

God is with us! In his covenant promise

Opening prayer:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hymn 443 StF

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCSx7ZZ3-2I>

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831-1905)

Let us pray together

Gracious God,

on this day, I and many others seek to renew our covenant with You. Your love is strong and faithful. You never stop loving us. Our love for You is weak and fickle and we often fall short of what we have committed ourselves to be and do. Forgive us for our reluctance to follow Christ, our half-hearted worship, our failures in caring, service and witness, and our unwillingness to challenge injustice.

Have mercy on us, O God, and renew in us both the desire and the ability to be people of love.

Thank you for your gracious words:

'Your sins are forgiven'. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson

Jeremiah 31: 7-14

On Monday evening 4th January at 8pm the Prime Minister announced that the country has returned to a national lockdown once again, no doubt that will have raised a lot of concerns across the country and across the Church. The latest stage in the journey we have been on looks as though it will last for several more weeks yet. Jeremiah is often referred to in negative terms as something of a pessimist, yet I read his words in the above passage as words of great hope, he is saying to the people of his time "in the end, all will be well"

Consider:

- *At the beginning of 2021 do you still cling to the promise of God that "all will be well" how important is that promise to you*
- *What is it that you hope for in the covenant of God, that things will go back to how they were, or that we will be a new Church, equipped for the future?*
- *If we cling to the Good News of Jesus Christ, how do we share that message with the people in our community today, many of whom are struggling.*

The Covenant

From the earliest days of the Methodist societies, John Wesley invited the Methodist people to renew their covenant relationship with God and this has become a tradition in Methodist Churches during the generations that have followed. There is an opportunity to renew our Covenant with God now.

Beloved in Christ, let us claim for ourselves this covenant which God has made with his people, and take upon us the yolk of Christ.

This means that we are content that he appoint us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward.

Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, other are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ who strengthens us.

Therefore let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Lord God, holy Father, since you have called us through Christ to share in this gracious covenant, we take upon ourselves the yolk of obedience and, for love of you, engage ourselves to seek and do your perfect will. We are no longer our own but yours.

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. Amen

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.

A time of prayer:

Pray for your church ... that it may be a faithful witness to God's love.

Pray for the church worldwide ...that in word and action it may help people to see God's glory

Pray for the leaders of nations... that they act justly and guide wisely.

Pray for those pushed to the margins of society ...that they and their gifts may be made welcome.

Pray for those in need...especially people we know

The Lord's Prayer:

Gospel: Mark 1: 4-11

Think for a moment about the words we have just spoken and the whole process of the relationship between God and his people. In our time of worship today, we have thought about the relationship between God and the people of around 570BC in our reading from the prophet Jeremiah. We reflect on the relationship between God and what John the Baptist was doing as he baptised people for the forgiveness of sins, we reflect on the covenant between God and the whole people of the earth in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Today we have renewed our covenant relationship with God.

- *Look back at the words of the covenant prayer for a moment, which lines were easy to say? Which ones were difficult? Were there any lines that you would have preferred to skip? Why?*
- *In a world where we like to be in control, how do you feel about being submissive to God's calling? How ready are you to surrender all things to him? What does that mean?*
- *As Jesus emerges from the waters of the river Jordan, a voice from heaven is heard proclaiming God's favour. How important in your life is it for you to find favour with God? How do you believe that is achieved? How does that speak into the Church of 2021?*

Hymn 412 StF https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-_5x_4zgy

See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesus' love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze:
To bring fire on earth He came;
Kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss!

When He first the work begun,
Small and feeble was His day:
Now the word doth swiftly run;
Now it wins its widening way:
More and more it spread and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail;
Sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.

Sons of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door hath opened wide!
He hath given the word of grace,
Jesus' word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
He alone the work hath wrought;
Worthy is the work of Him,
Him Who spoke a world from naught.

Saw ye not the cloud arise,
Little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
Hangs o'er all the thirsty land:
Lo! the promise of a shower
Drops already from above;
But the Lord will shortly pour
All the spirit of His love.

Blessing:

May the love of the Father enfold us, the wisdom of the Son enlighten us, the fire of the Spirit enflame us; and the blessing of God, the three in one, be upon us and abide with us now and for ever. Amen