is and His gracious promises. When it comes to eternity we have every reason to be optimistic—though the present might not feel too great with all that we are going through, the future is glorious. We know how the story ends! Because of Jesus we have the hope of hope of eternal happiness, and it is in this hope that we must place our confidence.

Frederick Langbridge (1849–1922) put it this way:

"Two men look out through the same bars: One sees the mud, and one the stars."

Sometimes all it takes is a shift in perspective . Happiness is not to be determined by 'happenings' - the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but rather confident trust in God our Father and Jesus the Son; who said *'Behold I am making all things new'*. (Revelation 21:5)

And so I'll say it again... 'Happy New Year!'

Let's make it a good one, as we step out in confidence with God!

Father, I dedicate
This new year to Thee,
In whatever worldly state
Thou wilt have me be;
Not from sorrow, pain or care.
Would I ask that Thou shouldst spare;
This alone shall be my prayer,
Glorify Thy name

*Thy great name! Thy great name!
Let my life, O Lord, each day
Glorify Thy name. (SASB 581)*

This week's Band piece chosen by Trevor Tullet

'In perfect peace' by Kenneth Downie played by the New York Staff Band
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=gwU13bc5-mY>

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace

Whose mind is stayed on thee. SASB 629. Isaiah 26:3

A very simple message. In these days of confusion we more than ever need to keep our minds on Jesus. (BM Bob Dare)

With every blessing

Major Liz

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Reimagining Church Together - Announcements

Vision and Commitment 2021

Traditionally in The Salvation Army, the second Sunday in January is Commitment Sunday. Every year Territorial Headquarters sets the theme and produces material to help support that theme. Hopefully some of you will have taken the opportunity last week to view the Territorial 'online' Vision and Commitment Sunday meeting that was on YouTube. This meeting included the installation and welcome of Colonels Paul and Jennine Main as the new Chief Secretary and Territorial Secretary for Leader Development; and it is still available for viewing via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/salvationarmyvideo>

The theme this year is *'Going Forward Together Living in God's Covenant'* - and over the next few weeks it is my intention to use some of the helpful resources which have been made available: We start today by looking at Jeremiah 31:31-34 and considering God's Invitation and then we will proceed as follows;

Sunday 17th January (NCT Connected Issue 22)

Week 2 – Covenant: God's Promise and God's Choice

Bible Readings: Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:1-8

Sunday 24th January (NCT Connected Issue 23)

Week 3 – Covenant: God's Gift of Christ

Bible Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-20

Sunday 31st January (NCT Connected Issue 24)

Week 4 – Covenant: Our response to God's grace

Bible Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Normally, on Commitment Sunday, opportunity would be given for members to sign some form of Commitment Card or Bookmark. I have a supply a Commitment Cards which I shall endeavour to have delivered to you at some point this week - but having looked briefly at each of the weeks themes, prepared for us in part by THQ, it seems appropriate to hold off signing those cards until the 31st January. Of course you are under no obligation to do so, and if at any time over the next few weeks you wish to sign your commitment card (once received) as a sign of your Covenant – then please feel free to.

Weekly activities & dates for your diary

Virtual Coffee Morning

Each Tuesday at 11am on Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/94036559399?pwd=S3lCVFU1QklkcWVsQnJrRUpWNDlndz09>

Meeting ID: 940 3655 9399

Passcode: 236837

LYFE House Groups

Liz's Group will meet on the following Tuesdays: 12th, 26th Jan, 9th & 23rd Feb, 9th & 23rd March*

Bob's Group on the following Thursdays: 14th, 28th Jan, 11th & 25th Feb, 11th & 25th March*

Heather's Group on the following Thursdays: 21st Jan, 4th & 18th Feb, 4th & 18th March & 1st April*

** Switching from the LYFE Material to a special Lent Course*

For Zoom access codes for the LYFE Huse Groups / Lent Course - please check with relevant group leader

For those unable to log into Zoom, the printed LENT material can be provided for personal use upon request - please speak to Major Liz.

