

We are in the beginning of the year 2017 and it is an appropriate time for us to look back on our relationship with God and with one another and to see how best we can draw near to God in the coming year and to love others as ourselves through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The covenant service which we hold once a year gives us the opportunity to thank God for his goodness, to spend time in self-examination and confession and to rededicate ourselves for the coming year.

The covenant has its origins in West Asian treaties where kings would make agreements between each other. The superior king would promise the vassal protection and in return the vassal was to pay in kind for the protection and promised loyalty. Usually a heifer or a goat would be cut into two and the two kings would walk in between the pieces to state that they would keep their promises to each other they and if they did not their fate would be like that of the of the animals.

In the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, Abraham is promised a son and that he would be a blessing to many. God makes this covenant by asking Abraham to cut the animals into two and God walks in-between those two pieces alone. In other words Yahweh was telling him that he would keep his promise with Abraham and if he did not, his fate would be like the animals. God's word is backed up by his life.

In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, he talks about a New Covenant sometime in the future. This New Covenant was needed because the covenant made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai where God gave them the Ten Commandments was broken ever so often. Jeremiah promises three things about the new covenant. Firstly, ***the Law will be internal***. It would be written on the hearts and minds of the people of Israel. Secondly, ***knowledge of God would be made universal***. In the Old Covenant the knowledge of God was primarily given to the people of Israel. However, in the New Covenant knowledge of God would be available for the entire world. Thirdly, in the New Covenant ***the forgiveness would be complete***. In the Old Covenant sacrifices would have to be offered over and over again. In the New Covenant there will be only one sacrifice which would suffice for the forgiveness of all sins.

These three things have been fulfilled with the coming of Christ, his death, his resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The law is now internalized as the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts and tells us what is right and wrong. Secondly, knowledge of God is now universal. It is no more restricted to the nation of Israel. It is available for the whole humanity. The Christian community is a universal community. With the coming of Christ and the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, the penalty of all our sins, past, present and future have all been paid. Therefore there is no need for any further sacrifices.

We too become members of this New Covenant community as we receive Christ Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. The Lord's Supper is a reminder to us that this New Covenant was sealed by his body and his blood which was broken and shed for us on the cross of Calvary.

Therefore God challenges us to bear Spiritual Fruit in our lives. John's gospel reminds us that we are to abide in Christ so that we may bear fruit in our lives. Jesus tells us that apart from him we can do nothing. We are called to remain in the vine so that we may bear fruit in our lives. As we are in the beginning of New Year may we renew our covenant with Christ saying that we will repent of our sinful ways and bear fruit for the kingdom of God in the coming year.