



## Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Dear friends

In my capacity as Wing Chaplain to the Durham and Northumberland Wing Royal Air Force Air Cadets, on Friday morning I hosted a 'Virtual Coffee & Prayer Meeting' via Zoom with Chaplains from across the wing. 12 of us met which was the first time many of us had actually seen each other 'face to face' and it was good to share in fellowship and enjoy the mutual support. I'd already decided that at the end of our time I would share with them verses from **Matthew 11: 28-30**; verses which became very popular amongst Salvationists a number of years ago now when on commitment Sunday, using the Message Paraphrase they became the inspiration for theme 'Walk with me, Work with me'; and some of you will probably remember the pen holder which doubled up as the commitment card that year!

*"Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*

The more we chatted together the more appropriate my choice of text appeared. It would appear that the weariness, which I have spoken of on previous occasions, is something of a common feeling - that none are immune from. Covid weariness is the malaise of these times; being less physically active than we were pre Covid restrictions, all those months ago, we struggle to understand why we feel so tired for much of the time. People have become weary of waiting, people speak of an emotional weariness and even a spiritual weariness - but it's important that we do not give up, that we do not give in but rather keep pressing on and keep trusting in God to bring us safely through.

In his 'Inspirational Bible' Max Lucado shares these words;

'When Jesus says, "**Come to me**", he doesn't say come to religion, come to a system, or come to a certain doctrine. This is a very personal invitation to a God, an invitation to a Saviour. In essence, Christianity is nothing more, nothing less than a desire and an effort to see Jesus. That's all it is. We're trying to catch a glimpse of a man, not a program, not a plan, not a system, not a doctrine. We're trying to see a man who called himself the Son of God.'

Our God is not aloof - he's not so far above us that he can't see and understand our problems. Jesus isn't a God who stayed on the mountaintop—he's a Saviour who came down and lived and worked with the people. Everywhere he went, the crowds followed, drawn together by the magnet that was - and is - the Saviour. The Life of Jesus Christ is a message of hope, a message of mercy, a message of life in a dark world.

And so I invite you to join with me in this prayer;

*Blessed Lord and God, we come to you, aware that you  
have pierced our world. You became flesh, you dwelled among us  
you saw our fallen state, you reached in and pulled us out.  
You offered us salvation, you offered us mercy.  
And we are ever thankful. AMEN*

**Suggested Song:** Someone cares (SASB 10)

**Suggested Songster Piece:** Someone cares <https://youtu.be/nb1wf5h2Yds>

**Praying you have a good week,  
With every blessing**  
*Major Liz*

# NCT SA Connected

Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

**SUNDAY:** 24th January 2021

**Theme:** Covenant: God's Gift of Christ

**Key Text:** Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-20



## God Loves People - FACT!

The fact that 'God loves people' is the reality that informs and drives the idea of covenant. God is relentless in his love for all people, at all times, through all generations and in all places. Last week we touched on the fact that Covenant and Contract are not one and the same - they are different. A covenant isn't a deal or a bargaining position that results in a contract. When we speak of the covenants established by God with his people we are speak of covenant in terms of it being the foundation of an everlasting relationship between God and people that reveals the incredible truth, that God wants to be with us... to love us.

## Broken covenants

The same cannot be said of us, as Jeremiah points out in Jeremiah 31:32. It seems that humankind are the ones who are prone to break the covenant – it has never been broken by God, and never will be!

<sup>31</sup> *'That's right. The time is coming when I will make a brand-new covenant with Israel and Judah. <sup>32</sup> It won't be a repeat of the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant even though I did my part as their Master.'* God's Decree.

<sup>33</sup> *'This is the brand-new covenant that I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them – write it on their hearts! – and be their God. And they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> They will no longer go around setting up schools to teach each other about God. They'll know me first-hand, the dull and the bright, the smart and the slow. I'll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I'll forget they ever sinned!'* God's Decree. Jeremiah 31:31-34 (MSG)

There is nothing contractual about this covenant, as in the 'you do this and I'll do that' type of bargaining that depends on compliance and co-operation from both parties.

Jeremiah suggests that the days of contractually based covenants are over and that God is doing something 'brand-new' (v33). The proposal being placed before us is that God is saying, 'I am going to do it all from my side of our relationship.'

This goes against humanity's ideas of what is right and fair! But God says, 'I will do it all – and I will never give up on you!' This the foundation of grace and mercy.

We often think of Grace as a new Testament concept;

I love the acrostic for grace: **God's Riches at Christ's Expense**. That is spot on. God's **grace** could be defined as this: **God gives us what we don't deserve** while **mercy** could be defined as this: *God doesn't give us what we do deserve*. We are saved by grace and not by works (Eph 2:8-9), and that's why the gospel is such good news because if we had to depend on works, none of us could ever make it, and none of us could ever be sure if we'd done enough good works to save ourselves. Whilst redemption was free for us - it was of the utmost expense to God.

The concept of grace isn't however confined just to the New Testament - as already implied it can be seen in God's covenant love. A contract is based on our ability to bring something to the relationship; it is heavily biased towards our ability to keep our side of the deal. It implies that we can earn or deserve God's love, favour and help and human pride revels at such a prospect.

