

DISCIPLE

THE BIBLE TEACHING

In the closing time together, we will remember. We will recall, in liturgical form, phrases of God's Word that we have studied. Some words are so much a part of our subconscious memory that we will hardly notice them. Others will cause us to think, Aha! I remember from Genesis, or Leviticus, or the Psalms, or the words of Jesus. We will close our DISCIPLE study by remembering, by making covenant together, by committing our lives to Christian work and witness, and by eating the meal of grace. We will focus on three spiritual realities when we worship together—covenant, communion, and commitment.

Covenant

By now you know that we walk by faith, not alone but within a covenant community. We have joined a salvation through marching across the centuries in conversation with God.

In the beginning God called Abraham and Sarah to be a pilgrim people, to bring blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). The covenant had signs: land, descendants, circumcision, sabbath. Later, with Moses, the covenant meant deliverance, law, and liturgy. Always the covenant meant promise and hope.

Obedience is the heart of human response. Biblical covenant is no mere contract. God calls an obedient people. When they disobey, everything falls apart. Isaiah was called to tell this to a people who would not listen—a hard duty (Isaiah 6:1-10). As the forms of sacrifice became superficial, as keeping the law became legalistic, as religion became ritual without commitment to justice and righteousness, the prophets foretold a new inner covenant. The new covenant would require a circumcised heart.

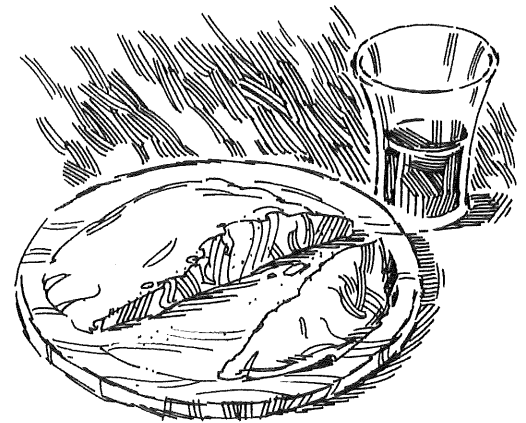
“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

Jesus Christ, the mediator of a new covenant, has put us right with God and has offered the sacrifice once and for all (Hebrews 9:15-28). Now as a covenant people we live in promise: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (13:14). That city is the new Jerusalem where God and the covenant people will dwell together (Revelation 21:1-6). The Holy Communion or Eucharist (“the Thanksgiving”) is the common meal the covenant people eat together, remembering and waiting (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Communion

We have learned that our faith is not a solitary faith; we live it out together. Just as ancient Hebrews ate thanksgiving sacrifices, just as they ate the Passover meal together,

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS



REMEMBER

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

together we eat the bread symbolizing Jesus' broken body and drink the wine symbolizing Jesus' blood of sacrifice. In sharing the common meal, something happens among us; the barriers are broken down. Look up and copy Ephesians 2:14-16 in the margin to the right.

We also eat with Christ. Theologians debate ways of understanding this mystery, but Christians know by experience and by God's Word that Christ is present as we eat together in faith. Look up and copy Revelation 3:20.

We eat a meal of grace. We come as we are, from the "roads and lanes" (Luke 14:23). We are the least, the last, and the lost. God provides the food and all that it means. All we do is eat in faith, believing. God counts it as righteousness. We are sorry for our sins, eager to be changed, and hopeful of God's future.

The meal is sign and symbol of covenant community. It is food for the journey, sustenance for our pilgrimage of faith.

Commitment

When Isaiah was called, he responded, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). So will we.

We know now from Scripture that to be God's people means to do God's work. We must be distinctive, peculiar, a people set apart. As we reread Matthew 5-7, we were reminded how different from the world we must be. Jesus taught, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). What does that phrase mean? Our peculiarity is a sign of God's work. Our saltiness is symbol and seal of what God is doing through us to save a lost world. In the Old Testament salt symbolizes the covenant relation. When people in the Near East eat salt together, they are bonded in friendship. So when we share our saltiness with others and with God, we share covenant.

God was not satisfied only to restore Israel after captivity; God gave Israel a mission:

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"
(Isaiah 49:6).

Our Lord stood on the mountain and gave his post-Resurrection command to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Disciples commit their life completely to God to serve as God wills.

DISCIPLE

The Covenant Service

The practice of holding special services for making and renewing covenants has roots in such Scripture passages as Deuteronomy 26:17-18, Joshua 24:1-28, and Jeremiah 31:31-34. This covenant service draws also upon the rich tradition of Puritan literature. Although across the years the service has been revised from its early Nonconformist—Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist—and Methodist beginnings, the covenant prayer has changed little.

