

“Our Covenant Part II”

Sermon by Pastor Dan Harrison, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA, 9/29/19

Micah 6:6-8; Acts 2:40-47

Last week we examined the history of the word “covenant” (in Hebrew: *Berit*) and how it is used in the very name for our own faith community: Church of the *Covenant*. We heard from three current Covenant Members, their views on covenant, as well as from Dolly this morning. We also looked more carefully at the actual covenant for Covenant and Community members. We connected it back to the verse in Hebrews 10, “...and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching.” We did a cursory study of the disciplines to which we adhere that align with this very principle and today I am going to share more in depth as to the spirit with which we practice these disciplines till this day.

Our disciplines are born out of a deep desire to know God and to know each other, and in that knowledge we are able to truly love and care for one another. It is undoubtedly inspired by the attitudes embodied by “the first church.” We get a glimpse of their story in Acts, chapter 2. The five areas our community disciplines include are: 1) Personal growth 2) Growth in community with others 3) Commitment to Mission 4) Commitment of Resources 5) Personal accountability.

In the “personal growth” category we commit to setting aside time daily for prayer and study. We also see in the first Church there was time for the apostle’s teachings (study) and a regularly “being filled with awe” at what they learned and observed. Indeed personal growth was important though clearly couched within the context of consistent fellowship. It said they met in the Temple Courts together and ate in each other’s homes. There was shared desire for fellowship, intimacy, and Mission—it says that they sold their possessions so that that no one had need. So, you see the sincere commitment of personal resources to the missional cause. No one was alone. They had each other: Community.

And all of this was done within a landscape of people needing to “be saved” from a corrupt generation. A generation that was controlled by pious leaders who used religion to manipulate people, separate the races, and enrich themselves. Jesus brought a different message. A message of unity, equality, and compassion. Church of the Covenant caught this vision. They didn’t see the Gospel as a story of simple personal redemption from a fallen state, but saw the Gospel as much further reaching, the grand aligning of a corrupt world back with its Creator through massive redemption and with it redemptive acts of love, spurring on an ultimate reconciliation, which manifests itself in the individual lives of us, those who seek God, and bears itself out in the community at large—with the sincere love that God calls us to: We are the Gospel. Societal transformation begins with us!

If societal change starts with us, the founders of our church reasoned that we better get our act together, not in the self-righteous sense, but at least treat our spiritual journey with sincere seriousness—in the sense of at least commitment to basic disciplines that foster personal and community spiritual growth: that is, the inward and outward journeys. So we do! We honor each other’s individual inward journey. We are all at different places on our own paths; we cannot say that one has arrived and others have not. All we can say is that we are at different places. This doesn’t mean one is ahead of another. No! That is ignorance. We are simply at different places on unique paths informed by experiences and knowledge unique to each person. Can we teach each other? Can we learn from one another? Can we encourage each other? Yes, yes, and yes. This is what we are supposed to do, and yet while respecting each other’s path lovingly. We will find personal intersections, moments of mutual enlightenment and connection. These are the nuggets, when we whisper mysteries to one another that

mutually resonate and bless us. Likewise our outward journeys are each unique, how we express the love God has awakened in us. However, how rich it is when we discover intersections with others, mutual places of similar “call.” That is, we find that our passions align in some way. We find God has called us to each help others but in a similar fashion. Maybe this is a call to help others in recovery, or to combat homelessness, or to help children’s organizations raise funds like we do at Common Grounds— or even help people find peace while on personal retreat like those in the Chrysalis Mission Group do. Or maybe your call is different, and is still sorting itself, and will soon coalesce with others to form a new mission and will ease the pain of this world through extraordinary acts of love and kindness in other ways. Needless to say, outward journeys are nurtured and respected in our community because they are how God moves in us to be on Mission with others. And our disciplines help us to commit to that end: *“to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God”* (Micah 6:8).

Every year our church invites us to join together on “silent retreat” for the day. This year it will be this coming Saturday. We will start in this chapel at 9am, we will do a little worship together, and then enter into a time of contemplative prayer, at which time we will dismiss ourselves onto the property. You will go and find a place to be (and move around if you wish), spend time in prayer, in study, reading, walking, thinking, contemplating. Then at noon we come back together and eat a meal. Then break again for prayer, meditation, contemplation, reading, study, journaling, and come back at 3pm, at which time we share with one another. And then as our share time wraps up we indicate whether we commit to membership this year or not (Covenant or Community). It is a beautiful experience, like no other. It is beautiful and words hardly describe it. I have invited Genevieve and John to share a bit with us about their experiences, especially as Community members: (interview)