

Jan 1, 2023 – Covenant – circuit online

Pre-service music:

Great is thy faithfulness – StF 51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLsGGPFSufQ>

I am no longer mine (Matt Beckingham),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xANAudouuk>

Take this moment — StF 513, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFYt0S2UFDU>

==ORDER OF SERVICE ==

Call to worship —

Be Still for the Presence of the Lord – StF 20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz5NYG2kP8k> (Everingham)

Prayer – Methodist Worship Book, 282ff, ppt slides 1-5;

Intro to scripture texts:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 –

Purify my heart — StF 508

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKfuZVWr-8I>

Romans 12:1-8 –

Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You – StF 611

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQaOErUUjm8>

Romans 12:9-21 –

Meditation – Rev Pickard

Gillian's Covenant hymn intro –

Covenant hymn

Covenant Intro and Confessions –

Come, let us use the Grace Divine (MW287),

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak2usFe_PSo

Covenant Prayer – MW 287-9, ppt slides 13-18;

Intercessions – MW 290-1, ppt slides 19-21;

O Thou Who Camest – StF 564

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzjkNAb2EFg>

Benediction — BBP — ppt slide 22 –

Prayer Methodist Worship Book 282

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.

Blessed 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.

Blessed 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.

Blessed be God for ever.

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

[silence]

God of grace, through the mediation of your Son,
you call us into a new covenant,
Help us therefore to draw near with faith
And join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—
a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.
But 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.

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters,
By the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God –
what is good and acceptable and perfect.
For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you
not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think,
but to think with sober judgement,
each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,
so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,
and individually we are members one of another.
We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us:
prophecy, in proportion to faith;
ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;
the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity;
the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.
Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
do not claim to be wiser than you are.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;
for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'
No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them;
if they are thirsty, give them something to drink;
for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.'
Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

Some years ago, an elderly gentleman asked me:

“Do Christians have the Mind of Christ?”

Certainly the Mind of Christ is offered to us –

Whether we can fully attain this “possession” within this lifetime is a question!

In good Wesleyan tradition, we are moving on to perfection –

“We are moving in the light of God, we are moving in the light of God...”

On this Covenant Service, we take the time to stop and consider again –

Are we walking with God? Are we walking in the light of God with each other?

Are we moving closer to having the Mind of Christ in us?

Certainly, God wants us to be of one mind with God and with each other –

And that’s where the hard work comes in!

When I was a teacher, several of us went to a teachers’ conference and concluded:

“We could have a really good school,

If it weren’t for all these students!”

Likewise, it’s tempting to think: “We could have a really good church

If we didn’t have to deal with all these difficult people!”

From the inside and from the outside – our difficulties getting on with each other

Is often what discourages us from living out our faith with each other.

But that is exactly where we are to start.

The difficult places are the places where God needs us to be

These are the places where God’s grace is most needed

And where it can be most abundant.

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We in the church are not in the business of getting rid of each other –

We are in the business of learning to live with each other –

Not just tolerating “bad behaviour”

But transforming – and allowing ourselves to be transformed in the process.

On this Covenant Sunday, I ask each of you to think of a person who drives you crazy....

One who annoys you deeply...

Could be someone in your church congregation

Could be someone at home or in your neighbourhood.

Chances are it will be someone with whom you come in frequent contact

(Because otherwise, they wouldn’t have the opportunity to annoy you –

Or you wouldn’t have the opportunity to be annoyed!)

This is the person God has put in your life

In order to transform you.

Not to remake you in that person’s image of you – or of themselves –

Most of the time, that person won’t even realise that’s their purpose

But God knows.

And God has allowed that person to be in your life for a purpose.

The purpose is to transform you.

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Perhaps God has put this person in your life
to make you more patient, more tolerant, more appreciative of difference.
We've all heard that often what repels us most in another
Is the very trait we share with that person –
And so, if we're bossy, we don't want to be around another bossy person.
Or if we're hesitant, someone else's hesitancy annoys us more...
Or if we're forgetful, someone else's forgetfulness makes us even more anxious...

