

11th January 2026 – Morning Service
Covenant Service from *The Methodist Worship Book*
Rev Andrew Sankey

StF 94 – To God be the glory

1) To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in:

Ch) *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
And give him the glory –
great things he has done!*

2) O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

3) Great things he has taught us, great
things he has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

Frances Jane van Alstyne

Prayer

2 Let us pray.

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.

Blessèd 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.

Blessèd 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 wisdom teaches us;
whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

Blessèd be God for ever.

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

3 Silence

4 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.**

StF 544 – As the deer

1) As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.

Ch) *You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.*

2) I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye.

3) You're my Friend and You are my Brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything.

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Reading: Ephesians 2: 1-22 (NIV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is done in the body by human hands) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

StF 391 – O breath of life come sweeping through us

1) O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive your church with life and power;
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit your church to meet this hour.

2) O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore; for this we plead.

3) O Breath of love, come, breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive your church in every part.

Message

Introduction

In over 40 years of ministry, I must have led and preached at over 80 covenant services (maybe over 100). There are six suggested readings for Covenant, and numerous other readings that are suitable. This year, Kinver Methodist Church is following a preaching series on Ephesians for the first six Sundays of 2026 so I was asked to focus on Ephesians 2, not a set reading for Covenant, but so many resonances to the key covenant themes.

The Covenant Service is one of the most demanding acts of Christian worship. It does not ask us what we feel, but what we will yield. In some of the places I have ministered, there have been a few people who have excused themselves from the covenant service, some because they feel the commitment to the Lord is too great and they cannot say with honesty “I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will...”. Still, others decline to attend because they feel ashamed of their lives not matching the Christian ideal – they know they are not worthy. If they have had the courage to say this to me, I seek to get alongside them and encourage them to attend – the sense of being overwhelmed or ashamed are excellent attitudes to enter into an act of worship including the covenant promises. In our last Church Bible study on Ephesians 1 many of us were overwhelmed at the superlative language used by Paul to describe the generosity and lavishness of God. Today’s reading from Ephesians 2 tells us why we can pray the Covenant Prayer at all: because God has already acted decisively in Christ. Covenant renewal is not about trying harder in the coming year; it is about remembering who we are and whose we are.

1. From Death to Grace (Eph 2:1–9)

Paul begins with honesty: “You were dead in your trespasses and sins.”

Dead people do not negotiate covenants. They do not offer promises. They can only be raised. Before we get to the Covenant Prayer there is a period of confession and in that prayer, there are 14 different prompts of sinfulness. As I share in these services, I have found that I am guilty of all 14 areas of sinfulness. Paul’s words shout at me “you were dead in your sins”. I am aware that it is easy to read the words of the prayer and not take in the words. I do sometimes stop and expound these 14 prompts to help people to be honest and point out how easy it is to wrongly justify yourself. We also still live among a group of people who still justify their selfishness as Paul reminds us in verses 3-5 – “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”

This is why the Covenant Prayer begins not with confidence but surrender: “We are no longer our own, but yours.”

We renew the covenant not because we are strong, but because God is merciful. Grace comes first. Always. And after we have confessed, the minister declares that we are forgiven and the words of the service include those words from 1 John 1:9, “God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. In that moment we are pure, cleansed from all unrighteousness. How amazing is that!

Covenant is not a contract between equals; it is a response to resurrection.

2. Made Alive for God’s Purposes (Eph 2:4–10)

Paul insists that grace does not leave us unchanged. In those few moments after we have been cleansed, we are pure, we are open to God speaking to us (the sin barrier has been removed). Perhaps in the quiet moment after the prayer, or when receiving bread and wine, listen for God to speak to you. If you rush on

too quickly you will miss him. Listening you may discover that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, prepared by God. Is there something God wants you to do?

This gives meaning to the hardest lines of the Covenant Prayer: “Put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you.” These are not words of despair. They are words of trust – trust that the God who raised us knows how our lives should be spent. No matter who you are or what you have done. God has a purpose for you and he longs to walk with you in it.

Grace does not remove obedience; it makes obedience possible.

3. Covenant Creates a People, Not Just Individuals (Eph 2:11–19)

Paul turns from “you” to “we”. Gentiles who were once far away are now members of the same household. Paul was talking about Jews and Gentiles. We have been part of a sinful community, now we are part of a community that is seeking to follow Jesus. We need to part of this new community.

The Covenant Service is intentionally corporate. We do not pray it privately because covenant is not private. We belong to God and to one another. As God has adopted us into his family, all the others who have also been adopted become our brothers and sisters. Paul says, “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...” His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

To renew covenant with God is to recommit ourselves to God’s people.

