

# Sermon Text for January 2, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Jeremiah 31:31-34, I Peter 1:13-16* *“Why renew our covenant?”*

When we moved to Florida in 1998 we had a couple of weeks to get settled before I started in the pulpit. We had just been living in Italy and it took a bit to get adjusted. My mom lived close by and we didn't have a car yet so I borrowed her car one day and was driving on a four lane highway when a car came from a side street and slowly began to make its way through the highway. Surely it is going to stop, it didn't stop so I had to swerve to not hit the car, but in the swerving the car adjusted itself and for five or six back forths, until I found the car speeding down the highway going backwards when I slammed on the brakes and the car spun around and came to a complete stop on the shoulder of the road.

There were people in a gas station by the shoulder of the road with their mouths open and they said, how did you do that? I said, I have no idea. Today, our Scripture is a bit of a whiplash from the Hallmark Christmas stories that we have been looking at through Advent and into Christmas. We completely move away from the Christmas story and refocus on our personal relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

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, our relationship with God.

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. 2021 was very very difficult for many of us. But before you throw it out we have to see what have we learned during this time? Let's not completely discard it until we identify some ways in which it has blessed us.

We find ourselves once again on the first Sunday of a new year when we find ourselves face to face with the covenant renewal service. We gather ourselves like people have gathered for centuries now to renew their vows and to reaffirm a covenant that we have with our Savior Jesus Christ. If this is your first Sunday here and you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it may seem a bit out of place for you. Nobody is forced to make a vow with Jesus,

although against our will and without any help from us he died on the cross and was raised again so that we could have salvation. We did not choose Jesus, he chose us. But today we gather to recognize that this past year we have not always chosen him, but He has remained faithful.

In 1775 John Wesley used this format for one of his services and credit goes to him for the content of this service. He in turn got the idea from a Puritan Richard Alleine 100 years earlier. Each year this service would be done during a New Year's Eve watchnight service. Wesley, who began the Methodist movement, found this service rich and meaningful as he expressed in his journal "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted.", and "It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing". As you can see this can be a powerful service if you let it be.

If you would take out the booklet which is in your bulletin. Notice that the heart of this service is found in the Covenant Prayer. This prayer requires persons to commit themselves to God. This covenant is serious and we must take it seriously. At the beginning of the prayer I will pause for a few moments to allow people to kneel if they so desire, or to bow your head in respect to the Almighty God and to the step which we are about to take together in this prayer. We will be held responsible for that in which we take part, good or bad. Approach this service with reverence, seriousness, and an open heart to God.

On the last page of the service you will find a space where you can put your signature and the date. I want to encourage all of you to read through, pray through this service. If you feel that you are able to recommit or commit yourselves for the first time to the promises which are written in these pages then sign it, mark the date, and please call me or let me know that you have done that so that I can pray for you and so that we can talk about what is involved in this recommitment, or this commitment.

It is now the year 2022, we will be taking together the first Lord's Supper of the New Year. But even more importantly today in this service you will be given an opportunity to embrace the new life that Jesus has chosen for you. How fitting it is that we will be able to recommit our lives to Christ and then together take part in the sign of that new commitment in the Covenant of the Lord's Supper. We will also have represented an opportunity for you to remember your baptismal covenant by taking a blue bead from the pew in which you are sitting and take it home as a reminder of the covenant that you made today.

Let us now renew our promises before Almighty God.