

Sermon Text and Covenant Renewal Proclamation for January 3, 2021

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Jeremiah 31:31-34, John 15:1-8

“Why renew our covenant?”

This Sunday is a unique Sunday because we renew our covenant every year using liturgy that we read together and profess together as a congregation. So we don't have a full blown sermon, and we do have congregational reading that for many of you might feel too scripted. Well, it should, because it is scripted. But every now and then we have to take a break from what we normally do and do something that reminds us of why we do what we do. This is that Sunday. We renew our covenant, our agreement with God.

Before we go forward and start examining the Scripture the first thing I want you to do is to count how many times Jesus says abide in this Scripture. 8 times in 8 verses Jesus uses this word. What does abide mean? It means to remain, to live with, to be in such an intimate relationship with someone that one is indistinguishable from the other. While you are at it, see how many times he mentions the word fruit. That's right, 6 times.

Let's look at John and you may not know it but every Gospel has parables, you know stories that Jesus uses as examples and teaching tools to give us the punch line for how we ought to live our lives. The parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the good Samaritan and so on. Jesus doesn't have any of those, this is as close as he gets where he uses the metaphor of the vines and the fruit. He uses this metaphor to describe our relationship as a disciple with the master. According to this word picture, what is the sign that we (the branches) are truly disciples of Jesus (the Vine?) We bear fruit. (We also obey his commands and love one another...both ideas come out in this passage.) But the dominant theme of this chapter is fruit-bearing.

Before we continue, ask yourself this question: what is the fruit of my life in Jesus? Can you name 2-3 specific things that are born out of your life because of your relationship with the Lord?

And what is the key to fruit-bearing according to this word picture? **Abiding in Jesus**. Think of the word remain, remaining in Jesus. Obviously, if a branch is chopped off of the vine, it can't bear fruit. 8 times Jesus uses the word “remain” to describe the nature of our relationship with him. Abide. Stay attached. Cling to him...and keep clinging to him. All of these give the idea of the word “remain.”

As we are searching for a director of youth ministries in the conversations about what we are looking for I tried to share with the group what someone in seminary taught me about not only youth ministry, but ministry in general. They said you don't have to know all of the fanciest ideas or be the most spiritual, you just have to love the youth and truly care for them. That is true for any work that we do, you have to love the people that you are with and they will know that you care for them and then everything else will flow from that. Abiding with people, remaining loyal and steadfast to people is what these verses is all about. Abiding in Christ, remaining in Christ.

It may not seem like very spectacular advice. But in the end, there can be something deep and real and good that arises out of a life that is lived faithfully and consistently in one place, one marriage, one community, one career, one church. And one Lord! We live in a culture of immediate gratification. We want what we want now...and we expect that of our religion, too. But Jesus speaks of a consistent, persistent, faithful "remaining" in him that produces a fruitful life of discipleship.

Today, ask yourself this question: am I a good "remainder?" Can the Lord count on me to hang in with him, to trust him, to cling to him, in good times and bad, in fruitful times and desert times? What is the key to a fruitful life in Christ? Just show up! Faithfully, every morning...show up. Abide.

Today as we celebrate the first Sunday of the New Year I know that many of you are thinking thank goodness that we are able to throw out the old and bring in the new. 2020 was very very difficult for many of us. But before you throw it out we have to see what have learned during this time? Let's not completely discard it until we identify some ways in which it has blessed us. Maybe you were a grandparent for the first time this year, or maybe you learned a new skill or began a new business.

Whatever it may be, today we are going to renew our covenant because we need to be reminded that our goal and our task is to abide in Christ, to remain in him during times of blessing and during times of pandemic. Let's renew our covenant together.

PROCLAMATION

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
the Christian life is redeemed from sin and consecrated to God. Through baptism, we have entered this life

and have been admitted into the new covenant
of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator.

He sealed it with his own blood, that it might last for ever.

On the one side, God promises to give us new life in Christ,
the Source and Perfecter of our faith.

On the other side, we are pledged

to live no more for ourselves but only for Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us.

From time to time we renew our covenant with God,

especially when we reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant and gather at the Lord's table.

Today, however, we meet, as the generations before us have met, to renew the covenant that binds us to God.

Let us make the covenant of God our own.

INVITATION

Commit yourselves to Christ as his servants.

