



Newcastle City Temple Connected

Reimagining Church Together

Dear friends

I'm sure like many I watched the news with heaviness of heart when, on Tuesday (26th January), it was reported that Britain had passed the grim milestone of 100,000 coronavirus deaths, almost a year to the day since the first recorded death.

On Wednesday morning - the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Right Reverend Justin Welby, gave a deeply moving and profound interview on BBC Breakfast news in which, when asked if he could help us as a nation to come to terms with this enormous sense of loss said;

"We have to think of 100,000 individuals, 100,000 families, 100,000 people who had friends – there's millions who will be affected by that number – but each of them is of infinite value in the sight of God..."

In the interview with Dan Walker - when asked where he finds Hope, the Archbishop said;

"I find hope in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ... that's the central core belief. That God comes and shares our sorrows. That He is in the middle of this mess. He is alongside us. He died and then conquered death., and death no longer has the last word. God has the last word..."

He then went on to say ***"Where I see 'Hope' worked out it is in the signs of what is good, the love that we pass on, that we receive and pass on to other people that I see in hospitals, that I see in neighbourhoods caring for each other, this wonderful outflowing of community support..."***

Thirdly, I see hope in a growing determination to build better in the future. To come back and say we don't want to live in a country where there is inequality of health, where there is inequalities and injustices, we are going to do things that work better for all of us. I think there are many signs of hope that these deaths will not be in vain, but lead to a better country."

If you want to listen in full to that interview, an interview in which the Archbishop shares from his own personal experience of tragic loss, then you can do so at the following link:

bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0957kcv

As we all grieve the loss of over 100,000 individuals, may this interview be a source of help to us all as we journey forward together, living in God's Covenant.

Suggested Song: Help us to help each other, Lord (SASB 815)

Suggested Songster Piece: Somebody Prayed For Me <https://youtu.be/pIf1-uH-JWo>

May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

Psalm 33:22

Virtual Coffee Morning

Each Tuesday at 11am on Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/94036559399?pwd=S3lCVFU1QklkcWVsQnJrRUpWNDlNdz09>

Meeting ID: 940 3655 9399

Passcode: 236837

LENT House Groups FROM THE RAM TO THE LAMB- PART 2

Heather's House group will be meeting at 7pm on Thursday (4th Feb)
Major Liz's group (Tuesday 9th Feb) and BM Bob's (Thursday 11th Feb)

With every blessing

Major Liz

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together



SUNDAY: 31st January 2021

Theme: Covenant: Our response to God's Grace

Key Text: Hebrews 9:11-15

Today we conclude the Vision and Commitment Theme entitled 'Going forward together - living in God's Covenant' and whether you are joining with us via Zoom for our weekly 'on line' worship—or whether you have been following this series from the comfort of your own study or armchair at home on your own - today we are encouraged to renew our covenant with God. Previously we have considered the place of covenant as, for example, that established between Moses and God on Mount Sinai.

Great promises were made by the people, committing themselves to abide by the covenant. (Exodus 19:8, *'We will do everything the Lord has said.'*) However, the keeping of the covenant was often short-lived. In Jeremiah 31:32 we read; *'...because they broke my covenant'*, and this reminds us of the propensity of the people to break the covenant. But still God continues to forgive; again in Jeremiah (31:34) we read , *'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'*

What a gracious God we have!

You might want to spend a few moments reflecting on these words of Albert Orsborn; (SASB 460)

VERSE 1:

*Have we not known it, have we not heard it?
Power unto God belongs.
Yet do we daily find in His mercy
Themes for the sweetest songs;
Healing the wounded, raising the fallen,
Making the blind to see,
Saying to all who seek His face
These precious words of redeeming grace:*

VERSE 2:

*Joy-bursts of singing gaily are springing
With every day that starts;
If we were silent then would the stones cry
Shame on our fainting hearts.
O banish the sadness, sing now for gladness
Glory in Christ, the Lord!
Who is a God like unto Thee,
One who can pardon iniquity?*

CHORUS

*No more! No more! He remembers sins no more,
They are pardoned for ever, and He will never
Bring them up against me any more.
I'll hear no more
Of the evil days of yore;
I'm a pardoned offender,
And God will remember them no more.*

VERSE 3:

*Safe in the dark day; safe in the bright day;
Safe till my latest breath;
There is endurance in this assurance,
Stronger than fear of death.
When the accuser comes to the judgment,
Seeking my soul to claim,
I have a token in the blood.*

With the coming of Jesus a new covenant was established through his shed blood. However, even at Jesus' last meal with his disciples as he declared the cup to be a sign of the new covenant, there was denial and betrayal;

*'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.
But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.'* (Luke 22:20,21)

So, just because a covenant is agreed doesn't mean that it will automatically be fulfilled. But what difference can the new covenant make? We're going to think about the words 'SAVED to SERVE'

But first - A Prayer

Father, on this day as I prepare to I commit myself to living in covenant with you. Help me to know that you will never fail to hold your side of the covenant I make. Help me to be faithful to what I promise this day. I pray this prayer in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.



Saved

Hebrews chapter 9 gives us an indication of the centrality of Jesus in the establishment of this new covenant over the mechanisms of the old covenant. This old covenant clearly had its place in the lives of the people and gave them the assurance of God's favour over the years.

But this was a complex set of rules and regulations, with everything, including the items of furniture in the Tabernacle and later the Temple, having significance and, very often, deep meaning. Even the writer to the Hebrews acknowledges this complexity, suggesting that *'we cannot discuss these things in detail now'* (Hebrews 9:5).

