

Deciding For God

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

For over 1900 years, on this day, the first Sunday of the year and the first communion, those who have believed that Jesus is the Son of our Maker have renewed their covenant with God, and so we do here in this family. We renew the covenant that we have made with God on this first Sunday. It's even more important for those of us who are wondering what we're going to do with our lives, because this is not only the beginning of a new year but it's the beginning of a new decade, and it's momentous because even the most optimistic person wonders if this world will reach the end of this decade? And so for all of us here in this room, it is a solemn and a serious moment. We are about to set out together on a new decade in the life of the world and in our own lives.

So, it's right for me to ask you and to ask myself, what we have done with our lives during the past decade? And I would ask you to think of that just now as I am talking. Where has your life gone during these past 10 years? What were you doing in 1970? All the uproar and excitement of the 60's had past and now the 70's have passed also and you and I are about to go into the 80's. I am 45, I'll be 55 this time 10 years hence. Many of you are 20, you will be 30 10 years hence, some of you are 30, you will be 40 10 years hence, some of you are 60, you will be 70 10 years hence. Now, think what are you going to do with your life during these next 10 years?

Loved ones, could I say to you that if you don't decide, it'll be decided for you. It seems only yesterday when I graduated from Queens University in Belfast at the age of 20. It just seems yesterday, and all of us who are at all past 30 or 35 will say the same: if you don't decide, and if you don't determine the cause of your life, it will drift along on it's own and you'll waken up some day and find that it's all gone.

I'd remind you of the stanza in Robert Frost's poem "Two Roads" where he says, "Oh I kept to the first for another day, but knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back." "Oh I kept to the first" -- the first road that he chose, "Oh I kept to the first for another day, but knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back."

Many of us in this room will testify to the truth of that. If you don't decide for yourself, the way your life is going to go during this next decade, it will drift along in its own fashion and the years will pass and you'll wonder where they've gone. And you'll wonder why you didn't think about it or get hold of yourself earlier.

So loved ones this is a solemn time this day, and I'd ask you, what are you going to do with your life? Now, what are you going to have achieved at the end of these 10 years? And what is worth achieving? So it's worth having the \$50,000 or the \$100,000 in the bank or in the stocks and shares -- it's good -- but is that the whole target and goal of your 10 years? To have a home and the automobiles and the equipment and the wife or the husband and the beginning of a family, they're good, it's good to have that, but is that going to be the whole aim of your life during these next 10 years?

Do you see that all those things disappear very fast? And it's not that they're bad but it's that

they are not worthy for you to devote your whole precious life to. The fact is that those are the other things that will be added unto you, and even those here who have them would say, "They're options, they aren't the heart of life for us", and many who have more of them than they would even need, will say, "With all of those things I haven't satisfaction in my life and I haven't a sense of meaning and worth and value in what I do day by day."

So loved ones I'd ask you to consider this very day the direction of your life and where it's going. And then I'd ask you to re-examine your covenant with God. I'd remind you that a covenant is an agreement. On God's side, it's His promise and His action in Jesus. It's the mighty work that He has done for us in Jesus, His Son, whereby He took our personalities that are so selfish and so enslaved to people and so dependent on circumstances for their happiness, and He put them in His Son in a cosmic miracle and destroyed them and recreated as new and fresh and clean, fit and able to trust Him and to obey Him as our dear Father and to live a life of joy and liberty. That is what God has done, that's His part of the covenant. Our part is to allow that to be actualized in our lives by submitting to the Holy Spirit whom He has promised us.

So I ask you, would you with me, examine again your covenant with your God? Have you done that during this past year? Have you in fact given yourself to what God has done to you in Jesus? Have you in fact begun to turn from people and things and circumstances for all that you need? Have you begun to live depending on God for those things? And to what extent have you failed to do that? To that very extent, the joy and liberty is either present or absent from your life. To that very extent, you are either a man or woman that lives in joy or you are a man or woman that lives with a burden on your shoulders. And I'd ask you now to examine your covenant with God.

Here is the way one dear man expressed it almost 200 years ago. "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 the 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 Perfector 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 us and gave Himself for us, and has 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 our 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 mercies of God and the hope of His calling, examine ourselves by the light of His Spirit that we may see wherein we have failed or fallen short in faith and practice, and considering all that this covenant means, may give ourselves anew to God. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we would now examine ourselves before you, humbly confessing our sins and watching our hearts, lest by self deceit we shut ourselves out from your presence. Father, we would confess with shame any slowness to learn of Jesus, any reluctance to follow Him, any time when You have spoken and called and we have not given heed. Any time when Your beauty has shown forth and we have been blind, any time when You have stretched out Your hands to us through our friends and we have passed by, anytime when we have taken great benefits with little thanks, when we have been unworthy of Your changeless love. Dear Lord we would confess before You any poverty in our worship, any formality and selfishness in our prayers, any inconstancy or unbelief, any neglect of fellowship in the means of

grace, any hesitating witness for Christ. We would confess any false pretences or willful ignorance of your ways.

Lord we would confess before You anytime that we have wasted our own time or misused our gifts, when we have excused our own wrong doing or evaded our responsibilities when we have been unwilling to overcome evil with good or have drawn back from the Cross. Father, we would confess before You that often so little of your love has reached others through us and that we have borne so lightly wrongs and sufferings that were not our own, times when we have cherished the things that divide us from others, when we have made it hard for them to live with us, when we have been thoughtless in our judgments, hasty in condemnation and grudging in our forgiveness.

Dear Lord forgive us if we have made no ventures in fellowship, if we have kept in our heart a grievance against another, if we have not sought reconciliation, if we have been eager for the punishment of wrong doers and slow to seek their redemption.

Dear Father we know that You have put those things as far as the east is from the west. So you have removed those transgressions far from you by putting us into Your dear Son Jesus and destroying forever the source of all that rebellion. Father we know therefore, that as the 70's have ended, so has ended our lives as they have been lived up to this present moment. and as far as You are concerned, they are finished and dead and crucified.

Lord we thank You for that. We thank You that we are able to rise up and to begin again this present year. We thank You Father that You are the God of new beginnings. We thank You that insofar as we are ready to believe it, so our old self and all our old life has been crucified with Christ. Lord we leave it now behind us.

Father we would take hold of the resurrection that has taken place in Jesus and we would accept that there is a new us that is available this moment from heaven and Father we would receive that new me by faith and we would trust You by Your Holy Spirit to manifest it in us and through us day by day so that, our Father, the old will pass away and all things will become new for us this day.

Our Father, we would begin this year and this decade as new people who have finished with the old ways and have turned from the old method of living and are living in a new way trusting You as our dear Father and giving ourselves wholly to Your purposes and no longer turning to our own. Dear Lord, we thank You that this is possible because of what You have done in Jesus and we grasp it with all our hearts for Your glory. Amen.