

ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING
WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION 10.30 AM 2ND MARCH 2025
Jill Bird leading with Simon Bird preaching

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

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THEME: 'We are Family 7 We covenant together

As we start this service let us remember the three important teachings of Jesus as part of our commitment to God and to each other.

A new Covenant to enter into – the most important place to start

Jeremiah 31:31-33 A time is coming declares the LORD when I will make a new covenant with my people – I will be their God and they will be my people.

The Old covenant was written on stone, the new covenant is written on hearts

Luke 22:20 After supper he took the cup of wine and said 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.

We pause and thank Jesus again for dying for us. We are made new, born again as children of a loving father for all eternity. We are sorry when we forget or make light of what you did for us. Jesus we receive again the new covenant you hold out to us. Amen

A new Commandment to obey

John 13:34-35 Jesus said 'A new commandment I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

We pause again. We are sorry when we have not loved others as you loved us. We say yes with your help, mercy and grace we will obey. Amen

A new Commission to go and do

Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...and surely I am with you to the very end of the age.'

We pause again and say sorry that this has not been as important to us as it should. We commit ourselves again to obey and be part of your great mission in the world. Amen

Jesus, we declare together that we love you, you gave up so much for us – your very life at a young age, your future, your hopes – you suffered rejection and extreme pain and even separation from your loving Father, so we could enter into the new covenant relationship of life in all its fulness and purpose with you. Help us today as we make our response to you, to honour and also obey your new commandment and new commission.

Let's make Jesus so very special as we sing these first two songs

MP 388:

Jesus, we enthrone you,
We proclaim You our King.
Standing here in the midst of us
We raise You up with our praise,
And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne:
Come, Lord Jesus, and take Your place.

PAUL KYLE © 1980 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

Hymn MP 1076:

Jesus be the centre, be my source, be my light Jesus

Jesus be the centre, be my hope be my song Jesus

Chorus Be the fire in my heart Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live Jesus, Jesus

Jesus be my vision, be my path be my guide Jesus

MICHAEL FRYE © 1999 VINEYARD SONGS UK/ SONG SOLUTIONS COPYCARE

THE LORD'S PRAYER: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

now and for ever and ever. Amen.

FAMILY TIME: Hearts of stone or hearts of life

The offering will be taken during the following song and then the children will leave for their own groups

BP&W 471:

Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together,
Bind us together with love.

There is only one God,
There is only one King;
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing:

Made for the glory of God,
Purchased by His precious Son;
Born with the right to be clean,
For Jesus the victory has won.

We are the family of God,
We are the promise divine;
We are God's chosen desire,
We are the glorious new wine.

BOB GILLMAN © 1977 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

BIBLE READING Psalm 133

BIBLE READING: 2 CORINTHAINS 8:1-9

Hymn MP 990:

I will offer up my life
In spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love
As my worship to You.
In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart.

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name
For the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part,
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

You deserve my every breath
For You've paid the great cost;
Giving up Your life to death,
Even death on a cross.

You took all my shame away,
There defeated my sin,
Opened up the gates of heaven,
And have beckoned me in.

MATT REDMAN © 1994 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

Sermon We are family 7 - Family commitment (Covenant) 2 Cor 8:5

We have come to the end of our series on 'We are family.' I hope you heard the message loud and clear: the church is not some social club, but something God has made. If you are a follower of Jesus, God has made you part of it, but we need to work this out in practice.

Today, we are looking at how to express our commitment to God and to each other. Like marriage, this (hopefully!) will be a glad and willing surrender to each other – not forced in any way!

We saw the vibrant life together of the first church in Acts 2. Our relationship with God brings us into relationship with each other. That word *koinonia* (which means sharing in): the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, is like glue between us. The glue is love. We looked at different pictures of the church: the body of Christ – our differences, strengths and weaknesses, combine to make us effective. Zoltan preached on the welcoming and giving church of Antioch. We are a priesthood of all believers. We are not spectators of a few 'gifted' people running around, but are a team, as Jim showed us, each gifted and anointed to serve in our own ways. So no one can say, 'I can't do it, I'm not qualified.' We are called together to pray, and our agreement brings encouragement and power to our prayers. We are called to step up, serve and play our part. Above all our life together is based on love as we: love, serve, and honour one another.

