



Sunday 3 January 2021

The idea of a covenant between a Christian and God appears frequently in the Bible. John Wesley, who started the Methodist movement, wrote a 'Covenant Prayer' to be read aloud once a year at a special service. It was meant to help people to open themselves more fully to God.

He developed a custom of holding Covenant Services near the beginning of the New Year. Typically, as here, the Covenant replaces the Creed

Wesley understood Christian discipleship as a Covenant relationship. It was like a marriage between human beings (both as a community and as individuals) on the one side and God in Christ on the other (e.g. Ephesians 5:21–33).

- All the Bible readings come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration have been included at the end rather than in situ because many following the service will be in isolation and unable to celebrate the sacrament.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Firmly I believe and truly](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Hear the words of the angel to Joseph:

‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ Therefore,
let us seek the forgiveness of God through Jesus the Saviour of the world.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.

**Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for The Annual Covenant Service

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.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.' See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.' For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. Then shall the young women rejoice

in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord. *Jeremiah 31:7-14*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. *Ephesians 1:1-14*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Purify my heart

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me"'.') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. *John 1:1, 5-18*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Take a mixture of liquids and gradually warm it. The liquids will leave the mixture one by one, just as steam leaves hot water. The more volatile leave first. It's called 'distillation'. We use the technique for two reasons: to separate the different component parts of a mixture—such as petrol and paraffin from crude oil—and, in that process, we purify each portion. Taking that idea, what would happen if we took the complex mixture we call 'Christianity' and distilled it? What does it comprise?

Today's Gospel passage describes the incarnation and helps us distil Christianity.

The first component part is **purity**. This word resonates through the entire Bible. So, while Hebrews says, 'Without holiness no one will see the Lord', that moral purity is attainable by everyone willing to accept it. 'Be holy as I am holy ...'; 'Be perfect as God is perfect ...'; 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God ...'. That's what today's Gospel means where it says, 'He gave power to become children of God All who received him, who believed.'

The second part relates to the first. It's **newness**. This word resonates all through the New Testament. 'A new commandment I give to you ...'; 'All who are in Christ are a new creation ...'; 'See, I am doing a new thing ...'; 'Behold, I make all things new ...' The central idea is the way we are forgiven our past *in order to receive the Holy Spirit of God*. With the Spirit, we can live and behave in different, better ways. That explains the next bit in today's Gospel, 'The Word became flesh' is all about. God became human and, with the Spirit in our own lives, we can start to copy him.

The third part relates to the first two. It's **communion** because we can commune with God—join with Him, appreciate Him, understand and communicate with Him. This word defines the way we even speak about Scripture (the old and the new covenants—'testaments'—which are binding agreements between us and God. 'Everyone will know Me [says God] from the greatest to the least ...'; 'I and the Father are one ...'; 'Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters ...' 'Our Father ...'; That's why, in today's Gospel, the next portion says, 'No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' and don't forget the word known here means more than 'know about' and refers properly to relationship.

If the whole point of distillation is to separate the portions we want, it also means we leave behind the contaminants—the tar and dirt. So, as we distil Christianity, we also jettison those things that cling to most forms of Christianity and pollute it. We will probably leave behind false ideas and unhelpful practises in order to concentrate on purity, newness and communion. The bits we remove often look like habits or traits of personality. Some of them may even look good. But if they're not of the Gospel they need to go. Our eternal destiny depends on their complete removal.

Distillation requires heat and extremity. Perhaps the process of distilling our Christianity will feel uncomfortable. Indeed, it might excruciate, but perhaps it should because that word means literally 'of the cross'. We are being crucified with Christ.

Today in the Church calendar we re-affirm our Covenant with God. It's a distillation of Christianity. It affirms communion where it says, 'You are mine and I am yours'. But most of it concentrates on the residue, the bits we leave behind if we are to attain purity and newness.

So we now re-afford the Covenant between us and God. Say it slowly, Savour the words and concepts. See which parts of the prayer are comfortable and which shock. And above all, let all its words percolate deeply into and through our souls.

The Covenant Prayer

Beloved in Christ, let us again claim for ourselves this covenant which God has made with his people, and take upon us the yoke of Christ. This means that we are content that he appoints us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward. I therefore invite you all to renew your Covenant with God the Almighty.

All I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen and Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help us to mean it and give us the strength to apply it. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

All Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, help your Church to be new, pure and in complete communion with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

All Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray that the structures of the world will be renewed, become cleaner and realigned themselves with You. In particular [...]

Lord, in your mercy

All Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we ask that you'll remind us to work to alleviate the suffering we see everywhere around us. And we pray for those whose suffering we see [...].

Lord, in your mercy

All Amen.

Loving heavenly Father, we pray this prayer. As we start a New Year, we pray for those who have died —today, during this part year and those whose time in this earth will expire during this coming year. Prepare them to meet with you.

Lord, in your mercy

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Blessed are the peacemakers:
they shall be called children of God.

We meet in the name of Christ and Share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Will you come and follow me (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May God the Father keep you in all your days.

All Amen.

May God the Son shield you in all your ways.

All Amen.

May God the Spirit bring you healing and peace.

All Amen.

May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from you
and pour upon you blessing and light.

All Amen.

And the blessing of God the Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 I the Lord of sea and sky (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.

You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.

His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.

And so we gladly thank you,

with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord;

and as we obey his command,

send your Holy Spirit,

that broken bread and wine outpoured

may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;

do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

All praise to you,
almighty God and heavenly king,
who sent your Son into the world
to take our nature upon him
and to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that, as we are born again in him,
so he may continually dwell in us
and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven,
now and for ever.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.