4. Christ Is the Mediator of the Covenant (Eph 2:13–18)

Paul repeats one phrase: “in Christ” many times in this letter.

Peace, access, reconciliation – all come through Him. Many times, Paul is praying for the unity of the body of Christ, we have a new family, all chosen by God and precious to him, and if that is true then whether we like them or not they are family.

We renew the covenant in Christ, not in our own resolve. The cross stands at the centre of this service, reminding us that covenant faithfulness rests on Christ’s obedience before it rests on ours.

The covenant holds because Christ holds us.

5. A Living Temple Renewing Its Dedication (Eph 2:20–22)

Paul ends with an image of the church as God’s dwelling place. “You are fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Christ you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

The Covenant Service is the temple renewing its vows. God has not moved out. The question is whether we are willing to say again: “You are ours, and we are yours”.

Conclusion

We renew the covenant not to make God faithful to us, but to remember that God already is. Raised from death. Reconciled by the cross. Built together by the Spirit. Therefore, we dare to pray: “We are no longer our own, but yours.”

The Covenant

12 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.

13 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.**

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.**

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.**

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.

15 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.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
 put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
 or laid aside for you,
 exalted for you,
 or brought low for you;
let me be full,
 let me be empty,
let me have all things,
 let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

16 *Silence*

17 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

Lord our God,
you have helped us by your grace
to make these prayers,
and you have promised through Christ our Lord
that when two or three agree in his name
you will grant what they ask.
Answer now your servants' prayers
according to their needs;
in this world grant that we may truly know you,
and in the world to come
graciously give us eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Supper

18 The Peace

The Lord has made an everlasting covenant of peace with his people.
The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

StF 551 – Forth in thy name

Giving it all to you,
giving it all to you,
no more hidden agenda,
giving it all to you.

Laying my burdens down,
bowing in full surrender,
kneeling before your cross,
giving it all to you.

Geraldine Latty © 2000 Thankyou Music

21 The Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

God our Father, fountain of goodness,
creator of all that is,
you have made us in your own image.
You have given us life and reason,
and love for one another,
setting in our hearts a hunger for you.

In darkness you are our light,
in adversity and temptation our strength.
You bear patiently with our folly and sin,
granting us your law to guide us
and your prophets to renew our faith.

In the fullness of time
you came to us in love and mercy
in Jesus Christ, your living Word,
full of grace and truth.

He lived among us,
declaring your forgiveness
and revealing your wisdom
in works of mercy and in his word of power.
For us he suffered and died upon the cross,
by death destroying death.
You raised him from the dead
and exalted him to your right hand on high.
Through him you sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your people,
gathered together in every time and place
to glorify your holy name.

With them and all the company of heaven
we join in the unending hymn of praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy God, pour out your Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood
of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who, on the night in which he was betrayed,
took bread, gave thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take this and eat it.
This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying,
'Drink from it, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, whenever you drink it,
in remembrance of me.'

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

And so, Lord, we obey his command
with this bread and this cup,
by which we recall his death and resurrection,
the source of our life and salvation.
Grant that we, who share in this holy sacrament,
may be united by your Spirit
and grow into perfect love.

Bring us,
with those who have done your will in every age,
into the light of your presence and the joy of your
kingdom.

**Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the power of the Holy Spirit,
we worship you in songs of everlasting praise.
Blessing and honour and glory and power
be yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

22 The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

23 The Breaking of the Bread

The things of God for God's holy people.

**Jesus Christ is holy;
Jesus Christ is Lord.
Glory to God the Father.**

25 The Sharing of the Bread and Wine

Prayers and Dismissal

30 Let us pray.

Faithful God,
with these holy gifts
you have fed and strengthened us
in Jesus Christ your Son.
Guide us on our way,
that with all your faithful people
we may come to share the feast
of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

StF 557 – Let him to whom we now belong

- 1) Let him to whom we now belong
his sovereign right assert,
and take up every thankful song
and every loving heart.
- 2) He justly claims us for his own,
who bought us with a price;
the Christian lives to Christ alone,
to Christ alone he dies.
- 3) Jesus, thine own at last receive,
fulfil our hearts' desire,
and let us to thy glory live,
and in thy cause expire.
- 4) Our souls and bodies we resign;
with joy we render thee
our all, no longer ours, but thine
to all eternity.

Charles Wesley

Blessing

32 The blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon us and remain with us for ever. **Amen.**

33 Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen