

## **Covenants as Rafts**

Shared at Shadow Rock United Church of Christ on Covenant Sunday

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### INVOCATIONAL PRAYER

May we walk with grace

May every footstep not be a wound to the earth but an act of love.

May the light of love and life which holds the universe together shine upon our path.

May my words be echo expressions of the deeper mystery. It is a bold hope and prayer but I do not pray it for me but for the edification of all people of faith.

Amen.

Today we define many relationships by contracts. These are usually for goods or services and for hard cash. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify failure in these relationships. Our tradition does not say that God established a contract with creation. God established a covenant. There is a difference. The difference has to do with depth of agreement and depth of trust. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" The doctor simply goes on to the next patient and has the appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor and if there was not enough notice the patient may be charged even though services were not rendered. The patient broke an informal contract.

Our tradition conveys something very different. Ancient wisdom from our scripture has God asking the question, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?" to make the point more emphatically the scripture goes obnoxiously further, "Though a mother may forget, I will not forget you!" The difference is like the a person who fails to sit at the table of a restraint compared to our children failing to show up at the table at dinner time. The waiter will not leave the restaurant and pull people off the street in order to serve them but a parent will turn the neighborhood upside down in order to make sure that the child is safe and provided for. It is the difference between a charitable dining hall and feeding the homeless as an extension of worship and celebration of life. A dining hall is an informal contract but feeding the homeless as an expression of true worship is a covenant.

A covenant is an agreement. A covenant is a raft for all of us to gather as we go down the river of life and faith together. A covenant is nice when we are all together and we are all rowing in the same direction. When we are not in agreement and we are not in the

same boat rowing in the same direction then a covenant is not just nice, it is essential. A raft on a quiet lazy river makes for a nice ride but when sojourners come to the whitewater then a raft is a life saver.

When we think about the various covenants of our lives we know this is true. When two people commit themselves to each other in the covenant of marriage and unity they have times of joy but when the relationship gets difficult then they have a covenant.

Covenants hold us together if we take them seriously and we allow them to make a claim on us. Peg and I decided before we married that our covenant would be the most important reality in our lives. We wanted our relationship to honor each other and to honor God. We entered into marriage believing that a good marriage was a glimpse of the good that God intends for the whole world and a bad marriage was a glimpse of hell. We wanted people to find sanctuary in our home and we knew that would not be possible if we were not loving and honorable for each other. Let me use a story that helped shape my level of commitment.

I heard this story either right before we got married or right after. A minister stands before God and has to give an accounting of his life.

He says, "I served the Church for over 45 years!"

God says, "What about your life partner?"

He says, "I have preached over 2500 sermons!"

God says, "What about your children?"

The minister is beginning to sweat and get defensive, "I did over 400 baptisms, 300 weddings, and 1000 funerals!"

God says, "What about the person who pledged their life to you and said you would do the same? How did you love and honor them?"

Bill Smith wrote in one of his Pebble articles, *"The hope of the world and the hope of us all individually may well depend upon the kind of covenants we have made and the kind of seriousness with which we fulfill those covenants. Love between two people is temporal without serious covenants. Treaties between two countries are of little value without a deep understanding of the nature of covenant."*

Covenants hold us together if we take them seriously and we allow them to make a claim on us and we honor that claim. This is what we do when we make a pledge on Stewardship Sunday. This is what we do when we give our time and talent to the Church. We are honoring covenant when we go the extra mile to listen to each other and we are honoring covenant when we acknowledge that people have gone the extra mile for our benefit.

Bill Smith ends his article with this proclamation: *"We have a covenant! Maybe the time is here for renewal for us all!"*

I call on your imagination to see beyond our important, essential and everyday covenants. People are all the time making agreements with life or with death. When we honor our covenants then we are participating with the Spirit of Life and Love to perpetuate life and love. When we dishonor each other and we fail to affirm every life then we are making a covenant with the forces of death.

The covenant of all covenants is the covenant we have with life itself.

**“Maybe the time is here for renewal for us all!”.**

By the way we live and treat each other we can tell whether or not we have an agreement with life or with death. The covenant of all covenants is the covenant we have with life itself.

**“Maybe the time is here for renewal for us all!”.**

When we speak for justice and peace we are honoring our agreement with life but when we keep silent we give our power away and in our silence we make an agreement with death. The covenant of all covenants is the covenant we have with life itself.

**“Maybe the time is here for renewal for us all!”.**

Our covenant with one another gives us strength for the journey. Our striving to keep Covenant with one another and with God creates sacred space and sacred moments. Our striving to keep Covenant takes us out of our egos to that which is within us and all around us. Indeed, now is the time to renew our Covenant.