

Ps 8; Ecc 3:1-13; Rev 21:1-6a; Mt 25:31-46
12-31-17 Covenant Renewal Service

The long history of covenant is interesting. I'm not going to unpack that history here. It is a story with many twists and turns on account of our fallen human nature. The Old Testament of the Bible is the chronicle of the covenant. The New Testament of the Bible is the beginning of the Good News of the Savior whose birthday we have just celebrated.

On one side of this covenant stands God, who promises to give us new life in Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Every day God proves His goodness and grace to us, showing us that His promise still stands firm.

On the other side, we stand as those who promise no longer to live life for ourselves but instead to live only for Jesus Christ because He has loved us and given His life for us.

I encourage you today to think about the character of this covenant. Some hear the terms and say, "Oh no you don't – I'm not giving up my rights to freedom of thought and action!" After

some years of moral and ethical failure, we revisit this covenant and say, “Oh-oh, I need a standard. I must look to goodness – I must find peace in my inner being, if I am to live out this life of mine.” Then, after a time of answering the call to God’s grace and mercy, we say at last, “Now I see God’s wisdom and generosity. He made Himself completely vulnerable as a man of flesh in order to bear all this burden of evil in me. He has freed me for joyful obedience!”

Let me tell you a story. John Wesley was born into a family of former Quakers (Samuel and Susanna Wesley). He received a strict Christian upbringing and a good theological education at Oxford. He was ordained into the Church of England. John was impeccable in his practice of his religion. But, he found the congregations of the Anglican Church to be lukewarm at their best, and ice cold at their worst. He knew something was missing, but he did not know what it was.

He sought to become a missionary to the peoples of the Americas. He traveled to Savannah, Georgia, a colony of England. John went from disaster to disaster. He found he could only

preach to the English colonists at Savannah. There was no place to meet Native Americans to present the gospel message. John also fell in love with a girl named Sophie, but was aced out by a romantic rival when he became ambivalent about marriage. He became vindictive toward the couple, and got crosswise with Sophie's uncle, the magistrate. John actually had legal charges against him when he quickly booked passage on a ship for England.

It took months to sail the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. John's fellow passengers, the Moravians, a German Christian group, seemed at peace and filled with joy as the ship was tossed by heavy December weather. They were calm, singing hymns and praying, while he was afraid he was going to die. He concluded that his faith was only skin-deep. He returned to England with the disturbing conviction that he was not a real Christian. In 1738, his brother Charles had a vital infilling of the Holy Spirit, and caught on fire for Jesus. Later, in May of that year, John was depressed. Some friends said, "Let's go down to Aldersgate Street to hear a teaching on the Letter to the Romans. John said,

“No, I don’t feel like it.” His friends insisted, so he reluctantly went along. There, as the preface to the Book of Romans by Martin Luther, was being read aloud, John suddenly felt his heart “strangely warmed.” He felt that Jesus had actually died for him personally and had taken away his sins and all his doubt and anxiety. John experienced a sudden infilling of the Holy Spirit – and began to be about the kingdom of Christ every minute of every day. He was revived, as some Christians like to say. John Wesley immediately rededicated himself to his Savior. He embraced the Christian life as a life found in Christ, redeemed from sin, and consecrated to God. He entered into this life and felt he had been admitted into the new covenant of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of this covenant. Christ sealed it with His own blood so it would last forever.

On New Year’s Eve 2017, let us remember and reaffirm our promises and vows. Come today and renew your covenant with God. Many generations have done this before us. Let us make the covenant our own, renewing with both

joy and sincerity the covenant that binds us all to God. (Use The Confession page) Silence...

Words of Assurance and Pardon

Leader: God, the Father of all mercies, is faithful to cleanse us from our sins and restore us to Christ's image. Praise and glory be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

The Invitation

Leader: Let us gathered here before the Lord now in covenant commit ourselves to Christ as his servants. Let us give ourselves to Him so that we may fully belong to Him. Jesus Christ has left us with many services to be done. Some of these services are easy and honorable, but some are difficult and disgraceful. Some line up with our desires and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we please both Christ and ourselves, but then there are other works where we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Jesus Christ, we offer You this prayer:

(Say prayer printed in the worship guide)

