

## People of the Covenant

The season of Lent invites new actions or new decisions that usher in a change of heart and mind. This is a time for us to explore what it truly means to be in covenant with God, as well as how we live this covenantal relationship with God through our community of faith.

Scripture constantly speaks about Covenantal relationships. God makes covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Ishmael and as we share the Eucharist, we celebrate the remembrance of Jesus in another new covenant.

New covenants do not cancel the former covenants they actually expand the promise of God's love for the world.

Covenantal relationship says that when we accept God's love for us, we understand that our lives are then profoundly linked with God's will.

Almost all of the things we do in life can be done *outside* of a covenantal relationship with God—marriage, children, work, voting—name it, but when we decide that we are God's person and we enter the world as such—we pledge our highest loyalty to God's purposes; we vow to see the world through God's loving eyes and not simply our own sometimes fearful, partial view.

It is then and only then that our relationships, our work and play and life become intertwined with God's hope for us. God never forces our hand, it is we who must invite God in.

Loving the world as God does means that sometimes we must have the courage in our day to day lives to empty ourselves of our need to control, dominate, or just go along to get along, and seek to do God's will instead of our own, even, quite possibly, at personal cost.

This might mean opening our hearts and changing our minds about something about which we were certain, but now realize it just doesn't seem like truth anymore. God tapping us on the shoulder can challenge our old worldview.

Taking a risk out of our relationship with God can lead us into all kinds of challenging "transformational opportunities" that twist us up for a while, but have a deep, soul driven "rightness" and freedom about them.

If we can be brave enough we can all begin to see the places in our own lives that cry out for transformation or healing or letting go.

Our tired spirits bloom into vitality when we make the decision to love the world as God does and claim the courage to be a people of compassion, and mercy. This is what it means to stand with Abraham, Jesus and all the rest and say, "I am God's person!"

God created the world and loves everything that is in it. And it is important to say that God's will and God's love never, ever intersects with injustice, oppression, shame or abuse of a person or persons.

God, who is revealed in the life and actions of Jesus, longs to have our lives oriented toward reconciling the whole world to God once and for all. We do this in covenant with God. We welcome God's constant forgiveness when we forget and must begin again to love and forgive.

Lent offers us a sweet invitation to examine our lives and to reorder our relationships and decide once again that we belong to God. We resolve to take up God's purposes of spreading joy. We embrace God's hope for the tearing down of walls and the building of building bridges.

As Henri Nouwen reminds us in *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*:  
"When God makes a covenant with us, God says: 'I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me, or betray me.'

He says, 'In our society we don't speak much about covenants; we speak about contracts. When we make a contract with a person, we say: 'I will fulfill my part as long as you fulfill yours. When you don't live up to your promises, I no longer have to live up to mine.' Contracts are often broken because the partners are unwilling or unable to be faithful to their terms.

He goes on to say, 'But God didn't make a contract with us; God made a covenant with us, and God wants our relationships with one another to reflect that covenant. That's why marriage, friendship, life in community are all ways to give visibility to God's faithfulness in our lives together.'

So, I say to us all, in this time of Lent, we need not be afraid. We do not have to fear our unfaithfulness, our doubt, or be afraid of the wounds or the petty smallness that we hide even from ourselves. Our covenanting God of mercy and grace will have the last word in all of our concerns.

Our challenge, like all who came before, is to believe that this will be so, in spite of frequent and impressive evidence that would suggest differently. Trust in the love of God that is never-ending.

Happy Lent, Stephanie+