

Jesus: The Yes to God's Promises

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. 20

We have heard a lot of things that have sounded like promises over the past year ... and lived most of the year under threat for our health, and we have found ourselves sanctioned with our freedom cut down for the good of others. Our choices have been reduced to ones we make within our 4 walls and we are yet again constrained by a stay at home order, necessitated by the terrible rise of COVID cases around London at a rate of 1 person in every 20.

It reminds me of Old Testament times of Exile - when the people of God had been held captive by invading regimes, forcing the people to live in places that were not their own and under rules that were alien to them.

Jeremiah the prophet wrote the prophetic words he was given by God. It too was to a people who were under the disruption - both in the capital of Jerusalem as they recognised their incompleteness as a nation, the people still in Jerusalem were under siege by the Babylonians and many still Exiled in Babylon - as we see in Chapter 29 as Jeremiah exhorts them to live and not merely exist, although they are not where they want to be. In chapter 31 we find these words :

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel

after that time," declares the Lord.

"I will put my law in their minds

and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

34 No longer will they teach their neighbour,

or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'

because they will all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest,"

declares the Lord.

"For I will forgive their wickedness

and will remember their sins no more." (NIV)

On this Covenant Sunday, when people of the Wesleyan traditions renew our 'Covenant with God', it is fitting that we pause to reflect on what it means to make our own Covenant promise with God. There are questions of relevancy that we can address, such as "what does it mean for me to make promises to God when I see no satisfaction in my own life, when I am lonely and vulnerable and the threat of severe sickness, even maybe death and definitely continued disruption hang over me... None of this is desperately uplifting, and quoting Jeremiah is quoting the most miserable of all the prophets ...

Am I trying to drag you down and to pile on the misery that has been evident throughout this first week of 2021? Or maybe I'm just a misery-guts? Could be the case! Covenant Sunday deals with some uncomfortable thoughts... that God continues to make covenant promises that go deeper than Law, deeper than 'later', deeper even than needing our feelings and cognition to catch up.

Jeremiah IS a misery-guts - but he is one who knows and understands what it means to be fully committed to God even in the depths of social and spiritual threat. I actually think that some of the most beautiful words of the Bible are in Jeremiah's prophecies - especially this promise from God that the Law of God which was written on stone tablets and received by Moses, will be placed indelibly in the minds and inscribed on the hearts of God's people... Forgiveness and restoration with God will mark out who they are... God is clear about His own

identity: "their God" and it is up to the people to respond to the stirrings and prompting of conscience and spirit and move in concert with God's will - being "God's People."

We have seen some bizarre things this week. UK Society again, placed under National Lockdown from Midnight on Monday and then on Wednesday, the strangest of chaotic and disturbing images from Washington D.C. There is frustration all over the world. When DC, arguable the heart of democracy can be overrun by chaos, this strikes fear into the nations whose democratic processes are far more tenuous... Only on Tuesday this week, I had been speaking with one of our good friends in Uganda who asked for prayers for their Presidential Elections to be peaceful and without the riots that so often accompany their elections. These will be later this month - and agitators will have taken note of Washington. So the question comes: when the world is unpredictable and we have zero control - how can Covenant Sunday be relevant to us? Many of us are older and the rest of us see ourselves most likely as inconsequential in the larger scheme of things... Does the Covenant I make with God make any difference in a world that is unpredictable and no longer governed by the rules of society and propriety that we knew and valued a mere 12 months ago?

The first thing I acknowledge is that God is sovereign. In a world that is constantly changing - sometimes wonderfully and brilliantly, God is sovereign. In a world that is constantly changing - often scarily and hopelessly, God is sovereign. This means that the promises God makes can be trusted... Promises that are so different to the promises of the world's systems which fall to corruption and fail - much as Jeremiah noted... God is a different kind of ruler. He doesn't change - it is not in the nature of God TO change, he makes his promises and allows our response: 'Follow me, go my way and you will have the security of citizenship of My Kingdom', God declares.

Everything else may crumble around you, but God's word is constant... To God's promise being written on the hearts and minds of his people is the understanding that it is from our hearts and minds that we respond. This in turn shapes our actions and responses to the world and the people around us. In the New Testament, Paul will term them 'fruit of the spirit' - Godly characteristics that we recognise as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control." The deployment of these attributes born of faith and trust in God will make a difference as you embrace God and begin to change the spiritual temperature of the nation, of the nations, of the world.

This leads us nicely into 2 Corinthians 1, which is our guiding text for today. There was discontent with Paul. He had not done what he hoped to, with regard to visiting the church in Corinth on his travels and the people were hurt and disappointed and so were expressing this terms that - well, put it this way, as a church leader who has been on the receiving end of church members' displeasure, it is most unpleasant and erodes the soul a little... Paul though directs the Church to look to the One whose faithfulness can ALWAYS be relied upon and that makes all the difference. WE don't place our trust in systems and rulers of this world - nor even in the promises of people. We can usefully place our trust in the promises of God.

The New Covenant is made with us, by God through the person of Jesus Christ. *No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.* 20

Into the turmoil of our anger and frustration of the current situation, God is with us. Jesus has died for us. His body and blood make their way into our own DNA and we become like him. God makes his covenant with Noah as the rainbow is placed in the heavens. He makes his covenant with Abraham as he requests Abraham's faithfulness in following him into new lands and to begin a new nation. He makes his Covenant with Moses as the people wandered, homeless in the

wilderness, giving anchor points in Law to the inscriptions that would be on tablets of stone. He makes his covenant with Jeremiah as his prophetic word is given to a people under siege and in exile. And to a people living in occupied territory, he gives Jesus. The YES to all the promises he has made. Fulfilled in the very giving of God-self to the world. Shared in Communion whenever we eat and drink in the unity of Christ. God gives us more than a word, more than a Law. God gives us himself in this moment as we offer ourselves to him once again - acknowledging that we are full of frustration, misery, angst and fear. Full of loneliness, verging on despair and feeling the weight and burden of oppression. In worldly terms, we want to lash out at the injustice - our children's schooling and their normality disrupted; the injustice of work vanishing and the financial precariousness. We want to lash out at the people 'who have done that to us' - and this makes a lot of sense.

The Covenant offers us something different - a different promise, a different value-system, an indelible AMEN, the so be it to God's rule and the acknowledgement of his living promise alive in us. As we make this Covenant today, we do so trusting that it is God who will be our reward, our strength, our guide as we trust in his promises and rely on his grace. I know I need more of this and will do as this year progresses. I am better living and within Jesus' love - especially in the current climate.

So I invite you to join with me as we move to make our covenant together.

Pp 287, 288, 289 of MWB

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.

I will offer up my Life Matt Redman