

## Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit Service at Home – Sunday 15th January

### Methodist Covenant Service

From the earliest days of the Methodist societies, John Wesley invited the Methodist people to renew their Covenant relationship with God. The emphasis of the service is on God's readiness to enfold us in generous love, not dependent on our deserving. Our response, also in love, springs from our thankful recognition of God's grace. The Covenant is not just a one-to-one transaction between individuals and God, but the act of the whole faith community.

### Listen, read, pray, or sing along StF51

<https://youtu.be/FLsGGPFsufQ>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;  
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not ;  
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :

*Great is thy faithfulness !*

*Great is thy faithfulness!*

*Morning by morning new mercies I see ;*

*all I have needed thy hand hath provided.*

*Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love :

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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### Prayers

Glory to the Father, the God of love,  
who created us;  
who continually preserves and sustains us;  
who has loved us with an everlasting love,  
and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory  
in the face of Jesus Christ.

### Blessed be God for ever.

Glory to Jesus Christ our saviour,  
Who, though he was rich,  
Yet for our sake became poor,  
And was tested in every way as we are,  
Yet without sin;  
Who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,  
And was obedient to the point of death,  
Even death on a cross;  
Who was raised from the dead and is alive for ever,  
And has opened the kingdom of heaven  
To all who trust in him;  
Who is seated at God's right hand in glory,  
And will come to be our judge.

### Blessed be God for ever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit,  
The Lord, the giver of life,  
By whom we are born into the family of God,  
And made members of the body of Christ;  
Whose witness confirms us;  
Whose power enables us;  
Who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

### Blessed be God for ever.

To the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Be praise and glory for ever. **Amen.**

### Collect

God of grace,  
Through the mediation of your Son,  
You call us into a new covenant.  
Help us therefore to draw near with faith  
And join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Read** Deuteronomy 29 v 10-15

**Read** John 15 v 1-10

### Reflection

The annual Covenant Service is at the heart of our discipleship as Christians within the Methodist tradition. It is in this service that the whole Church, the Connexion of Methodists worldwide and the Connexion here in Britain joyfully celebrates God's

gracious offer to Israel as in the reading from Deuteronomy that "I will be their God and they shall be my people".

We believe that the offer made to Israel extends to all women and men in Jesus Christ. Jesus provides us with the supreme example of what it is to live in such a close and committed relationship with God both individually and corporately. What God offers us is a loving relationship. The Covenant is not a contract in which God and human beings agree to provide goods and services for each other! It is not something that we have to do to create a relationship with God. God's grace comes first. The Covenant is the means by which we accept the relationship and then seek to sustain it. It is not about acquiring a relationship with God but about continuing to live within the loving relationship that God has already made possible.

There is a challenge however within the Covenant offer. If God is committed to us, are we prepared to accept that as reality and commit ourselves in return to God? If we are, then how are we to live out this relationship faithfully as individuals and as a local Methodist church, an offshoot of the larger Circuit to which we belong?

One of the ancient analogies by which the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) referred to the people of Israel was that they were God's vineyard. John plucks this image and uses it here to illustrate the Oneness, the unity of God. God is the vinedresser enabling the flowing of the divine life through the vine, pruning it so it can grow and bear more and more fruit. 'Think of me', Jesus says, 'as that vine through whom the essence of the One God flows into every branch and through whom all the nations on earth will be blessed'. Think of yourselves as the branches of the vine and see how we are all bound together in this divine purpose. God flows through me and I flow through you. Your job as the branches is to remain attached so the flow will be unbroken. Only by remaining attached can you grow and bear fruit. A branch that is cut off will wither and die. God, the vinedresser, continually cares for, nurtures, and prunes the vine cutting back the branches to maximise their growth and their yield of fruit.

So, sisters and brothers as we commence a New Year 2023 and as we make once again our Covenant oath, how are we to ensure that we each of us both personally and corporately stay attached to the vine?

