

Virtual Church 3rd January 2021

Sing, read or listen to: It is well with my soul https://youtu.be/AHe_qmo3gX4
Let us pray.

Glory to the Father, the God of love,
who created us;
who continually preserves and sustains us;
who has loved us with an everlasting love,
and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory,
in the face of Jesus Christ.
Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour,
who, though he was rich,
yet for our sake became poor,
and was tested in every way as we are,
yet without sin;

who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,
and was obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross;
who was raised from the dead and is alive for ever,
and has opened the kingdom of heaven
to all who trust in him;
who is seated at God's right hand in glory,
and will come to be our judge.
Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us;
whose wisdom teaches us;
whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think.
Blessèd be God for ever.

To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be praise and glory for ever. **Amen.**

Sing, read or listen to: God is here! <https://youtu.be/5akNpzEGrgs>

Every year, at the turn of the year, while the rest of the world is thinking about New Year's resolutions the Methodist Church is looking forward to The Covenant Service.

What are New Year's Resolutions? – promises to ourselves? Setting impossible goals? There are a variety of jokes set around these cliches –

“ At the beginning of the year I made a resolution to lose 10lb... only 15 more to go!”

“Thank goodness we are now in 2021 – I can now say hindsight really is 20/20!”

“What is a New Year's Resolution? – something that goes in one year and out the other!”

So, what is a covenant?

Read: Jeremiah 31: 31-34 and Mark 14: 22-25

Sing, read or listen to: O Happy day (Mission Praise 499)

<https://youtu.be/a4ZLcJrTRY>

A covenant is not just a contract, agreement, or promise. In historic English common law, the difference between a covenant and a contract is the presence of a seal. It indicates a special solemnity. In Bible times your seal was the equivalent to an ID and a Bank Card. It showed who you were related to and what your standing was in the community. A visible credit score!

A Biblical covenant was not reliant on people to enforce the penalty, that role was always down to God. So – imagine – you are going to swear an oath that will be supervised (“policed”) by God. You lay out your sacrificed animals – dismembered to show what will happen if the covenant is not kept – and you put on it your seal, your ID, your very self.

Now throughout the history of Gods relationship with his people there have been covenants:

Adam learns that there are consequences to disobeying God. Noah sees in the rainbow the sign of God's covenant to never again destroy the earth.

Abraham is promised that God will bless the whole world through him because of his faithfulness. When Moses goes up the mountain to be with God the

people lose their way and worship idols. God then gives Moses the ten commandments setting out rules for Godly living.

But it is in Jesus that we see the coming of a New Covenant – breaking the cycle of rules and consequences. For the first time the Covenant is unconditional, not relying on people for its power. Jesus is the sacrifice and also God's seal – being the whole identity of God but also having already paid the price for our broken relationship with him.

In this way the emphasis of the Covenant Service is on God's readiness to enfold us in generous love, not dependent on our deserving.

Sing, read or listen to: Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee
<https://youtu.be/Of4l5bTdZ8M>

Let us pray.

God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sins.

For the sin that has made us slow to learn from Christ,
reluctant to follow him,
and afraid to bear the cross:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has caused the poverty of our worship,
the formality and selfishness of our prayers,
our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace,
and our hesitating witness for Christ:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gifts,
evade our responsibilities,
and fail to be good stewards of your creation:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has made us unwilling to overcome evil with good,

tolerant of injustice,
quick to condemn,
and selfish in sharing your love with others:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

Silence

**Have mercy on me, O God,
in your constant love;
in the fullness of your mercy
blot out my offences.
Wash away all my guilt,
and cleanse me from my sin.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Give me the joy of your help again
and strengthen me with a willing spirit.**

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just,
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Therefore to all who truly repent
this is his gracious word:
'Your sins are forgiven.'
Amen. Thanks be to God.

And now we read and meditate on the words of the covenant prayer:

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
let us again accept our place within this
covenant which God has made with us
and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples.

This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit,
we accept God's purpose for us,
and the call to love and serve God

in all our life and work.

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,
others 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.

Eternal God,
in your faithful and enduring love
you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ.
In obedience we hear and accept your commands;
in love we seek to do your perfect will;
with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.
We are no longer our own but yours.

I am no longer my own but yours.

**Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me,
in all that I do
and in all that I may endure;
when there is work for me
and when there is none;
when I am troubled
and when I am at peace.**

**Your will be done
when I am valued
and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment**

**and when it is lacking;
when I have all things,
and when I have nothing.**

**I willingly offer
all I have and am
to serve you,
as and where you choose.**

**Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**

Blessed Assurance **Sing, read or listen to:** <https://youtu.be/yuyf1YQvcwY>