

*Last Sunday we reached the climax of our 'covenant' series with the New Covenant in Christ and we started with a question: 'What sets us aside from every other religious system & even from every other irreligious world view?' (You might like to discuss this question now.) On the surface each world religion has a very similar set of 'carrots and sticks' to keep us on the straight and narrow and protect us from human failure. In Judaism failure to keep the law is mitigated by a sacrificial system and in Christianity failure to adhere to the Beatitudes (the 'Beautiful Attitudes') is mitigated through Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross. It seems that, given perseverance, you can become as good an example of Christianity as you can of anything else. But this attitude can lead to 'faith fatigue'. The new Covenant is all about finding rest in Jesus Christ.*

#### 1. Recap.

- 4,000 BC God covenants with **Adam**, who disobeys Him so human faithlessness obstructs their relationship.
- 2,500 BC God saves **Noah** from the flood, promising to wait in patient mercy for mankind's repentance.
- 2,000 BC God covenants with **Abraham**, promising him a Name, a land and descendants from many nations.
- 1,500 BC Moses reiterated God's covenant with **Israel**, promising them land and a life of fruitfulness as long as they obeyed His law ..... in the certain knowledge that they would fail, but would be restored when repentant.
- 1,000 BC covenants with **David**: promising him a dynasty that would always reign supreme for Israel. The covenant is broken many times but God keeps bringing the Israelites back into relationship when they repent.

#### 3. 0 – 33 AD The New Covenant. Read Hebrews 8: 1 - 13.

- By now the Israelites had returned to their land – Judea in the south and Galilee in the north. A temple had been built in Jerusalem but less grand than that of Solomon and their King was not of David's line.
- They knew **Jeremiah 31: 31-34**, which is the same as our reading, and **Ezekiel 36: 24-27** and were waiting for a new Davidic King who would inwardly transform them into covenant-keepers and rid them of the Romans.
- But the problem wasn't the covenant – it was the Jews. Similarly the problem isn't Christianity, it's me!

#### 4. Modern-day Covenant Christianity.

- Given our propensity for doing and saying the wrong thing, we all need transformation from the inside. We, too, need a new heart, a new mind and a new Spirit, like the Israelites who were not selected as a special nation who were meant to keep their God to themselves, but to be a demonstration and a revelation to us all.
- So often we behave like the 'Foolish Galatians' of Galatians 3: forgetting that everything we have comes by grace, through believing Christ is our Saviour and is not because we work hard to live a relatively decent life.
- Inspiration, information and hard work don't lead to transformation. For that two more things are necessary:

##### Community and the Holy Spirit

- At the Last Supper our Lord alludes to His imminent self-sacrifice, saying the bread He had broken is His body and the cup of wine is 'the New Covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins'. And in John 14: 25-27 He explains he is returning to the Father so the **Holy Spirit** can come to dwell in our hearts and transform our lives, hearts and minds.
- When we come to communion as a **Christian community**, we take the bread and the wine together and remember what the reality of those elements represent: the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus secures my forgiveness and the indwelling Spirit turns the external restraint of the law (OT) into an internal constraint to do God's will (NT). We find ourselves partnering with God in our world.
- This is profoundly different and uniquely Christian. There is no other way: God lives in us by His Spirit to transform our lives and secure our resurrection and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.
- The glory of communion with Christ is that we become bold to share our Lord with others, we find ourselves praying with people and for them, we even get to disciple new Christians! Keep trusting in His Spirit and remember we never move on from the Gospel, we always move in and with the Gospel through to Jesus. That's what makes us Christians, empowering us to share His glorious rest & peace.

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Do we find Christianity is becoming 'hard work', do we suffer from 'faith fatigue'?

A possible prayer at the communion rail: 'God, I am turning away, not just from sin, but from my thoughts and ways and my own righteousness. I am abandoning all that so as to be in relationship with You, to know your forgiveness, Your presence and the power of the Holy Spirit working in me'.