Being with others is often like looking at ourselves in a mirror –
God puts us in community in order that we might see ourselves more accurately...
Sometimes we find that we're attracted to opposites –
Sometimes, we even marry that person!
But eventually, we find that opposition isn't so attractive anymore...
One marriage counsellor years ago told Alfred and me that those who marry their
“opposite”
Actually find over time that they are gradually becoming more like the other...
And I remember a moment some years ago when I suddenly realised
That Alfred and I had *crossed!*
I had become like him, and he had become like me –
And fortunately, we were able to recognise that moment and have a good laugh...
And then keep moving on in our newly opposite directions!

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I often think of church congregations as giant stone polishers –
The tumblers that take seemingly ordinary pebbles
And tumble them around for hours and hours
Till all the rough edges are worn off
And the inner beauty emerges...

That's transformation.
That's what can happen in a church congregation
that is committed to living and learning together.
People tell me sometimes that they don't need the church –
They have their other groups
Which is fine,
But most other groups are not around for the long-haul
The time it takes to really polish off all the rough edges.
We're not in the 'Apprentice' business of saying, "You're fired!"
We're in the business of saying at times, "You messed up,
But we still love you, and God still loves you,
And together we're going to continue on this road..."

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When Paul says to the Romans, who were a fractious bunch,
“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...”
He wasn't saying, “just be nice to each other on Sunday mornings”,
He was saying, “jump in with your whole being...
And be prepared to be struck down, time and again...
Because this is how you're going to be transformed, remade...”
“But,” we protest, “I don't want to be transformed! I'm happy just the way I am!”

And God is happy with you as well –
That is, God loves you just the way you are,
But too much to leave you that way.

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What God actually intends for each of us
Is that we will have the Mind of Christ within us...
And so God has set you into this church community –
Perhaps for life, perhaps for just a short time
In order to continue with your transformation –
“so that you may discern what is the will of God – [the Mind of Christ]
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Moving on to perfection... “Holy and acceptable to God”

As we come before God on this Covenant Sunday,
At the beginning of the New Year –
Many of us are all too aware
Of all the ways we’ve messed up over the past year...
Of the ways we’ve fallen short of “holy and acceptable to God.”
Of the ways in which our mind has NOT been the Mind of Christ.

But God is not in the business of throwing us out.
God is in the business of transforming us.
Of putting “the mind of Christ” within us...

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Before the elderly gentlemen left my office that day,
I gave him a book by Desmond Tutu called, “Made for Goodness.”
We discussed how we’ve all messed up,
From the Garden to the Holocaust and all our personal disasters.
But in the beginning, we were made for Goodness
And that’s where God intends us to be in the end as well...

And so we gather again this year to renew the Covenant
In the sight of God,
But also in the presence of all these other people
Who will be part of our transformation – if we let them!

Supporting, encouraging, moulding, forming each other
So that, as a body, we learn to “discern what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
So that, each of us individually and all of us together
Might have “the mind of Christ” within us. Amen.

Listen, my people, here is my challenge:

Can you be loving as I love you?

Those who offend you, hurt or ill-treat you,

Like you God's children, they're precious too!"

Do you mean us, Lord? Can it be done, Lord?

Self-giving love that looks for no gain?

If you'll stay close we'll give it a try, Lord,

Showing your mercy, sharing your pain.

"Listen, my people, here is my challenge:

Can you forgive as I forgive you?

Those who have failed you, pained or betrayed you,

Do not condemn, you've all done it too."

Do you mean us, Lord? Can it be done, Lord?

You will repay, so leave it to you?

Help us to trust and let you be judge, Lord.

As you forgive, may we forgive too.

Words: © Gillian Collins

Confession Methodist Worship Book 285-6

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.

**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.

Covenant Prayer

Methodist Worship Book 287-9

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 a 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.
Ye 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.**

Intercessions

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.
Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy
catholic church:

Make us all one, that the world may believe.

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority
in the nations of the world;

Establish justice and peace among all people.

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief
or trouble;

Deliver them from their distress.

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your
eternal glory;

Bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray in silence for our own needs and for those of
others....

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace
To make these prayers,
And you have promised through Christ our Lord
That when two or three agree in his name
You will grant what they ask.
Answer now your servants' prayers
According to their needs;
In this world grant that we may truly know you,
and in the world to come
graciously give us eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Benediction

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and
the Holy Spirit,

Be upon us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.