

Covenant Renewal

John 6:53-59

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, will you take a Bible and turn to John 15?

I don't know how many of you are here this morning, who really are just beginning to think about the possibility of Jesus being really the son of the Creator. Maybe you don't know much about the real truths of Christianity but do you see that many of us here believe that Jesus is alive at this moment and that He was more than just a human being and that it's possible to have an intimate relationship with Him? And that's what this chapter is speaking about, you see. This it's impossible if He is just a dead body. I mean, who can live in a dead body? But we believe that He is alive at this moment and that He has a spirit in which we can be, and in fact in which all of us are, as I'll try to share later. So, that's the meaning of these words just in case you think, "oh, this is crazy stuff."

John 15: "I am the true vine and my Father is the wine dresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I and you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." God help us to live in that, Amen.

This is a solemn day for all of us in this room because it is the first Sunday of our new year 1979 and most of us here will only have 70 such days in our lives and probably almost every one of us here has only about 50 such days left so it is a very natural and obvious time for standing back and examining the course that our lives are taking. For those of us who are in Christ it is an even more solemn occasion because it's the first communion of the new year 1979. It's the first observance of the Lord's supper, it's our first mass.

Being in Christ means believing that when Jesus of Nazareth died and came back to life again in the first century of our era, we all were destroyed and recreated new in him by our infinite Creator. Being in Christ means that you believe that in a cosmic miracle in Jesus we were all changed, and it means respecting and obeying the Holy Spirit and trusting Him to make that change real in us more and more. So that for those of us who are in Christ, every day is a dynamic new change and a new birth and maybe especially so at a time like this because it will be unto us according to our faith.

It's something like what the astronauts experienced in their space capsule. You remember that they were able to do certain things because the space capsule took them beyond the earth's atmosphere. You remember how they experienced weightlessness and they were able to float in mid-air? Now it's

like that for those of us who are in Christ. Being in Christ means that we have been put into a space capsule that is able to take us outside the limitations and the pettiness of this present life and we are able to live in the transcendent love and then a magnanimous piece of Jesus himself.

We believe that God did actually put us into His son symbolically in the first century A.D. - but realistically in the super space, super time world of eternity -- and He destroyed there our dependence on people and things and circumstances for our security and our happiness and we are able therefore, and free to live above all those things and to live by the power of God's own life.

You remember just as the astronauts were able to be freer and freer and to ascend further and further away from the earth's atmosphere as they were willing to accept increasing limitations on their own personal freedom -- because that's certainly what it meant, putting yourself in that little capsule -- grave limitations in all kinds of ways to their own personal freedom -- so it is in Jesus. We are able to ascend more and more into the liberty that God has planned us to experience in this life, we are able to rise from glory to glory into more and more of His lightness and His power as we are willing to accept more and more limitations to the free exercise of our selfish wills.

So, I would ask you, are you willing this coming year to stay in Christ? Because actually even those of us who are not believers in Jesus, even we also have been put into Christ and we are simply cut off from the benefits of this because we don't believe. So I'd say to all of us this morning, are you willing to stay in Christ for another year? If you are, then in this service here, God's Spirit is going to reveal to you further limitations to your selfish will that He wants you to accept, further attitudes of Jesus himself that He wants you to allow to be made real in you. And if you are willing to accept those, you will move into new levels of personal freedom and personal liberty and personal power and peace and love in these coming 12 months.

So really what I am asking you to do is, will you join me in renewing your covenant with God in Jesus this morning? Or if you have never made a covenant with God in Jesus, and in the light of what God has done to all of us in Him, will you make that covenant this morning?

Loved ones, above all, I would say if you don't believe any of this, or you don't agree with any of it, by all means, stand with the rest of us so that you don't feel uncomfortable -- but don't take words foolishly on your lips -- because it is true what God said to Paul that if you eat and drink without discerning the body in this communion service you eat and drink damnation onto your own soul. So I'd ask you to be honest and real today. So, loved ones will you just stand now as I outline to you what this covenant means.

Dearly beloved, the Christian life to which we are called is a life in Christ redeemed from sin by Him and through Him consecrated to God. Upon this life we have entered, having been admitted into that new covenant of which our Lord Jesus Christ is mediator and which He sealed with His own blood that it might stand forever.

On one side the covenant is God's promise that He will fulfill in and through us all that He declared in Jesus Christ who is the author and perfecter of our faith. That His promise still stands we are sure, for we have known His goodness and proved His grace in our lives day by day.

On the other side, we stand pledged to live no more unto ourselves but to Him who loved and gave Himself for us and called us so to serve Him that the purposes of His coming might be fulfilled.

From time to time we renew our vows of consecration, especially when we gather at the Table of the Lord. But on this day, we meet expressly as generations of our fathers have met, that we may joyfully and solemnly renew the covenant, which bound them and binds us to God.

Let us then, remembering the miracles of God and the hope of His calling, examine ourselves by the light of His Spirit, that we may see wherein we are failed or fallen short in faith and practice, and considering all that this covenant means, may give ourselves anew to God.

Let us be seated as we pray.

Dear God, we thank You for creating us and Lord we would start right there. We thank You for the faces You've given us, we thank You for these bodies and for these personalities and Lord we would step right back from any resentment because we're not different. Lord, we want to thank You for making us just right for Your son's image to be shown to the world. Lord, we thank You. Lord if any of us have been resentful about the bodies we've had, or the personalities we have, we repent of that right now. We want to thank You Lord for the way You've made us. We know that You have lived and You've said, "Behold, it is very good," and if You are satisfied Lord, so are we.