There are other pictures of the church in the bible: a flock of sheep, the bride of Christ, and most awesomely: together we are God's temple and the Holy Spirit make his home among us (1 Cor 3:16). Think how special that makes us as we gather and work together. But there is a challenge here too. To have the holy God living with us, we need to be holy. We must examine our lives and keep short accounts with God and each other.

It is amazing and exciting that God chooses to achieve his mission and purposes in the world through the church: through us working together. So how do we express this? It is built on our love and commitment to each other.

Paul expressed something of believers' commitment to God and then to each when writing about the Macedonian Christians, 'They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us' (2 Cor 8:5). He was writing about their financial gifts to relieve the famine facing the Jerusalem Church. Even though they had troubles of their own, they were generous. He called this sharing *koinonia*. Paul goes on to mention God's extreme generosity and grace to us. So, like for those the Macedonian Christians, our *koinonia* is motivated by and follows the example of Christ's of sacrificial serving and giving.

Baptist churches have developed this in the idea of church members being in a covenant. The covenant we have with God leads us into a covenant with each other; and we need to look at Baptist history here. Jim spoke of the reformation in Europe in the 16th Century, when churches broke away from the Roman Catholic church. In England, this coincided with the murky Tudor period (the 6 wives of Henry VIII; no time for a history lesson now!). After a period of back and forth between Catholic and Protestant monarchs and bloody persecution, Elizabeth came to the throne, and to bring peace forced everyone to attend the Church of England (Anglican) parish church. Baptists broke away, but suffered persecution – arrest and imprisonment - for meeting separately

So it was in the situation of persecution that the idea of a covenant developed. If you were meeting secretly, and feared arrest, you would want to be sure about your fellow church members. Who were true believers? Who could you trust? Who should you look out for? You would be reassured that they had made a solemn covenant before God to be a member with you. Baptist churches kept a register of who attended on Sunday, so they would find out if any had been arrested!

We know only too well of situations like this now. The Communist Party in China allows people to attend church, but only their approved 'Three-Self Church.' Others have to meet in secret and fear arrest. There are Christians in Iran who meet in secret, and fear arrest too.

We need to think if the idea of covenant is relevant today.

Life in England and the Baptist church has moved on. Revival in the 18th Century saw many coming to faith and brought an outward looking, mission spirit. In the 19th Century, Baptists engaged in public life and social action. In the 20th Century, many Baptist churches have been involved in Charismatic renewal, affecting many other churches in the UK. So we see a coming together and unity of churches, breaking down barriers erected in the 17th Century.

Society too has changed since then. Individualism, commitment-phobia and anti-authority are the mood now. But some kind of commitment to God and each other is still helpful. You will not be arrested for coming to Abbey today, but we each face individual challenges. We need to care for each other. We need to encourage each other and walk together. There are temptations in the world, so we need to watch over each other and be part of a strong fellowship, held together by the strong glue of love, which supports each other. And we need to be the kind of fellowship that welcomes others in.

For some, this may seem too big a step. We can understand the caution of opening yourself to others. What are you prepared to share? How far will you go? God understands where each of us are at. But remember, if you are a follower of Christ, you are part of his body – the church. It is up to us to work this out in practice, but I believe He is gently calling each of us into a life together, to work out his purposes in the world.

Now, we were going to read through and say the set words we have of a covenant together, but we sense many might not be ready for this. We want to give more time to think about the words, to reflect on what our commitment to Abbey means, to see if it needs to be revised, then came back to this.

But I just summarise what our commitment to each other as members and part of this fellowship will mean practically: it is to love one another; meet regularly for worship, communion and church activities; use our gifts to serve in the church; contribute financially to the church and be witnesses in the world of our Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMUNION

Julia just before she left reflected on her Doctorate studies and encouraged us to make more of the time of communion, so we shall use this as our focus of commitment today.

We are coming together to share a special time of fellowship with Jesus and with each other. Jesus on the night before he died shared a meal with his friends, the Passover meal, when they remembered God's deliverance of his people from the cruelty of the Egyptians.

Jesus was to bring a new and deeper meaning to that remembrance time. His death and resurrection was to deliver us for all time from sin, failure, regret and the fear of death. The New Covenant was given whereby we can each one have free access forever to the very presence of God and know we belong to his family and to each other.

