

Why the Covenant Service is a Wonderful Opportunity

On Sunday the 21 January 2018 we celebrate our "Covenant Service". For over 260 years Methodists have held an annual Covenant Renewal Service. At the heart of the service is the Covenant Prayer:

***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 pass unnoticed;
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,
just as you choose to use me.
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.***

In the Covenant Service we are reminded that, in Jesus Christ, God has established a "New Covenant" with us. In the "New Covenant" sins are forgiven and God's law is written on our hearts (Jer. 31:31ff).

The Covenant Prayer helps us to respond to God's grace. We say to God: "Yes, *this is what we want to be part of. We love you, we trust you and we give ourselves completely to you*". We express our absolute trust in Jesus and our faith that God will protect us, provide for us, and guide us.

The words "*put me to suffering*" do not mean we ask God to make us suffer. Rather they are an acknowledgement that the way of discipleship is often difficult. But, we are saying, even if it is difficult, even if we suffer for it, we will live as followers of Jesus.

The prayer above is a contemporary version. The traditional version and a version written for children are copied below.

May God's Spirit revive, renew and empower us as together we offer ourselves to God as "*living sacrifices*" (Romans 12).

Rev. Sean M^cGuigan

This version written by Morag Venter, our Sunday School Superintendent, may be meaningful for you to say it with your own children or grandchildren.

***I realise that I belong to you, God
so show me what you want me to do
whether it means I become important or not.
In everything I do or have to endure,
when I work and when I have nothing to do,
when I am successful and when I fail,
when I am full of joy and when I am sad,
when life is going well and when things are in a mess,
I willingly offer myself and everything I have to serve you
-wherever you want to use me.
I am your child and you are my Father.
May it be so for ever and ever.
I am promising this, but it is only with your powerful help that I shall be able
to keep this
promise. Amen***

Traditional Covenant Prayer:

***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***

Here are two other prayers that you may find useful in preparation:

***O Lord,
open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;
open my ears that I may hear their cries;
open my heart so that they need not be without succour;
Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,
nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.
Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,
and use me to bring them to those places.
And so open my eyes and my ears
that I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee.
Amen.*** (Alan Paton)

***Today, O Lord, I say YES!
to you,
to life,
to all that is true, and good and beautiful. Amen*** (Richard Foster)