The death of Jesus brought about a new way of being, one not dependent upon the regular sacrificial system repeated year after year in different ways, but now completed once and for all by the blood of Jesus. Jesus, the great high priest, entered the most holy place by the shedding of his own blood so that the relationship with God could be established once and for all.

In Matthew 27 we read;

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, ema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

From our understanding of the Easter story, access to God was established as signified by the curtain of the Temple being torn in two, from top to bottom, and so relationship with God has been re-established through the new covenant, that *'those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant'* (Hebrews 9:15).

...To Serve

This promised eternal inheritance might lead us to think about going to Heaven when we die; but as Jesus himself suggested, eternal life is not just about living for ever but about knowing God and the quality of the life that we live now. In John 17:2,3 we read *'For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent';* and John 10:10, *'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'*

This fulness of life is here for the taking - just as soon as we invite Jesus Christ into our lives!

Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!'* Notice the tense here: this is not a future hope, but a present reality, a living of the life of Heaven here on earth, free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15). But it also seems to be clear that the new covenant leads us into service. Hebrews 9:14, *'...so that we may serve the living God'.*

In speaking of the sacrifice of Jesus, William Barclay says, 'The sacrifice of Jesus... is not only the paying of a debt; it is the giving of a victory.' (*The Daily Study Bible*, comment on Hebrews 9:11-14)

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Reimagining Church - Let's Worship Together

Continued ...

This victory means that we have been set free from sins committed under the first covenant, but not so that we live whatever life we want. That would be to abuse the grace of God, as Paul addresses in Romans 6:1,2, *'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?'*

However, *'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free'* (Galatians 5:1) – freedom not to do our own thing, but to live according to the ways of God, living a life of victory, *servicing him* in all we do.

The Bible is full of examples of what this may look like in our own lives as we live out our side of the covenant.

It may be that the great words of the Old Testament prophet Micah come to mind that we will *'Act justly... love mercy and walk humbly with our God.'* (Micah 6:8)

It may be that Peter's challenge comes to mind, repeating the Levitical call to *'Be holy, because I am holy'*, indeed encouraging us, as he did them to *'be holy in all we you do.'* (1 Peter 1:15)

So as we are living in the new covenant, saved by the blood of Jesus? Let us pray that God will help us serve the living God in all we do and in all we are.

Personal Reflection

Here are some questions to help with our personal reflection on what it means to live in God's Covenant. Are you looking forward to the promised eternal inheritance or are you experiencing it now?

Would you say that you live a life of freedom? How does this freedom show itself in your own life?

If I am saved to serve, is there a danger that what I do (my service) can become more important than who I am (someone enjoying the life of God now)? How can I strike a good balance in my own life?

Hebrews 9:14 speaks of having our conscience cleansed. As you examine your conscience, do you know something of it being cleansed? How does your living help to have a clear conscience?

Covenant Renewal - Pledging our Commitment

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Read through the following songs slowly. What strikes you as being particularly significant? What elements are easy to say and to do? Is anything particularly difficult for you to say and to do? Are there any areas of your life which these are speaking directly to, maybe something you need to stop and maybe something you need to start?

O Jesus I have promised (SASB 613)
Take my life and let it be (SASB 623)
My life must be Christ's broken bread (610)

Listen to 'Guardian of my Soul' by Major Darren Shaw

<https://youtu.be/JAH8eSpz87w>

In the book of Nehemiah we see that in response to God journeying with his people, there is a willingness to make a covenant, a binding agreement with God. We also note that there was a desire to put this in writing, affixing their seal to it.

'In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.' (Nehemiah 9:38)

As we have opportunity to make a covenant with God, you might find it helpful to read through the Soldiers Covenant, The Methodist Covenant, or Booths Personal Covenant - which can be found overleaf; and in making our covenant we are encouraged to add our name in writing (*to sign the covenant cards which we have received*) to help us keep the promises we make this day.

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Reimagining Church Together - Announcements

Soldiers Covenant

Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of His Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant. Believing and choosing to live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith I will....

- be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to His leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible. I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.
 - I will uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.
 - I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others; my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.
 - I will uphold the sanctity of marriage and of family life. I will be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God.
 - I will abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.
 - I will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to Him, and in His name caring for the needy and the disadvantaged.
 - I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.
 - I will be true to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army, loyal to its leaders, and I will show the spirit of salvationism whether in times of popularity or persecution.
- ... I enter into this covenant ...convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me this devotion of my life to His service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.

The Methodist 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;

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.

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

A Personal Covenant

As a young man William Booth dedicated his life to a set of values which he covenanted to keep.

I do promise – my God helping;

1st That I will rise every morning sufficiently early (say 20 minutes before seven o'clock) to wash, dress, and have a few minutes, not less than 5, in private prayer.

2^{ndly} That I will as much as possible avoid all that babbling and idle talking in which I have lately so sinfully indulged.

3rd That I will endeavour in my conduct and deportment before the world and my fellow servants especially to conduct myself as a humble, meek, and zealous follower of the bleeding Lamb, and by serious conversation and warning endeavour to lead them to think of their immortal souls.

4^{thly} That I will not read less than 4 chapters in God's word every day.

5^{thly} That I will strive to live closer to God, and to seek after holiness of heart, and leave providential events with God.

6^{thly} That I will read this over every day or at least twice a week.

God help me, enable me to cultivate a spirit of self denial and to yield myself a prisoner of love to the Redeemer of the world. Amen & Amen