Then Lord we thank You for our families. Lord we thank You for the moms and dads that we have. Lord again we would not resent but thank You for the good things that You gave to us through them. We thank You for our brothers and sisters. Lord if we have been remiss in our love for them during this past year, will You show us that? God we intend to change that this year, we see Lord Jesus how You provided for Your brothers and sisters when Your father must have died and Lord we see that in us, You want to love our brothers and sisters and our fathers and mothers the same way.

So Lord, if any of us have failed to give them a sense of warm affection, we would change that this very day even if we have to write a letter to do it. Then Lord, we thank You for our friends that You have given us. Thank You for the people that we live with, thank You for the people we work with. Lord, we see that it's a unique time together that we have, but some of them will move on to other jobs, some of them will move on to other living situations. Lord, if we have failed to be what You want to be to them Lord Jesus, we repent of that right now and apologize to You for keeping You a prisoner and for presenting a cold unfeeling picture of You -- for really massacring You in us -- instead of allowing Your warmth and Your affection and Your interest in them to come forth from us.

Lord, we would examine our relationships with our colleagues at work and our relationships with the friends that we live with. Lord, forgive us if we have left them out of any plans that you have for their lives or if we have made use of them and failed to shoulder our responsibilities for them. Lord, we thank You for our jobs or our skill situations or those of us who are wives for our ministry at home. Lord we want to step right back now from any resentment about any of those things.

Lord we see that it's casting your gifts in your face, if we resent the job that we have. Lord, we see that it doesn't matter very much what job we do. It's the attitude of our hearts that we allow Jesus to take over, that means everything. So Lord forgive us, if we have regarded our jobs as boring and therefore have made them more boring. Forgive us Lord if we have resented our jobs or thought we were too good for them. Lord we see that a job will never be the measure of the child of God that we are and that will always be bigger than our jobs. Lord we thank you for these jobs.

Thank you that all things work together for good to those that love God and that these are just the

right jobs for us at this present time and that You will move us on from them when we have learned what You have to teach us in them. Lord we thank You for our skill situation. Lord if we have been indolent or lazy or careless about our academic work, we repent of that right now and Lord Jesus would allow you to be yourself in us instead of making you out to be a lazy easygoing creature.

Lord we would allow you to come through us and to do the work well, and to study hard and to bend our minds and our wills into Your image. Lord those of us who work at home, we would thank you for the dear homes we have, thank you for the fathers and the husbands and the children that leave the stuff all around for us to pick up. Lord we would ask You for them now, pray that as they see our own patience and our own order in our lives that they will be moved to pick up after themselves but Lord we would not resent them, we would repent of that. Thank you for them. Thank you that we have such an opportunity to make that home a palace of the King for them to come home to.

Then Lord we would examine before you the course of our own lives during these past years. Lord if we have drifted, we would see the desecration that we do to Your original plan. You sent us here for a certain purpose and if we don't fulfill it, nobody will and there'll be a continual gap left in the symphony that You have created here on earth. So Lord forgive us if we have drifted, forgive us Lord if we have not respected the dignity of our position -- that we are not flotsam and jetsam in the world of seas, we're not chance items -- but we were sent here by our loving Father fitted for a certain purpose.

Lord we would stop the drift. We would ask you why You have sent us here and Lord we would begin to move in that direction however difficult it may be. Then Lord, as we see the way our world is going and we're approaching now the last 20 years of this century and we see all around us change and chaos, and people who are striving for self-expression and people who are striving for more consumer goods, Lord we see the need for more of us to be abroad in Your world living as children of a loving Father who will take care of them and living in the faith and peace that that brings and the social responsibility that that produces and Lord we would come before you and ask you, "Do you want us abroad, do you want us somewhere where more people will see what your children look like?"

Lord if we have drifted into life here in Minneapolis by default, we would stop that this moment. Lord we see that Your work is not done by default and by drifting but by decisions consciously and responsibly made. Lord we bring before You our lives and tell You we intend to find Your purpose for us and fulfill that purpose. Lord we thank You for this family into which You have brought us and if there has been any tendency in this to take and not give, then Lord we would ask You to show us that, enable us to begin to give the beauty and the life that You have started to make real in our lives so that these people here this morning, our friends and our neighbors will begin to touch you through us.

Lord we would give ourselves to You so that You can express Your image and that of Your son Jesus in the unique way in which we are designed to present that image. Lord as we come to your table, we would be honest about our sins and Lord if we have got used to a dirty mind or we have got used to careless thinking or we've got used to careless words, we know fine well they're wrong. Lord we would repent of those sins. If we have gossiped and criticized and worked havoc where we needed to work peace, Lord we would repent of that now and commit ourselves to stopping at this very moment. Lord if some of us are caught in the old drugs or caught in the alcohol or caught in the sex, Lord, we'd stop at this very moment. Lord, we commit ourselves now.

We see that all things have been changed because we've been put into Jesus and all His power is ours

and Lord we would stand up against these wills that have become so weak over the years and we would determine to change by Your power and to begin to go the way You want us to. Those of us Lord who have been resolving forever to read the Bible and pray everyday, we'd start this very day. We'd make a change now and continue to make that change until it becomes permanent in us. Lord we thank You that all you're asking us to do is express the reality that has already taken place when You put us into Christ and that we are in Him at this very moment and that all You are asking us to do is let Him out of us and that is reality, not the lie that we treat so often as reality.

So Lord, we thank You for that. Lord Jesus we thank You that as we approach Your dear table You are already in us and this bread and wine coming into our mouths, signifies something that is already true. As Christ died for all therefore all died but all of us are in You Lord Jesus and You are only asking us to believe that and act in the light of it, that we intend to do it Lord this day and this coming year for your glory. Amen.