Order of Worship

GATHERING

GREETING

Dearly beloved, the Christian life to which we are called is a life in Christ, redeemed from sin by Christ, and through Christ 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 for ever.

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

On the other side we stand pledged to live no more unto ourselves, but to Christ who loved us and gave himself for us, and has called us to serve him that the purpose of his coming might be fulfilled.

From time to time, we renew our vows of consecration, especially when we gather at the Lord's Table: but on this day we meet expressly, as generations of our forebears 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 God's calling, examine ourselves by the light of God's 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.

HYMN

"O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Let us pray:

Let us worship our Creator, the God of love;
God continually preserves and sustains us;
we have been loved with an everlasting love;
through Jesus Christ we have been given complete knowledge of God's glory.

You are God; we praise you; we acknowledge you to be the Lord.

Let us glory in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor;
he was tempted in all points as we are,
but he was without sin;

he went about doing good
and preaching the gospel of the kingdom;
he accepted death, death on the cross;
he was dead and is alive for ever;
he has opened the kingdom of heaven
to all who trust in him;
he sits in glory at the right hand of God;
he will come again to be our judge.

You, Christ, are the King of Glory.

Let us rejoice in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.

Through the Spirit we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
the witness of the Spirit confirms us;
the wisdom teaches us;
the power enables us;
the Spirit will do far more for us than we ask or think.

All praise to you, Holy Spirit.

SILENT PRAYER

LORD'S PRAYER

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 49:1-10 **or** Deuteronomy 8:1-10

PSALM OR ANTHEM

Psalm 8 **or** Psalm 117

SECOND LESSON

Colossians 2:1-7 **or** Ephesians 3:1-10

GOSPEL

Luke 14:12-24 **or** Matthew 25:31-46

SERMON

[Two- or three-minute exhortation by group member who has been identified as having this gift. Or let all persons have opportunity to tell briefly what the DISCIPLE study has meant in their spiritual development.]

HYMN

"Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine"

[This hymn may be read in unison or sung to the tune of "Amazing Grace."]

CONFESSION OF SIN

Let us humbly confess our sins to God.

O God, you have shown us the way of life
through your Son, Jesus Christ.

We confess with shame our slowness to learn of him,
our failure to follow him,
and our reluctance to bear the cross.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

We confess the poverty of our worship,
our neglect of fellowship and of the means of grace,
our hesitating witness for Christ,
our evasion of responsibilities in our service,
our imperfect stewardship of your gifts.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

Let each of us in silence make confession to God.

REMEMBER

SILENCE

Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive us.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

In your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions; thoroughly wash my iniquity from me, and cleanse me from my sin.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Now the message that we have heard from God's Son and that we announce is this: God is Light, and there is no darkness in him.

When we live in the Light—and God is the Light—then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from every sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

But if we confess our sins to God,

God will keep his promise;

God will forgive us all our wrongdoing.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

COLLECT

Let us pray:

Father, you have appointed our Lord Jesus Christ as mediator of a new covenant;

Give us grace to draw near with fullness of faith and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE COVENANT

In the first covenant, God chose Israel to be a special people and to obey the Law.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection, has made a new covenant with all who trust in him.

We stand within this covenant and we bear Christ's name. On the one side,

God promises to give us new life in Christ.

On the other side, we are pledged to live, not for ourselves but for God.

Today, therefore, we meet to renew this covenant that binds us to God.

(The people stand.)

Friends, let us claim the covenant God has made with his people

and accept the yoke of Christ.

When we accept the yoke of Christ, we allow Christ to guide all that we do

and all that we are,

and Christ himself is our only reward.

Christ has many ways for us to serve him; some are easy, others are difficult.

Some receive applause; others bring only reproach; some we desire to do because of our own interests; others seem unnatural.

Sometimes we please Christ and meet our own needs; at other times we cannot please Christ unless we deny ourselves.

Yet Christ strengthens us and gives us the power to do all these things.

Therefore let us make this covenant with God our own.

Let us give ourselves completely to God,

trusting in God's promises and relying on God's grace.

I give myself completely to you, God.

Assign me to my place in your creation.

Let me suffer for you.

Give me the work you would have me do.

Give me many tasks,

or have me step aside while you call others.

Put me forward or humble me.

Give me riches or let me live in poverty.

I freely give all that I am and all that I have to you.

And now, holy God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

May this covenant made on earth

continue for all eternity.

Amen.

CONCERNS AND PRAYERS

[Let opportunity be given for prayers for others.]

THE PEACE

[Stand and greet each other with appropriate signs of love and peace.]

OFFERING

[Let the bread and wine be placed before the minister.]

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so,

with your people on earth and all the company of heaven

we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.