

SIGNS OF THE COVENANT
Consecration Sunday –November 19, 2017 --Jeremiah 31: 31-34
The Church of the Covenant

I told the story of rolling the car my Dad had just given me in college down the hill backwards, with my grandmother in it, as part of the Thanksgiving Dinner on Wednesday. The punchline was: “No, Dad, I didn’t total the car. And I didn’t kill grandmother either!” Last year, before my Dad passed away, I was able to speak with him and tell him “Thank You” for many things like that car, and I again said I was sorry, and again we laughed over something that happened years ago. We were able to remember many of the nice things he did for me over the course of my life. I remembered with him the pole house he built for me. I remembered with him the soap box derby car we built together. I remembered how he was in church every Sunday and what a great example that was to me. I remembered him being the head usher and dutifully straightening up the sanctuary every Sunday after worship. I got to share all those memories with him and say “Thank you” and express my gratitude to my good, good Father. Christian Stewardship is like that. It is gratitude and love flowing from the Child of God’s heart to their good, good Father in heaven. Gratitude and giving are signs of a life-giving relationship with our heavenly Father. It is a covenantal relationship established by what Jesus has done for us, that we could not hope to do for ourselves, at the cross. It is love and gratitude poured out for God because God’s love was first poured out for us at Calvary. It is a covenant, a one-sided reaching out to us in love that then has our heart desire to do things and be things that give thanks and gratitude to God. Gratitude, it is a SIGN OF THE COVENANT.

All this fall we have been having “Moments in Covenant” in worship. We heard Elder Joan McCrory speak of all the many things we do in mission for a hurting world in need. Mission is a sign of the covenant. Joan is a sign of the covenant. We heard from Donna Carlisle and Rebecca Aizupitis and Todd Bright on what their mission trips meant to them and how committing their time in love to the Lord Jesus Christ makes a profound difference in their world and a profound difference in their lives. It is a sign of the covenant. The three of them are signs of the covenant. We heard from Mary Alice Jones about her work with the developmentally challenged folks at Friends of Jesus. For May Alice its not about carrying a burden, its about joy; she misses her congregation of 50 folks who show up every Thursday if she’s not there. She WANTS to be there. She WANTS to do what she does for the Lord. She is a sign of the covenant. Linda Grimm, our wonderful Parish Nurse, visits people in the hospital and the homebound; she’s always there first, way before I even find out. She has a profound love for people and she has a profound love for the Lord. All of her work is not work, it is JOY. It flows from her heart. It flows from her faith. It flows from being in covenant relationship with the loving Creator of the Universe. She is in covenant. The covenant is alive in her. She is a sign of the covenant.

All these lives pour out their love and gratitude to God because they are in covenant with God. Are you in covenant with God? How do you express your love and gratitude to God today?

Presbyterianism is inherently covenantal. God reaches out to us in covenants of law and covenants of grace. Our scripture for today is from the prophet Jeremiah where he prophecies about a coming NEW COVENANT, which will be unlike the covenants of old. These are not legalistic covenants. You MUST do this and you MUST do that. No, these are covenant relationships of the heart. God’s heart impacting our heart. God’s love transforming our lives and our priorities and our gratitude, or lack of gratitude, for the things which pertain to HIM. The Lord God declares through His prophet: *“But this is the covenant I will make...I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31: 33)* This new relationship, this new covenant, will be written upon the heart if it exists in someone’s life. This new relationship flows from an inward heart desire to be obedient and to love and serve God. This is a love relationship that flows from the human heart. It is about a life lived in gratitude to God for everything the Lord has done for us. **What flows from a heart that is in covenant with God? What are signs of the covenant in your life?**

You want to worship. You want to be where the living presence of God is. You want to be in the place where HE is and to say "Thank you, Lord. I love you, Lord." Worship is a sign of the covenant. You want to serve God as you serve others. You want to bring a cup of cold water to those in need. Your heart breaks for the things and the people that break God's heart. You WANT to be in mission. You don't HAVE to be; you WANT to be. Mission is a sign of the covenant. You WANT to study the Word of God because you WANT to know the One who gives you life and new life and abundant life and eternal life. You have a relationship with HIM, so you want to KNOW HIM BETTER. Study is a sign of the covenant. You WANT to pray. You want to speak to this wonderful loving person who wants to hear from the child whom HE loves. You want to listen for His voice in prayer. Prayer is a sign of the covenant. O yes, and you WANT to express your gratitude to God. Your heart overflows with an inward desire to express your thanks and gratitude to HIM. You WANT to give your tithes and your offerings to HIM as an expression of your love to HIM for all He has done for you. Its not out of obligation; it flows naturally from a heart that is in covenant with God, a heart in whom the Holy Spirit of the Living God dwells, a heart that is broken in gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. He's written it upon your heart. He's called us by name. He's justified us. He's sanctified us. One day when we die He will glorify us. He has reached out to us in covenant. OR NOT. His choice. And the only way you know that He has is if all of these signs of the covenant seek to flow from your heart. They are OUTWARD SIGNS of an INWARD REALITY. See, the day's going to come when a lot of people are going to be shocked. "Sure, I believe in God. Then God has to let me into heaven 'cause somewhere in my brain I've reserved two brain cells for Him." "Sure, I know I'm saved. I went forward at a Billy Graham Crusade when I was twelve years old. Now I've never darkened the door of the church since. I've never done anything remotely covenantal since. But He has to let me in." Checked that box long ago. Bucket list on eternity complete. No, no, no. The question is –Are you in covenant or not?

Because the harsh truth is this. Maybe if there are no signs of the covenant issuing forth from our heart –no desire to worship, no mission, no study, no prayer, no giving in gratitude—then maybe, just maybe, we think we're in covenant...but we're not.

My Dad on the Saturday before he died, ordered his son to get out his check book and write his July pledge. His kidneys were shutting down but he still had the presence of mind to focus on what was in his heart. I took the check over to him and he personally signed it and I was instructed to place it in the collection plate the next morning. I did, of course. And it was during that worship service, that he was listening to over the radio, that my Dad passed away and went into eternity to see his Savior Jesus, face-to-face. He was so grateful to God for all the Lord had done for him in his life that his last official act on this earth was to express his gratitude to the Lord by giving.

Thank you, Dad, for teaching me once again with your life what it means to be in covenant. Thank you for your lifelong gratitude that flowed from your heart to the Lord. Thank you for being a sign of the covenant to your son... Beloved, are you a sign of the covenant today????? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*