



“Recommitment and Renewal in the New Year”

SHINE LIGHT! Sermon Series

Homily by Nathan Oney

Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

In 1775, John Wesley introduced a covenant service as an important part of the spiritual life of the people called Methodist. This renewal service was a time to gather annually for self-examination, reflection, and re-dedication of their lives to God.

For Wesley, what it meant to be a mature disciple of Christ was the joining of believers in a covenant “to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul” and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He urged his Methodist followers to renew, “at every point, our covenant, that the Lord should be our God.”

By the end of Wesley’s life, the service was observed typically on the Sunday nearest January 1st. The covenant renewal service has undergone revisions and adaptations over the years, but its purpose as a pledge of commitment to ongoing discipleship and Christ-like character has always remained.

This morning, on the eve of New Year’s Eve, we are taking this opportunity to experience this service ourselves.

Covenant is a peculiar word. It evokes a sense of the sacred, and carries a note of gravitas. It is seldom heard outside of religious space, being mostly understood as the promises made to and by God’s people throughout the bible. In this sense it can seem far removed from us today, especially as we go forth from this place and begin our lives in the new year.

The reality is, though, that the idea of covenant is what underlies all of our relationships. Covenant is where grace and accountability come together in unity.

On one side of this covenant is God, who initiates the covenant and comes in love to be with us and promises to give us new life in Jesus Christ. Every day God shows goodness and grace to us. God’s steadfast faithfulness endures forever. From Deuteronomy we hear: “the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

On the other side of this covenant, we stand as those who promise to no longer live life for ourselves, but as God’s beloved children, desirous of a loving, life-giving relationship with God and our neighbor that is transformational. Wesley prayed: O God, “You are now become my Covenant-Friend, and I through Your infinite grace am become Your Covenant-Servant.”

As we move into a new year--a new beginning--we don’t do it alone. We are accompanied by a God who is our Covenant Friend. This is a God who is not angry, but abounds in steadfast love. This God is also the model for all our covenantal relationships—friendship, marriage, congregation, community. All these human relationships are about love and promise, about forgiveness and persistence, about patience and humility, about potential and transformation. And this is the very nature of God’s love for us.

This covenantal relationship is at the heart of what the kingdom of God is all about. In covenant with God and one another, we find hope. We experience belonging, extend and receive forgiveness, and discover a sense of purpose and direction. We learn to live with appreciation and joy. Covenant renewal is a renewal of our ability to notice and experience God in our midst, and of our desire to partner with God in achieving God’s aims for the world, in being part of God’s work for justice and peace.

Covenant renewal occurs many times in Scripture. And we join today with countless Christians who have done this before us. Today we make the covenant our own, renewing with both joy and sincerity the covenant that binds us all to God and to one another.

Let us pray: Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: 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, who taught us when we pray together to say:

Our Father...