7th February - Self Denial Launch

16th February - Shrove Tuesday

17th February - Ash Wednesday (1st Day of Lent)

7th March - Self Denial Altar Service

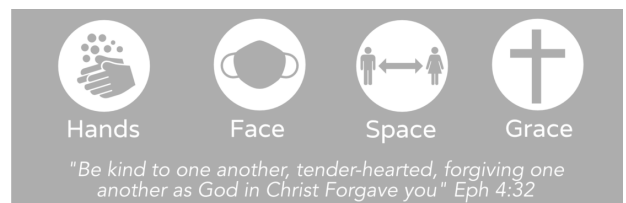
8th March - 21st March - Major Liz Hancock - Furlough

14th March - Mothers Day

28th March - Palm Sunday

2nd April - Good Friday

4th April - Easter Sunday



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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

SUNDAY: 10th January 2021

Theme: Covenant: God's Invitation

Key Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34



*³¹ Look, the days are coming when I will bring about a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² **It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors** long ago when I took them by the hand and led them out of slavery in Egypt. They did not remain faithful to that covenant—even though I loved and cared for them as a husband. ³³ **This is the kind of new covenant I will make with the people of Israel when those days are over. I will put My law within them. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.** ³⁴ No longer will people have to teach each other or encourage their family members and say, "You must know the Eternal." For all of them will know Me intimately themselves—from the least to the greatest of society. I will be merciful when they fail and forgive their wrongs. I will never call to mind or mention their sins again. (THE VOICE)*

Those who watched the Territorial Vision and Commitment Sunday Service on YouTube may recognise much of what I shall share here. The Territorial Commander set the scene for our theme this year and reminded us that God has chosen to invite us into covenant with Himself.

The Bible is all about covenant. That's what 'testament' means – the old covenant and the new covenant. Covenant itself is not explained in the Bible, yet it is there all the time. It is the backdrop to everything, like the scenery on the stage of a theatre.

It is a fact that throughout history God has made covenants with His people; but what do we mean by 'Covenant'?

If we were to turn to the dictionary definition of the word 'covenant' we would discover that it is a word that means an agreement; or bargain. In terms of Law, it is contract made under seal.

Generally speaking, covenants are binding between two or more parties, with certain conditions attached. In some cases covenants might be established on equal footings with each party; be it an individual, family, or king agreeing on mutual obligations; or in some cases the levels may spilt with the stronger party imposing the conditions on the weaker party (obedience, taxes, tribute) in exchange for certain benefits (e.g. protection)

In either case, there may be the promise of specific benefits, rewards, or blessings for people who keep the terms of the covenant; but also the threat of sanctions, punishments or curses for people who break the terms; and between the contracting parties, symbols or signs might also be exchanged to remind the two parties about the agreement.

With respect to the Old Testament the word covenant refers to a contract between God (or Yahweh) and the Israelites. In this context, a covenant is a promise made by God for the purpose of helping and protecting His people; and the first covenants were unconditional acts of divine grace. We see this in the earliest recorded covenant - that made by God with humanity, as established with Noah.

'The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become...The Lord was grieved...his heart was filled with pain...So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...for I am grieved that I have made them. But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord...And so God said to Noah...Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you". (6:5ff)

The first thing to recognise here is that it is God who takes the initiative in making the covenant. God says 'I will establish my covenant'. And, though some scholars might be quick to point out, that sometimes there is a need for human response and obligation; for example in the case of Noah - his righteous obedience, there clearly is no 'parity' in the covenants which God makes with His people - that is to say, that these covenants are not established on equal terms, neither can they ever be - rather they are indicative of His mercy and grace and the immense love which He has for you and me.

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued ...

Suggested Song: Only by grace (SASB 471)

in Genesis 15-17, we have the account of Abram entering into a covenant with God; and I encourage you to read those chapters for yourselves and as you do so identify within them—the different elements which made up the covenant -

God instructs Abram to prepare a sacrifice—cutting the animals in half and arranging the halves opposite each other - the sun sets, darkness falls, and there is a symbolic changing of places as a smoking firepot and blazing torch pass between the pieces, the covenant was sealed with blood, Abram becomes Abraham - (a changing of names—another significant part of the covenant process, think of the marriage covenant - as a woman takes her husband's name, or as is sometimes the case, the names become cojoined); and then we have the sealing of that covenant with a cutting - every male was to undergo circumcision 'for this will be the sign of covenant among you'.

