

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 22 – The Church and the Covenant

But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.
Hebrews 8:6

So far we have seen that the God who creates the world has made the church the instrument for God's redemption in the world. And the church's mission draws all churches together. The idea in the Bible that brings these two ideas together is the relationship between the world and God's people. In both the Old and New Testaments this is known as the covenant.

The covenant in the Bible is the foundation of creation and it is also the foundation of God's call and election of a people. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant with God, both with creation and with God's people. Jesus himself is the new covenant and therefore is the One in whom we must seek both *knowledge* of the reality of the world and *knowledge* of the church and how they interrelate. This knowledge of both world and the church is primarily theological knowledge. That is, we understand the world and the church when we seek to understand God.

If we do this then we will not be doing, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "thinking in the terms of two spheres; the sacred and the secular", but one reality which is defined by God in God's action towards both those realities in Christ. It is God in Christ which defines the nature of church *and* the world in their relationship and their difference. For it is Jesus Christ who is the creator Word of God, through whom everything that is came to be, and it is He who is incarnate in Jesus Christ as the world's reconciler and Lord of the church.

So the unity and difference between the church and the world, creation and redemption, creation and reconciliation is grounded in Christ. Not grounded in our ideas about the world or the church. Because our ideas are limited by our human experience. If we want to understand what the world is or what the church is, we must start with who God is. "*Who is God and what is the world in relationship to this God who gives Himself to be known?*" The key concept in the Bible that undergirds God's relationship to the world and to God's people is that of the covenant.

In the covenant, God binds Himself to a people. This God who is completely free and needs nothing, nevertheless chooses to be in covenant with Israel. The Old Testament writers did not believe that God was tied to the world by necessity. Why? Because this is not the way in that God had acted in relationship to them. God had acted in relationship to them as the God who did not need them, who was not tied to them in any way.

Nevertheless, graciously, freely, God willed to tie Himself to God's people. Therefore, Israel deduced that everything that exists is the consequence of God's freely willed purpose to relate to that which is not God.

Christ is the fulfilment of this covenant. The early church, still coming to terms with what the coming of the Messiah meant and how He fulfilled the covenant in Himself, came to realise that the mission of the church was the proclamation of a new covenant in Jesus, not just for Israel, but for Jews and Gentile alike.

PRAYER

Covenanting God,
You chose us. You redeemed us.
And you bought our freedom through
the blood of Your own Son.
Now you call us to proclaim this new covenant
of a God who still gives of Himself for all people.
Thank you for Your covenant and promises
That find their fulfilment in Jesus
Our Lord and Saviour.
Amen