

I could preach a long time to you this morning on the concept of Covenant. You all might remember I went to Divinity school where I was taught to expound at length on deep theological concepts. But you might be relieved to know that I am not going to do that. Most importantly because I don't think speaking about covenant is how you learn about covenant— you have to live it, enact it experience it. And so we will this morning

We write down covenants but they do not live on paper, they live in our hearts, they grow and deepen and strengthen as we live them and use them and sometimes break them and then renew them.

Covenants are nothing more and nothing less than promises. But ... Not the kind of promises you make when your adult asks you to clean your room – “I promise” not the kind of promise you make when your partner asks you to remember to pick up some milk on your way home “I promise” Not the kind of promise you make when the cashier asks you to fill out the survey that you can find by following the link at the bottom of the receipt “I promise”

Covenants are deeper promises. They are the promises we make to ourselves and to each other that help bind us together into a community. And they can be hard. In our congregational covenant We promise each other that we will be warm and friendly, open and welcoming, respectful in our language, caring in our conflict. We promise each other space enough to be ourselves, and closeness enough to challenge one another to learn something new, to change and to grow. We promise to practice gratitude and to be responsible for our actions owning up to and accepting when we make mistakes. We promise to make amends when the covenant has been broken. I don't know about you but those are the kind of promises that make me take a deep breath and say OK I'm going to try my hardest but whew I don't know if I am up to it. But covenants have a kind of super power.

This morning we are going to celebrate our community – we will bless backpacks, covenant with our new intern, ritually bring our community back together by co-mingling water, we will sing together and if that is not a fomr

of prayer I don't know what is, we have greeted one another and will continue to do so after the service in what is sometimes know as the after party or "coffee hour" It is good to be together and it is epspecially good to be together in a covenanted community because of that super power.

Last June 5th you all voted to call me as your pastor – that moved the relationship from a contract to a covenant. More than anything that move means that we promise to stay in the relationship to the best of our abitility - it means that when I make a mistake you promise not to boot me out the door but come back and try to work it out with me – it means that when you make a mistake I will not simply gather my toys and huff off – I promise to come back and work it out to the best of my ability.

Great things will happen this year, the Capital Campaign, our youth groups will astound us, the choir and Sara Jo will bring forth fabualous music, our fellowship hall will be dry, we will have potlucks and discussions that bring us joy. We will share our joys and sorrows with one another and we will come to love each other even more deeply.

And we will disappoint one another. If I haven't done it already some Sunday I am going to give a sermon that is God awful, or I will forget to send out that critical email, or even worse I might miss that you are not doing well and need a friendly call from the pastor. And you all, hard as you try one of you might miss a committee meeting, and it is possible try as hard as you can that gluten will end up on the gluten free table, or words will deeply hurt one of you or ... well the list could go on but it is not in my nature to over emphasize the negative in a sermon.

Let me read a quote to your from RevGretchen Haley:

“sometime in the next year, maybe in the next few minutes, the people you most believe in and care about are going to disappoint you. Your church is going to disappoint you. This world is surely going to disappoint you. Like, all the time. We all are walking wounded and weary from the way this world can – and does – break our hearts.

And what our faith asks of us, what our faith imagines for us, is that somehow, right at that moment when our hearts break, we will find our way to see through that heartbreak. We will stay put – not close off, not run away, not hurt back – but keep on being in relationship, doing what we can to repair the world and each other, keep on opening our hearts with greater love. And, right then, our covenantal faith says – we will feel not only most human, but also most whole and most at home.”

I do know is that this community is full of love – we love with open hearts, we stay in relationship, we work to repair the world that is so broken, and we support each other in that work.

It is the super power of covenant that allows us to do that. The promise that we will stay at the table stay in the relationship we won't leave at broken. We heard the words this morning:

Come, come whoever you are
Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving

This isn't a caravan of despair

And the words we don't often sing:

It doesn't matter if you have broken your vows a thousand times before!

Come yet again come,

In a world without end let us be together in covenant.