

July 24, 2022

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Kingdomtide

“Covenant”

Announcements:

- SPPRC Chair announces Erin’s departure.
- Health Team/Covid Hazard
- Reminder to mark your calendars for Chuck Crain in concert, Monday August 29 at 7 pm.
- Printed copy of the sermon available.

Pastoral Prayer:

Fount of Blessing, God of Healing, Maker of New Covenants;

As you spoke through the prophet, Hosea,  
*Lead us with cords of human kindness; Lead us with bands of love*

Yet what does it mean to be led with cords of human kindness and bands of love?

What does it mean to be in covenant with you and with each other?

Remind us of the connection our souls have to you, O God, our source of life and love.

You tug at our cords to remind us that we also need the kindness of other humans.

You pluck at our heartstrings to remind us of the love you’ve placed within each of us.

But we still become distracted.

We get lost in our aggravations, disappointments, and deep-seated longings.

We forget the ties that hold us together, the promises we have made and the hope we have

received.

Sometimes, it seems as though the negativity and sadness will swallow us whole.

How are we to turn this pain into love and kindness?

God, you know these feelings all too well; oftentimes, as a result of human action or inaction.

The story, repeated over and over again in our sacred texts, tells of your incredible love for us;

Your faithfulness in the midst of our failure.

You, O God, choose love, despite the pain.

You choose community, despite the cost.

May we do the same, trusting that the Holy One is in our midst.

Amen.

As the people of God, let us pray now, together, that prayer that Jesus taught his first disciples:

**Our Father (the Lord’s Prayer) ... Amen.**

**Romans 12:2-12**

*2 Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.*

*3 Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. 4 We have many parts in one body, but the parts don’t all have the same function. 5 In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. 6 We have different gifts that are consistent with God’s grace that has*

*been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith.<sup>7</sup> If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. <sup>8</sup> If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.*

*<sup>9</sup> Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. <sup>11</sup> Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! <sup>12</sup> Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer.*

**May God add a blessing to this reading from God's holy word. Amen.**

{SLOW DOWN AND SPEAK CLEARLY}

We began with a vision of what the world could be, not according to the pattern of what is, but the pattern of how God has related to us, with grace, and mercy, and steadfast love.

Our mission, as we follow the way of Jesus, the way that leads to that kind of world, is to help others discover and grow in the love of God and the way of Christ, renewing our minds, opening ourselves to being changed; transforming the world.

All of us are called.  
This “faith” thing, this “church” thing is something that we do in community.

We need the gifts of others to be what we are meant to be together.

It's all about relationships.

Loving God.

Loving Others.

Proclaiming Christ to the world.

And the nature of the relationship, in fullness, is not acquaintance.

It's not casual.

It's covenant.

It's commitment, and sacred vow, witnessed by and modeled after the Divine Love that commits God's-self to a particular way of relating to humans.

Serious... and joyful, weighty... and liberating, we covenant together to be God's people.

Beloved Saints,

**Will you pray with me?**

**Lord, we are no longer our own, but we are yours. Put us to what you will, our reputation is in your hands. Whether we're successful or persecuted, whether it feels like we're the star of the game or sitting on the sidelines, rich or poor, in sickness and in health, we yield everything to you. Keep us faithful in your love.**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.**

Paul writes to the church in Rome that “we belong to each other”.

Think about that.

Think about what a radical difference that is from the pattern of the world that is most often presented to us, which is all about ME, and what’s MINE, and how we can only depend on ourselves and NO ONE CAN TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

We belong to each other.

The relationship between us as Christians is a covenant, of which the sign and means is baptism.

Baptism by water AND the Spirit, naming and claiming the vision, mission, and call of God through Jesus Christ in and on our lives.

And that baptism is always into community, into fellowship, into relationship with other Christians, part of a larger Body, a body that we reconstitute, that we re-assemble, reconnect, re-member when we gather at the Lord’s table, receiving the Body of Christ broken for us that we might be the Body of Christ for the world, redeemed by His blood.

So as a way of developing a shared vocabulary of what that might look like, in the tradition of David Letterman’s to 10 lists, I offer you the **Top 10 list of assumptions in church** (originally created by Rev. Jim Bell)

These aren’t things that we always see because we’re still growing together in grace.

And the list is not exhaustive, but it’s a good place to start, I think.

### ***10. You want me to be blessed.***

As covenant members together of a community of disciples of Jesus, we bless, and do not curse.

So we should be able to assume that other members of the community desire good for us.

And by God’s love shed abroad in our hearts, we want good for others.

### ***9. You choose to serve me; I don’t have to serve you.***

A covenant is not a transaction.

It’s the foundation of a relationship.

We belong to each other and we’re together in the service of Jesus.

And we’re free to find our own ways to express that love in service to each other and the world.

***8. Although neither of us is perfect, both of us are acceptable to God, and God may choose to use or speak through either of us.***

Moses was a stutterer.

David was a murderer.

Timothy had stomachaches and Lazarus was dead.

We test the words and guidance, but we remember that God often uses the things that seem foolish according to the patterns of this world to reveal God's will and purposes.

***7. You would rather I tell you I'm hurt and work to reconcile our relationship.***

Relationship is messy.

Forgiveness and reconciliation require truth.

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, we are people of grace, by grace, through grace.

We should be able to talk to each other, to value each other enough to name what's going on, not calling each other out, but for the sake of calling each other IN to healthier relationship.

***6. You serve the church; the church does not serve you.***

This may be the biggest, most countercultural item on this list.

It's JFK saying "ask not what your country can do for you."

It's remembering that we're not called to have our needs met, or to get spiritually fed, or to a great Sunday School, or vital worship, or the best coffee fellowship, or youth group, or any other program.

We're called to follow Jesus, to make disciples, and transform the world.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.

***5. We each serve the Gospel and First UMC to the best of our understanding and ability.***

We're all doing the best we can.

When we disagree, let's start with this idea, and work for shared understanding and increased ability.

***4. You would rather I tell you if I think that you are falling short.***

As covenant members together, we are our siblings keepers.

We need to be able to hold each other accountable for how we're walking the walk of faith, and to do so in love with grace.

But we need to do it.

### ***3. The Bible is a guide for how we live.***

There are lots of books, but the Bible is our sacred text.

It's not a books of answers for 21<sup>st</sup> century questions, but it absolutely provides a guide for how we wrestle with and resolve ethical and practical questions of our time, providing shining examples and terrible warnings.

### ***2. We accept the decisions and authority of our pastor, Church Council, denomination, etc.***

Not, we agree with all of them.

But we accept that God has called folks into positions of authority and responsibility.

And we accept the authority and responsibility for holding our leaders accountable, for supporting them so that they can do their best thinking, instead of being conformed to the patterns of this world.

We demand that they use their gifts passionately and enthusiastically.

### ***1. God is so thrilled with our mindset that we will be blessed beyond our understanding and ability.***

God desires far more to connect us to the source of goodness and blessing than we have knowledge, desire, or understanding of how infinitely good and gracious God's will is for us.

Every good thing that we want for the church, for this congregation, for our community, and for the world, begins with our covenant to be the people of God together, the seeds of the kingdom breaking in and transforming the world.

May it be so.  
Amen.

#### Invitation to the offering:

God has freely given good gifts to us, even salvation. May we cheerfully give, with no strings attached, that God's love in Christ Jesus may be made known in the world.

#### Charge:

I charge you, servants of God, to go into the world and be the Church. Model covenant relationship with each other this week, and invite others into servant leadership.

#### Benediction:

Beloved Saints of God, go now in peace, and may the love of God, the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit go with you now and remain with you always. Amen.