We come to remember, we come to celebrate, we come to proclaim what Jesus has done for us, as we share this special time together.

He first shared with them the bread – just ordinary bread they would eat with every meal. He had taught them that he was the very bread of life. 'I am the living bread' he said, 'If anyone eats of this bread he will never die, but live for ever. This bread is my flesh that I will give for the life of the world. He who comes to me will never go spiritually hungry.' So as we eat this bread – a symbol of Jesus' broken body, we receive afresh the life giving presence of Jesus to fill us with his love, his grace and his strength. We remember each other too as we do this and especially those more needy amongst us.

Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you , do this in remembrance of me.' Let's share the bread together

He then shared the cup of wine, their common drink at every meal. Jesus opened the way into God's presence through his death . His blood represents the ultimate sacrifice of his life on our behalf. He carried our sins for us on the cross, that we might go free of punishment. We rejoice in that forgiveness and cleansing from all sin as we repent and confess our sinfulness – both personal and corporate - as a body of God's people, Abbey church.

Let us take the cup together – Jesus said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.'

Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the power of the Lord's death until he comes back.

Time of prayer and receiving into membership

MP151/BPW483

For I'm building a people of power
For I'm making a people of praise
That will move through this land by My Spirit
And will glorify My precious Name

Build Your church Lord Make us strong Lord
Join our hearts Lord Through Your Son
Make us one Lord In Your body
In the kingdom of Your Son

I have broken the walls that divide you,
For I brought you a message of peace;
By my cross I have ended your warfare,
In Christ Jesus your firm corner stone

DAVE RICHARDS/ROGER MAYOR © 1977 THANKYOU MUSIC.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS: Nigel and Anne

When we read the news today, it is all too easy to feel afraid for the future.
But when we feel afraid help us to put our trust in you.

When we read the news about Palestine, about the West Bank and Gaza:
of ethnic cleansing,
of houses destroyed,
of people uprooted from their homes,
of any ceasefire in peril,
of children imprisoned and we feel afraid.

But when we feel afraid help us put our trust in you, and to have faith that we will see justice restored.

When we read the news about Sudan:
of US aid to vulnerable people being cut
of women and children at risk of starvation
of famine spreading across the region we feel afraid

But when we feel afraid help us put our trust in you, and to have faith that we will see hope rebuilt.

When we read about the rise in energy bills:
of people unable to pay for heating
of families at risk of being pushed into poverty
of mothers having to decide between heating and eating we feel afraid

But when we feel afraid help us put our trust in you, and to have faith that we will see poverty eradicated.

In difficult times when it is all too easy to be overwhelmed by need and fear. Help us at Abbey to put our faith in you, to work for change, to struggle for justice and to bring new hope in dark places. We pray that this church be a beacon of hope to all in need.
Amen

BP&W 384:

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
For by His power each tree and flower
Was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it,
Sun, moon and stars in heaven Cry, 'Jesus is Lord!'

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord! Praise Him with hallelujahs For Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
In flesh He came to die in pain
On Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,
Yet gave His life a ransom Thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
From death He rose, and all His foes
Shall own His name.

Jesus is Lord! God sent His Holy Spirit
To show by works of power That Jesus is Lord.

DAVID J. MANSELL © 1982 WORD'S SPIRIT OF PRAISE MUSIC/ADM. BY COPYCARE.

THE BLESSING

Yes, Jesus is LORD over any and every situation. We will not be discouraged or afraid.
Jesus said he would build his beloved church and protect it to the end.
So to him who is able to keep us from falling and bring us before his glorious presence,

without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for ever Amen

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

This week's prayer meetings - all very welcome and to pray in any language

March 4th Tuesday evening 20.00 to 20.30 on line zoom church prayer meeting – all welcome

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86215188882?pwd=0Ln8HnRMbvmYrwCPJbsGDrE0TokDmB.1>

Meeting ID: 862 1518 8882

Passcode: 657161

Friday March 7th World Day of Prayer at Wesley Church, 10.30 (No prayer meeting at Abbey)

Saturday March 8th Church walk leaving Abbey at 10.30 – let Simon know if you are coming

Sunday March 9th Baptism service Service will be followed by a church meeting for all members.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay.

QR Code for Offering:

