

10.05.25 ~ Pentecost 17 + Communion
“Remembering God’s Covenant through Jesus”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Exodus 24:3-8 ^{ESV}

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. 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 twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw 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 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Leader: These Are Words from God.
People: Thanks be to God!

Hebrews 9:15-28 ^{ESV}

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. ²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Leader: These Are the Promising Words of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Forgiving Lord, we thank you for this church and the legacy of its people before us. We worship and adore you, remembering your blood, sweat, and tears of the cross as you fulfilled your mission on earth. Today, as we remember our church covenant, we also remember our Godly covenant and commitment through communion. Help us to recall our baptism and conversion experience as we surrendered to your love and ways of living and giving. Discipline our lives both physically and spiritually as we recommit ourselves to you this fall, studying your word, praying and listening for your guidance, and remembering your sacrifice. Let us hear your message through this messenger and all our moments of worship. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

We use or see the word “covenant” in church and in the Bible, but do we know what it means? The dictionary calls it an agreement or understanding between two people (like a marriage covenant) or groups of people like an organizational covenant or business covenant. If you ever served on a Homeowners Association Board, your definition of covenants means rules and guidelines among neighbors and landowners in a certain neighborhood development: agreed upon fencing regulations, house colors, building additions, or dog-walking guidelines, for example. For churches and ourselves, our covenant is a code of conduct and commitment to one another as members. While the issues addressed, their legality or the documents themselves, may seem trivial or unnecessary, they are not; covenants are agreed upon by both parties, so they are binding formal agreements especially in real estate law.

I would also say that a covenant with God or his human instrument (i.e. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus) is a formal agreement for how God and his people would live together in harmony and understanding; it is binding. In Exodus 19:3-4, the Israelites were

encamped on the Sinai Peninsula as Moses ascended the mountain to pray. It was at Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai) that Moses met God, who reminded him that he had protected them from numerous plagues, conveyed his people safely across the Red Sea, and continued to carry them on eagles' wings as they learned to fly, figuratively, and become his people. His covenant would make Israel respected by other nations as they were God's treasures. God assured Moses that through his covenant, they would become a royal priesthood and a holy people if they agreed to obey his laws.

Exodus 20 is the chapter when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and when he revealed them, the people responded with fear and awe. The following chapters outline other rules and guidelines; this is called "The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-24.11): a list of civic, ethical, and religious statutes and ordinances to help them live well together in community. After Moses read the people all the statutes and ordinances (not just the first Ten Commandments), the people agreed to obey them. Moses wrote down God's commands and ceremoniously ratified the law. He consecrated a sacred altar, had twelve stone pillars erected to represent the original twelve tribes or clans of the Israelites, had the people prepare burnt offerings of sacrifice, and sealed the covenant by sprinkling the pillars and people with blood (I'm glad we did not do that today!) Symbolically, of course, we will drink the juice in communion which represents Jesus' blood on the cross, so we use similar rituals of offering and acknowledgment of God's power.

One could say "covenant" is a formal agreement between God and his people, but it is more accurate to say God made the covenant and

invited the people of Israel to participate in the Kingdom as vocation and they accepted. This is similar to our church covenant. It is not a legally binding contract on you, but it is an understanding of how we live and serve God in community. Both churches were invited by God (by that I mean called into faithful vocation) to join together in community and agree to support one another with certain ethical standards and commitments to Christ and to one another, including spiritual development, learning, teaching, financially giving, encouraging, challenging one another in positive ways, nurturing the fruits of the Spirit, praying for one another, and sharing the Gospel with others.

The unknown writer of Hebrews focused on the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as he spoke of covenant only in the context of the holy blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his ministry teachings superseded previous covenants with God. The Mosaic Covenant failed from human weakness. Jesus' covenant would succeed through supernatural power of Christ's forgiveness and removal of human sin. The tabernacle or temple would be replaced by relationship and surrender to Jesus, God's only son. The Levitical code was all about cleanliness, eating and drinking, but conveyed nothing about impure hearts, the inside of a person. Through Jesus' many miracles and teachings, we see how he was more concerned with the inner person, a person's soul. After Christ's death and resurrection, the cleansing rituals were unnecessary. Jesus taught that a relationship with God the Father through him was more important and transformative than any external ritual. The holy, pure, internal state of one's heart was what our Creator God longed for and knew that only his son Jesus could redeem. It is this

sacred and relational redemption that we celebrate when we have communion together. That is the most important covenant we have. Our church covenant and our Covenant Book here on the table are outward ways we demonstrate our personal commitment to Jesus, each other, and the church as a whole. If you have not signed it, please come forward at the end of the service during the hymn to do so. It is not a legal document, only a symbol of our community and willingness to covenant or agree to live, worship, and serve together as God directs us.

Let us remember that Christ overcame death on the cross, and because of God who sent him, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his miraculous resurrection, we are forgiven our sins and have eternal life. In the closing prayer, let us confess our human weakness, our sins of omission and commission, as we renew our covenant of mutual prayers and surrender to his will. May you share your faith with others in need of this merciful grace and love. Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we pray for your grace and mercy in these matters of covenantal community. Forgive us and help us to boldly commit to you and one another all that pleases you. Help us to grow in spiritual maturity by working together well in service and mission. Lord, we ask you to bring others who love you or are curious about you so that we may nurture and teach, sharing your many blessings. Change us as we must to attract others to our congregation. We dedicate the ideas shared here today and ask you to multiply them as you continue to multiply our resources. Bless these communion elements as we remember your sacrifice on the cross in humble gratitude. It is in your name, we pray, Amen.