

St James United Church - Sunday 10th January 2021
The Covenant Service

Welcome

Call to Worship – Peter

Opening prayers

Let us pray.

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.
Blessèd 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.
Blessèd 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.
Blessèd be God for ever.

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

Silence

Collect

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

The Ministry of the Word

A reading from the Law –

Exodus 24.3-11

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do. ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. ⁸ Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

⁹ Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹ God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

For the wisdom that guides us: we praise you, O God.

A reading from the Prophets

Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34

³¹ 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. ³² 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, ^[a] says the LORD. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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.

For the word that inspires us: we praise you, O God.

A reading from the Epistles.

Romans 12.1-2

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 the truth that enlightens us: we praise you, O God.

Gospel Reading

John 15.1-10 –

Jesus said to his disciples:

¹ 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.

² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself
unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches.

Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,
because apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers;
such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,
ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.'

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

This is the Gospel of Christ: Praise to Christ our Lord.

Short Comment

The Covenant

God made a covenant with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law.

The covenant was renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in his life, work, death and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power, and united in love and obedience.

In this covenant God promises us new life in Christ.

For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God.

We meet, therefore, as generations have met before us, to renew the covenant which bound them and binds us to God.

Let us then seek forgiveness for the sin by which we have denied God's claim upon us.

Prayers of Confession

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.

Silence

**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.

Hymn: Come, let us use the grace divine – read by Peter

1. Come, let us use the grace divine,
And all, with one accord,
In a perpetual cov'nant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord:

2. Give up ourselves, through Jesu's power,
His name to glorify;
And promise, in this sacred hour,
For God to live and die.

3. The cov'nant we this moment make
Be ever kept in mind:
We will no more our God forsake,
Or cast his words behind.

4. We never will throw off his fear
Who hears our solemn vow;
And if thou art well pleased to hear,
Come down, and meet us now.

5. To each the cov'nant blood apply,
Which takes our sins away;
And register our names on high,
And keep us to that day.

(Charles Wesley (1707-1788))

The Covenant

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 are 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.
Yet 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.**

Prayers of Intercession (led by Anne)

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.

Prayer requests received

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 . . .

Silence

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.

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing and Dismissal

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