

Sermon Starter – Covenant: A Living, Breathing Thing

Genesis 17:1-10, 15-16, Jeremiah 31:33

Covenant, as a term and concept, has largely fallen into disuse in our society. We use other words like *commitment, vow, promise, treaty, contract, agreement, responsibility, oath, allegiance, or care*, but we rarely use *covenant* anymore. A covenant is not like a contract, where there are clear indications of whether or not the contract has been fulfilled or broken. Rather, a covenant is much more messy, much more fluid, much more like life. This concept of covenant recognizes that commitment has a spiritual component. Covenant acknowledges that, whatever it is we commit ourselves to in this life, there is a spiritual component to that commitment; it impacts us at the deepest levels, at soul levels. No other word in our language holds this reality.

Why does God continue to appear to Abram and Sarai and renew the covenant to them? Does God forget? No, God continues to make this promise to Abram and Sarai because a covenant is a living, breathing thing. Every time that promise is said aloud, every time those words are uttered, the promise is renewed—more life is breathed into it. Every time we say, “I love you” to one another—as parents, or siblings, or spouses, or friends—that promise is renewed. New life is breathed again into that covenant with those words. It’s not because we forgot the promises we made, but that covenants are messy things that need constant attention and care. They require intention, time, and deliberate renewal.

On this third time that God appeared, God decided it was time to give them a daily reminder of their covenant. So God changed their names, just slightly, from Abram to Abraham, “father of many nations,” and from Sarai to Sarah, “kings shall come from her.” It would have been a lot easier if God had just given us a contract to sign or a list of 600 rules to follow. But that is not what God did; instead we were given this living and breathing commitment to make with God and one another, a commitment that requires constant attention and must be uttered again and again. A covenant is not made complete with a signature or even with our being dipped in baptismal waters; a commitment is only made complete with our lives. It is certainly good that we have one another for such a commitment as this.

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