We can look at a story like that and wonder what implication there could possibly be for us today—but here's the thing; Abraham enters into the covenant with God, and as descendants of Abraham we become inheritors of the covenant.

It is a covenant which says that we belong to Him and He to us. *'I will walk with you and you shall walk with me; all you have I shall have and all I have shall be yours. As you walk in obedience, I will be with you and your children and your children's children.'*

Wow! When we sing; Abba Father let me be yours alone, we align ourselves with this covenant making God who calls us into relationship with Himself.

Throughout the Bible we read of God renewing the covenant;

The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah. (Jeremiah 31:31)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

And ultimately of course, the covenant is fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

In understanding covenant, we will appreciate Jesus even more. The great covenant events of the Bible all head towards the coming of Christ.

This is why the narrative of the birth and life of Christ are contained in a new book, the New Testament, in other words the New Covenant! It is why Jesus is described as the mediator of the new covenant in Hebrews 9:11-15; and it is why at the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'. (Luke 22:20).

Paul wrote and explained that we are all invited into a covenant relationship with Christ when in Ephesians 2:11-13; he wrote;

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) - Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

... and now we are invited to go forward together with Him as a covenanted people

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*Only by grace can we enter
Only by grace can we stand
Not by our human endeavour
But by the blood of the Lamb*

*Into Your presence You call us
You call us to come
Into Your presence You draw us
And now by Your grace we come
Now by Your grace we come*

*Lord if You mark our transgressions
Who would stand
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb*

(Graham Kendrick)

Covenant is amongst the best news we ever have received! In a covenant with God – in this coming together, in this exchange of places –we give up our life to him and he gives his life to us. He says to us, 'You give me your life that should end in death marked and tarnished with sin, and you will receive my eternal life!'

The blood of Christ was shed for us as the payment for our sins. He dies in our place and this is the culmination of the eternal covenant that has been running through all the pages of Scripture.

We won't just have his name – 'Christian' – we will have him! The covenant will be written on our hearts, not engraved on stone. This covenant will be sealed with the blood of Christ.

When we understand covenant, it changes everything for us. It helps us understand and appreciate that:

God is Emmanuel – the one who is with us.

He is able to help us at every turn of our lives and every step of the way.

Heaven is not simply a destination, it is an eternal experience to be increasingly enjoyed now.

Our relationship with a loving, covenant-making God must impact our relationships with fellow believers who are also part of the covenant – we are family!

Together our lives must be in the service of our Father God; but this means too in the service of his created world for which we have a covenanted responsibility. It is God's world in which we have been called to be salt, light and love, in order that people of all ages, and of every nation and tribe should have the opportunity to hear and know the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Prayer

Thank you, heavenly Father, that while I was still dead in my trespasses and sins and at enmity with you, Christ Jesus my Lord died for me. Thank you that his blood paid the price for my sins, and that by grace through faith in him I have been brought near to you, returned into covenant relationship with you, forgiven of my sins and I have received the gift of eternal life. To you alone I offer my praise and worship. In Jesus' name I pray. AMEN. (<https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Ephesians/2>)

Suggested Viewing

As we go through this series on 'Going Forward Together Living in God's Covenant', those with access to Youtube might want to check out the Musical 'Covenant' written by Karl and Kevin Larsson, together with lyricist Commissioner Keith Banks. It's a musical, which some of you may have seen at the Boundless Congress back in 2015, highlighting eight breath-taking real-life stories of The Salvation Army's work around the world and captures William Booth in his last days as he pens a covenant charging all Salvationists to continue the Army's work after his passing.

It's about 2hrs. 50mins long - but definitely worth viewing.

<https://youtu.be/1TwUup-wEKs>