John Wesley referred to some of the ways in which we are able to do this in his sermon on 'the means of grace'. He said we must pray regularly and we must study the Scriptures. These are things we can all do at home to ensure the flow from the vine to the branches is maintained. It will demand commitment and discipline and a willingness to allow ourselves to be pruned, but over time if we stick at it, we will bear much fruit.

### **The Covenant**

God made a covenant with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law. The covenant was renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in his life, work, death, and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power, and united in love and obedience. In this covenant God promises us new life in Christ. For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God. We meet, therefore, as generations have met before us, to renew the covenant which bound them and binds us to God. Let us then seek forgiveness for the sin by which we have denied God's claim upon us.

### **Let us pray**

God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sins.  
For the sin that has made us slow to learn from Christ,  
reluctant to follow him, and afraid to bear the cross:  
Lord, have mercy,  
**Lord, forgive**

For the sin that has caused the poverty of our  
worship,  
the formality and selfishness of our prayers,  
our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace,  
and our hesitating witness for Christ:

Lord, have mercy,  
**Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gifts,  
evade our responsibilities,  
and fail to be good stewards of your creation:

Lord, have mercy,  
**Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has made us unwilling to overcome  
evil with good, tolerant of injustice,  
quick to condemn,  
and selfish in sharing your love with others:

Lord, have mercy,  
**Lord, forgive.**

*Silence*

**Have mercy on me, O God,  
in your constant love.  
in the fullness of your mercy  
blot out my offences.  
Wash away all my guilt,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Give me the joy of your help again  
and strengthen me with a willing spirit.**

If we confess our sins,  
God is faithful and just,  
and will forgive our sins,  
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Therefore, to all who truly repent  
this is his gracious word:  
'Your sins are forgiven.'

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Sisters and brothers in Christ,  
let us again accept our place within this covenant  
which God has made with us and with all who are  
called to be Christ's disciples.  
This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit,  
we accept God's purpose for us,  
and the call to love and serve God  
in all our life and work.

Christ has many services to be done:  
some are easy, others are difficult.  
some bring honour, others bring reproach.  
some are suitable to our natural inclinations  
and material interests,  
others are contrary to both.  
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves.  
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying  
ourselves.

Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in  
Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore, let us make this covenant of God our own.  
Let us give ourselves to him,  
trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God,  
in your faithful and enduring love  
you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus  
Christ. In obedience we hear and accept your  
commands. in love we seek to do your perfect will.  
with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.  
We are no longer our own but yours.

**I am no longer my own but yours.  
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,  
wherever you may place me,  
in all that I do  
and in all that I may endure.  
when there is work for me  
and when there is none.  
when I am troubled  
and when I am at peace.  
Your will be done  
when I am valued  
and when I am disregarded.  
when I find fulfilment  
and when it is lacking.  
when I have all things,  
and when I have nothing.  
I willingly offer  
all I have and am  
to serve you,  
as and where you choose.  
Glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours.  
May it be so forever.  
Let this covenant now made on earth  
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**

As we have entered this covenant not for ourselves  
alone, but as God's servants and witnesses, let us pray  
for the church and for the world.

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy  
catholic church:  
**make us all one, that the world may believe.**

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority  
in the nations of the world:  
**establish justice and peace among all people.**

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness,  
grief or trouble:

**deliver them from their distress.**

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory:

**bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.**

Let us pray in silence for our own needs and for those of others...

*Silence*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Offering and Prayer of Dedication**

*If you give your weekly offering through an envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and pray with those who give using Standing orders.*

Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives, to be used in mission and service through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

John Harvey, Wild Goose Publications, the Iona Community

#### **Listen, read, pray, or sing along StF 545**

<https://youtu.be/x3jtklzbApA>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art ;  
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ;  
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be ;  
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight ;  
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might ;  
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower :  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise :  
be thou mine inheritance now and always ;  
be thou and thou only the first in my heart :  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won ;  
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century

*translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)*

*versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (alt.)*

### **Closing prayer**

The blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Be upon us and remain with us forever.

**Amen**

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Service prepared by the Revd Ruth Fry

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