

Children of the Covenant  
Joshua 5:2-7

This morning we are renewing our covenant with God. In doing so, we are following an ancient tradition. In Genesis 12 God established the covenant with Abraham, “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants. Some years later, in Genesis 15, the Bible tells us that the Lord renewed this covenant, again promising Abraham many descendants, as many as the stars in the sky. The Jewish people consider themselves the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham. They call themselves “*benai berith*,” which means “children of the covenant.” Two chapters later in Genesis 17, the covenant was again renewed by God, and this time God told Abraham that he and his descendants were to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. In Exodus 19, the Lord once again renewed the covenant when he called Moses up to Mt. Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments. Then again, Joshua 5, when the people crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, after wandering in the desert for forty years, once again the covenant was renewed.

Why all this renewal of the Covenant? Because people have short memories. Covenants have to be renewed in order not to be forgotten. That’s certainly true of the marriage covenant. I heard a man tell about how his wife asked him if he loved her, and he said, “I told you that I loved you on the day we got married, and if I change my mind, I’ll let you know.” And I thought to myself, “That’s not a very smart man.” Couples need regularly to tell each other that they love each other as a way of renewing the covenant they established on their wedding day. And we need to renew our covenant with God. Over and over again God had to remind the people of the covenant and to renew their commitment to the covenant. God had to remind the people of the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants. God also had to remind the people of their responsibilities under the covenant to be a holy and righteous people.

We are people of the covenant as well. We are children of the covenant with Abraham. We are spiritual descendants of Abraham, adopted into the family of Abraham, or grafted into the family of Abraham. And we are people of the new covenant. At the Last Supper Christ established a covenant with all who follow him. Remember that he said, when he blessed and poured the wine, “*This is my blood of the new covenant.*” This covenant was the one foretold by Jeremiah, “*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*” (Jeremiah 31:31-35)

When we were baptized, we became children of that covenant. When we were confirmed, we renewed that covenant. Each time we receive communion, we are renewing that new covenant.

In 1755, John Wesley began a tradition of beginning a new year by leading the Methodists to renew their commitment to the covenant established by Christ. This covenant renewal leads us to reconfirm our complete and wholehearted commitment to serve Christ.

We need this covenant renewal because we do forget. There was a day when you gave your life to Christ. You committed yourself entirely to serving Christ. But there are constant temptations and even demands to serve other priorities. There are others who tell us that they will give us great satisfaction and pleasure if we will serve them. There are others who tell us they will punish us severely if we don't serve them.

These temptations and demands take their toll. Soon our wholehearted commitment to Christ becomes half-hearted, without our even realizing it.

We need to examine ourselves to see where our priorities are and whom or what we are serving. We need to set aside a time to once again give ourselves completely and totally to Christ.

As we enter into a new year, this is an excellent time to make that commitment.

After Joshua led the Israelites in resettling the Promised Land, he knew that they had come to a new stage in their history. He called them all together one more time. He said, *“Now therefore revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling, to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”* (Joshua 24:14-15)

That's the challenge for us today. “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.” In this new year, whom will you serve? The challenge is to decide to serve Christ only during this new year.

Dr. Wesley Welborn  
Senior Pastor