The humiliating reality, for human ego, however, is that covenant love is not based on this kind of thinking. God knows that we humans can never keep our side of the agreement. We break the covenant, we mess up and time and time again we fail to measure up – this is the human story. The premise of grace, however, is that God does it all for us... God fills up the gaps and cracks with his mercy and grace. There's a wonderful quote by Leonard Cohen which says *'There's a crack in almost everything, That's how the light gets in.'* (Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem' from 1992 album *The Future*); because God loves us so much - he takes our broken, messed up lives and fills the cracks with his Grace and mercy.



## Illustration



In Japanese culture there is an ancient tradition called Kintsugi. When a piece of pottery breaks, rather than discarding it, it is bound together again using gold, silver or platinum. This repair method celebrates each artefact's unique history by emphasising its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them. Kintsugi often makes the repaired piece even more beautiful than the original, revitalising it with new life. If we think in terms of our own 'futile' lives and what God, by his Covenantal love, does for each one of us - ultimately through the gift of his son Jesus Christ to us, then that is Grace.

## Broken Justice

The movement from retributive (punishment based) to restorative justice is based on the concept of God's covenant love. For most of human history, justice in the form of a legalistic system informs most societies' idea of justice – where people get what they deserve for their crimes. While this provides a basis for legal and court systems, it is rather limited in its scope, and often leaves victims disappointed, hurt and angry. It does nothing much for victims of crime, nor does it address the causes of crime. *David Riddell said; 'This life isn't fair. If you always INSIST on justice, you'll be angry all of your life.* Restorative justice seeks to heal and restore people.

Within loving families we can see how parents often love their children unconditionally. In such a relationship, the parent does not expect the child to merit or earn their love; parents realise that little children aren't capable of earning love and care by behaving or performing to order. A good parent's love is not conditional on their child's capacity to earn or merit their love, although the child's capacity to love is often developed within this context.

Love can be reciprocated naturally as the child absorbs the parents' love. This kind of relationship *transforms* both the child and the parent.

Richard Rohr said; *'Unfortunately, the most common view of God's judgment is retributive justice, which appeals to the ego, rather than restorative justice, which brings true transformation.'* (Richard Rohr: *Essential Teachings on Love*)

God's love transforms everything and heals the damage that is done to relationships. Human experience suggests that retributive justice does not work very well in families... or in any other context! Good parents love their children unconditionally, even if there is personal hurt and cost in loving this way, and as such this reflects the way in which God loves people; how God loves you and me.

**Suggested Song:** I believe that God the Father (SASB 34)

***'I believe in transformation , God can change the hearts of men  
And refine the evil nature til it glows with grace again '***

Saint Ignatius said;

*'There are very few people who realise what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into his hands, and let themselves be formed by his grace.'*

***Going forward together in covenant*** means that we must love each other to the extent that all of our relationships are transformed. The Church is to be characterised by the extent of our love for others.

***'And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,  
and to love one another as he commanded us'*** (1 John 3:23)

## NCT SA Connected

Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued ...

When acting in accordance to God's will and purpose and in response to his covenant love, the church will be a loving, tolerant, accepting and inclusive community of people that is like nothing else on the planet.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr had this to say;

'Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, "Love your enemies." It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long... and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love...'

As we consider the idea of Covenant in relation to God's gift of Christ to us, we turn our thoughts from **Broken Covenant** and **Broken Justice** to **Broken Bread** and to the second of our key texts for today;

### **Broken Bread** (God in Christ)

At the Last Supper Jesus announces a new covenant. His willingness to lay down his life underlines the radical basis for relationship that will heal and transform the world.

**<sup>14</sup> When it was time, he sat down, all the apostles with him, <sup>15</sup>and said, 'You've no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you before I enter my time of suffering. <sup>16</sup>It's the last one I'll eat until we all eat it together in the kingdom of God.'** **<sup>17</sup>Taking the cup, he blessed it, then said, 'Take this and pass it among you. <sup>18</sup>As for me, I'll not drink wine again until the kingdom of God arrives.'** **<sup>19</sup>Taking bread, he blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, given for you. Eat it in my memory.'** **<sup>20</sup>He did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant written in my blood, blood poured out for you.'** Luke 22:14-20 (MSG)

The breaking and blessing (note the contrast indicated in the two words) of the bread imply that brokenness and healing (death and resurrection) are key components of human relationships and the means by which humanity will flourish and thrive.

Whilst in the Salvation Army we might not practice sacramental worship in terms of Holy Communion (a celebration of the Lord's Supper) with the breaking of bread and sharing of wine - Albert Osborn emphasised that the whole of our life ought to be offered as a sacrament to God'

*'My all is in the Master's hands  
For him to bless and break;  
Beyond the brook his winepress stands  
And thence my way I take,  
Resolved the whole of love's demands  
To give for his dear sake.'*

(Albert Orsborn, SASB 610)

May God speak to us through these words; and may we be reminded that;

- Christ's covenant with us is one of grace, a covenant of the heart.
- That God's restorative love transforms relationships.
- And that in following the example of Jesus, in the laying down of our lives so that others can pick up theirs, we arrive at the heart of discipleship and we share God's vision of the new Kingdom community.

**Suggested Song to close:** Will you come and follow me (SASB 695) <https://youtu.be/o469PRLdbHU>