

“New Church - Empowered by the Spirit”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27

Graphics: new start, Holy Spirit, covenant

Big Truth: After Jesus ascended to heaven, the church was brand new and had to find its way. Right now, the church in 2021 is a new church, and we have to find our way again. To do that, we have to do the same thing the first church did - seek the Lord in prayer, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit as we renew our covenant with God. We are a new church!

Focus Phrase: I renew my covenant with you, God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

- B. When was the last time that you remember making a **promise** or commitment to someone? Stacy and I just spent a couple days in Syracuse helping our son Ben and daughter-in-law Brianna move to a new apartment. A couple months ago, when they told us they were moving, we said, “We’ll BE there to help!” We’re a little SORE this morning!
- C. I think we make promises and commitments all the time! Some are small, like showing up for work on time, or going to a family gathering. Being in worship regularly and growing as a disciple also takes commitment to the church. Other promises are more profound like getting married or raising children.
- D. The bible has a word for making a committed promise. But it’s not just promising to do something for someone else, but a commitment between two people or parties. It’s called a **covenant**. A covenant is a mutually-binding promise, most of the time between God and a person or a group of people.
- E. God’s first official recorded covenant in the Bible was with a man named Abram, who God would later rename Abraham. In Genesis 17:1-5, we read these words, “When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants.” Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, “But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham.”
- F. You can see how it’s a two-way street: God said, “...walk with me and be trustworthy...” which means that Abram was to be faithful to God alone. And God would make Abraham the father of many, many descendants. It’s not really an ‘if/then’ arrangement, but ‘both/and’. You will do this. I will do this.
- G. Now, a covenant can be broken by one or the other parties involved. But, in the case of God, the only one who would ever break the covenant is on the human side...because God is 100% FAITHFUL.

- H. The next major covenant that God made was with Moses. And, actually, it wasn't a new covenant, but a renewal of the covenant that God made with Abraham. It was at that time that God gave Moses and the Jewish people the 10 Commandments. God said, "I will be your God...you will be my people."
- I. That covenant - that promise - is still in effect today. Yet we, as followers of Jesus Christ, have a renewed promise of God's covenant in a bigger way. **WE have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit**, given to the church on the first Pentecost Day.
- J. And it was on that first Pentecost Day that God renewed the covenant He made to Abraham and Moses - WITH THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS...renewed the promise to be our God.
- K. Here's where we're headed today: as we today press on through COVID chaos, in a world that's changed and will continue to change and try to negate the things of God, we're a NEW CHURCH. In order for us to live into the calling God has for us as we live into that, we have to renew our covenant with Jesus, again, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to testify to that lost and broken world.
- L. Jesus promised in John chapter 15:26-27 when he promised: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning." That's also our mission.
- M. Today, God is asking each of us to renew our covenant with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- N. Let's turn to Acts chapter 2, starting in verse 1...

2. Scripture

A. READ Acts 2:1-13

- i. On that first Pentecost, the apostles and the gathering of disciples and followers of Jesus - the 120+ people that we talked about last week from Acts 1 - became the New Church. Same God, NEW CHURCH in a new way.
- ii. Becoming the New Church was initiated when the Holy Spirit that was promised by Jesus, came, literally, CRASHING into this crowd of people.
- iii. But, it was more than that.
- iv. See, the day that all those people were gathered in Jerusalem was one of the big three festivals in the life of the Jewish people.
- v. Pentecost took place during the annual Festival of Weeks - in Hebrew known as Shavuot. It was a pilgrimage festival, meaning that people came

into the city from all over the region. This festival was a celebration of the end of the spring grain harvest. People would come together, bring grain offerings, and worship.

- vi. But a critical piece of this festival and worship was, listen, a RENEWAL of the COVENANT that God made with Moses - you remember the whole burning bush incident in Exodus 3.
- vii. And what we find is that when that happened on that particular day, it wasn't just a new thing in their midst - not just an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as amazing as that was - but it was a renewed promise from God to empower His Church for a new awakening of His mission and vision for them.
- viii. Steve Werlin writes, "There is evidence...suggesting that for some Jews during the Second Temple period, Shavuot was the most important and holiest of the three pilgrimage festivals. In the book of Jubilees, Shavuot is celebrated as the annual renewal of the covenant between God, on the one hand, and Noah, the patriarchs, and Moses on the other. Shavuot may have had special significance for the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well. The theme of an annually renewed covenant carried over into early Christian interpretations, associated with Acts 2:1-11. Over the centuries, Christians have celebrated Pentecost fifty days after Easter, to commemorate the receiving of the Holy Spirit by followers of Jesus."
- ix. So, the people came together, they prayed for God to show them the New Church, and when God poured out the Holy Spirit in wind and fire, the covenant with God was renewed!
- x. It was at that moment, by God's power, that "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."
- xi. Now, most scholars tell us, and I agree, that this, "...speaking in other languages..." here is not the same as speaking in tongues that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13 and 14, or even in Acts 19. In those references, it's talking about an unknown Holy Spirit-given prayer and prophesy language - known as glossolalia in Greek - that's used to build up and encourage the church.
- xii. Here in Acts 2, it's xenolalia, where the hearers COULD understand what was being said, even though the speakers were speaking in foreign languages. Both are Holy Spirit-given, but for two different purposes. In this case, it was for all who were gathered in that place, who were entering into the NEW CHURCH and renewing their covenant with God, to understand God's mission and vision.

xiii. To hear what God had in store, let's turn back to Acts 2, starting in verse 14, as Peter stood up to address the crowd and some onlookers - some of whom were quite skeptical of all that was happening around them...

B. READ Acts 2:14-21

- i. Peter saw what was happening - that some people, who didn't have the Holy Spirit come upon them, were confused and thought these people were drunk. But it was only 9 in the morning! It's not THAT! It's the Holy Spirit doing what the Holy Spirit wants to do in the crowd.
- ii. And to explain it, Peter reached back to the words from the Old Testament prophet Joel, who listed out ALL those things that would happen when God's Spirit came upon the earth in the final chapter of history: prophecy and visions and dreams; grand signs in heaven and on earth; blood, fire, misty smoke; and all this before the final coming of the Lord.
- iii. AND...AND, here's the promise, here's our vision, here's our HOPE: **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord WILL BE SAVED! (repeat)**
- iv. Saved from what? Saved from destruction...saved from death...saved from the ultimate punishment for our sin...ultimately saved from the harshness of this world to live with God forever!
- v. But not just saved FROM all that, but saved FOR God's holy purposes. They were being saved for the mission to testify to the truth of Jesus, to love the community and give people the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus, to make disciples for the transformation of the world!
- vi. EVERYONE who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!
- vii. And it all started with the Holy Spirit came upon them for the renewal of God's promise and mission through them!
- viii. I can't think of a better time than today FOR US to be reading this!

3. Application

- A. For the last 40-50 years, maybe longer, there's been a sense that the Church is approaching another spiritual great awakening. It's something that happens once every 500 years or so, if you look back through church history. As each year passes, we sense it more and more - a call to the next great awakening in the church.
- B. This global pandemic has been the center of all that we've done. It's hastened the awareness of our need for more of God and less of us. It's a good day to worship with more openness today!
- C. And coming out of this pandemic, one thing is clear: we're not going back to the way things were. That way doesn't even exist anymore. So, the only two choices we have, other than giving up, and letting the devil win are (1) to stay

where we are...or (2) to move forward toward that next great awakening in the church.

- D. I, for one, am all in to move forward with ALL that God has for His church right here in Panama, and around the globe.
- E. Last week, we saw the New Church in Acts 1 come together and then pray for God to do that new thing.
- F. And after they came together, and prayed, God made their leadership whole by adding that 12th disciple. When they were ready together and prayed up, God then **empowered the New Church with the Holy Spirit**. Bam!
- G. We're being called to be a New Church for today. Yet, the incredible thing is that the God who made a covenant with Abraham and with Moses...the God who renewed that promise every year at Shavuot with the Jewish believers... THAT God is the SAME God who's calling you to renew YOUR commitment to His mission and His Kingdom today.
- H. And, the same Holy Spirit that blew through the place on the first Pentecost is here today at the 2000th or so Pentecost.
- I. And if the covenant was set in place THAT day...then because God hasn't changed, we confidently place it before us today to renew once again.
- J. But before we do that, let me give us some cautions to consider as we live into being the New Church for today, seeking the Lord and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - i. First, the **New Church will need to be confident** in the midst of the world's skepticism and even hostility. This is nothing new, though. The church in Acts had nay-sayers and critics. Jesus died on the cross because the religious authorities were threatened. The church today has nay-sayers, critics, and more, for the same reasons. That's going to increase. The church at its best is a place of salvation and hope and community. Yet, the church is not perfect, and the people of the church are sinners saved by grace. Sometimes we're our own problem. Yet, when we confidently love and live in humility, the world will see the truth! Be confident in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep the mission moving.
 - ii. Second, being the **New Church requires some changes** for each of us and for the church. Change is never easy, as we know very well from the past year. Yet, as we raise up new leaders to lead us through any changes that God is calling us to make, we can be confident in taking those steps with hope!
 - iii. The final caution is that **you will be asked to do things that you may not currently want to do**. The New Church is bold in its witness. Robert W. Wall said, "A Spirit-empowered witness to the risen Jesus is the means by

which God's purposes are realized." God's purposes are to turn scoffers into believers and skeptics into worshippers. God's purposes are to redeem and prepare the world for Jesus' return. God's purposes are to awaken the world to the reality and truth about Jesus. John Wesley said that, "Gospel preaching leads to an awakening experience." Preaching isn't just from the pulpit, but from the mouths of all those who are part of the New Church. God may just ask us to do things we aren't comfortable doing right now, but will empower us to do them by the Holy Spirit's presence.

- K. Change is coming, but with God's promises IN US through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can not stop or give up!

4. Conclusion

- A. Our covenant with God is empowered and ratified by the Holy Spirit IN US.
- B. In this RE-NEWed CHURCH, we are called to offer ourselves again for His use and glory to spread holiness throughout the community and world.
- C. I'm inviting you this morning to RENEW that COVENANT AGAIN. To do that, we'll be using a prayer written in the 18th century, which came out of the Methodist Movement started by John Wesley. The purpose of the movement was to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.
- D. Today, we renew that covenant. This is an invitation. If you're not ready to pray this or renew this covenant, that's OK. All I ask is that we do this with integrity and faith, even if we're not sure what God will do with our prayers.
- E. (remain seated and take a posture of prayer) Wesley's Covenant Prayer...
 - i. A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (Contemporary Version)
**I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,
Praised for you or criticized for you.**

**Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
And now, O wonderful and holy God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it also be made in heaven. Amen.**
- F. What you've just said is, "I renew my covenant with you, God, by the power of the Holy Spirit."

- G. After I offer a brief prayer, we'll be sent out today with a blessing. This song is also a prayer that bestows God's favor and mercy on you, your family, and the generations to come after you.
- H. God offered Abraham a blessing...and it's the same blessing that He's offering you today. Take it. Be NEW, CHURCH!
- I. **PRAY...**