Give yourselves to him, that you may belong to him.

Christ has many services to be done.

Some are more easy and honorable,

others are more difficult and disgraceful.

Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests,

others are contrary to both.

In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.

But then there are other works where we cannot please Christ
except by denying ourselves.

It is necessary, therefore,

that we consider what it means to be a servant of Christ.

Let us, therefore, go to Christ and pray:

Let me be your servant, under your command.

I will no longer be my own.

I will give myself to your will in all things.

Be satisfied that Christ shall give you your place and work.

Lord, make me what you will.

I put myself fully into your hands:

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 with a willing heart

give it all to your pleasure and disposal.

Christ will be the Savior of none but his servants.
He is the source of all salvation to those who obey.
Christ will have no servants except by consent;
Christ will not accept anything except full consent
to all that he requires.
Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Confirm this by a holy covenant.

To make this covenant a reality in your life, listen to these admonitions:

First, set apart some time, more than once,
to be spent alone before the Lord;
in seeking earnestly God's special assistance
and gracious acceptance of you;
in carefully thinking through all the conditions of the covenant;
in searching your hearts
whether you have already freely given your life to Christ.
Consider what your sins are.
Consider the laws of Christ, how holy, strict, and spiritual they are, and whether you, after
having carefully considered them,
are willing to choose them all.
Be sure you are clear in these matters, see that you do not lie to God.

Second, be serious and in a spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant,
rely upon God's promise of giving and grace and strength,
so you can keep your promise.
Trust not your own strength and power.

Fourth, resolve to be faithful.
You have given to the Lord your hearts,
you have opened your mouths to the Lord,
and you have dedicated yourself to God.
With God's power, never go back.

And last, be then prepared to renew your covenant with the Lord. Fall down on your knees, lift
your hands toward heaven,
open your hearts to the Lord, as we pray:

COVENANT PRAYER

(The people may kneel or bow if they so choose)

**O righteous God, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
see me as I fall down before you.**

**Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will,
for you have promised mercy to me**

if I turn to you with my whole heart.

God requires that you shall put away all your idols.

**I here from the bottom of my heart renounce them all,
covenanting with you that no known sin shall be allowed in my life.**

Against your will, I have turned my love toward the world.

In your power

**I will watch all temptations that will lead me away from you. For my own
righteousness is riddled with sin,
unable to stand before you.**

Through Christ, God has offered to be your God again
if you would let him.

Before all heaven and earth,

I here acknowledge you as my Lord and God.

I take you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for my portion,

**and vow to give up myself, body and soul, as your servant, to serve you in holiness
and righteousness all the days of my life.**

God has given the Lord Jesus Christ
as the only way and means to coming to God.

**Jesus, I do here on bended knees accept Christ
as the only new and living Way,
and sincerely join myself in a covenant with him.**

**O blessed Jesus, I come to you,
hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked,
unworthy even to wash the feet of your servants.**

**I do here, with all my power, accept you as my Lord and Head. I renounce my own
worthiness,**

and vow that you are the Lord, my righteousness.

I renounce my own wisdom, and take you for my only guide.

I renounce my own will, and take your will as my law.

Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

**I do here covenant with you, O Christ,
to take my lot with you as it may fall.**

**Through your grace I promise
that neither life nor death shall part me from you.**

God has given holy laws as a rule of your life.

**I do here willingly put my neck under your yoke, to carry your burden. All your laws are
holy, just, and good.**

I therefore take them as the rule for my words, thoughts, and actions,

**promising that I will strive
to order my whole life according to your direction,
and not allow myself to neglect anything I know to be my duty.**

The Almighty God searches and knows your heart.

**O God, you know that I make this covenant with you today
without guile or reservation.**

If any falsehood should be in it, guide me and help me to set it aright.

And now, glory be to you, O God the Father,

Whom I from this day forward shall look upon as my God and Father.

Glory be to you, O God the Son,

**who have loved me and washed me from my sins in your own blood, and now is my
Savior and Redeemer.**

Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit,

who by your almighty power have turned my heart from sin to God.

**O mighty God, the Lord Omnipotent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have now become
my Covenant Friend.**

And I, through your infinite grace, have become your covenant servant.

So be it.

And let the covenant I have made on earth be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

Signature: _____

Date: