

“Covenant”

Brief sermon notes - Gregor Henderson

Wesley Uniting Church, 1st January 2012

Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:22-40

1. Our Bible is divided into two parts – the Old and the New Testaments. Another word for testament is covenant. The OT is so called because it primarily deals with the covenant between God and the people of Israel, initiated by God through Moses in around 1280 BC. The NT is so called because it deals with the new covenant initiated by God with the whole of humanity through Jesus. The coming of Jesus brings in the new covenant or new testament.
2. Luke’s account of Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus visiting the temple in Jerusalem to fulfil their religious obligations 40 days after the birth introduces us to two grand people of faith – Simeon and Anna. Each of them feels their life has been fulfilled as they recognise the action of God in Jesus. Anna uses the language of the redemption of Jerusalem. Simeon celebrates with more expansive language, speaking of God’s salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel. In Jesus, they see God’s action for the whole of humanity, they rejoice that a new covenant is coming into being.
3. Covenant is a two-way agreement. There are benefits and obligations. In the new covenant brought in by Jesus, there are many benefits – let me cite what I regard as five of the most important benefits:
 - God’s love and forgiveness there for us always;
 - A sense of purpose in life, to love and serve God through loving and serving others;
 - Ability to cope with adversity, as God always with us;
 - A sense of peace and deep joy in life, knowing you are loved, knowing you are never alone;
 - The gift of eternal life.
4. And what are the obligations we are to meet in order to receive these covenant benefits? Simply to receive, to accept God’s love for yourself - to sense God reaching out to you and to receive.
5. Then, having received God’s love and knowing it every day, to live following the way of Jesus, the way of self-giving service. This is not part of the obligation, part of the requirement, but it’s a voluntary response. It’s the way to maintain purpose and peace and joy.
6. It’s appropriate to be reminded of the new covenant at the beginning of the year. It’s also right to do so in the context of celebrating Holy Communion – when Jesus said over the wine, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood”. Every time we participate in Communion we are renewing the covenant with God. Thanks be to God for all the ways in which he loves for us, for the new covenant he has brought into being in the coming of Jesus, and for all the blessings he wills for us in this coming year. Amen.