

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading
Sunday Worship Service
10:30AM 12 July 2026
Selina Chan leading & Rev. Dr. Zoltan Biro preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk
Find us on Facebook @Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



Extending the Covenant: connecting with other churches

Colossians 4:7-16

Good morning, dear brothers and sisters. During last Sunday Service, Zoltan shared with us that the new covenant changes God's people instead of lower God's standards. The new covenant changes hearts, offers complete forgiveness and gives us direct relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Zoltan also explained why communion matters, as it not merely remembering Christ's death, but also celebrates a new covenant.

Today Zoltan will help us understand what it means to become a covenant people, and how churches covenant with each other.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Step out of a fractured world and into the family of God.

The old boundaries have been shattered, and the old walls have come down.

**We gather as a living testament to God's extended covenant-
a promise wide enough for everyone.**

The world divides us by status, wealth, and background.

But in this space, God unites us as equal partners, equal heirs, and one body.

No longer isolated, we are woven together by grace.

Let us worship the God who brings us all home! Amen.

Hymn MP 1282

Hear the call of the kingdom, lift your eyes to the King;
Let His song rise within you as a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy, came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the Kingdom To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven, the humility of Christ;
Walking justly before Him, loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.

King of Heaven, we will answer the call.

We will follow, bringing hope to the world,

Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim

Salvation in Jesus' name.

Hear the call of the Kingdom to reach out to the lost

With the Father's compassion

in the wonder of the cross,

Bringing peace and forgiveness and a hope yet to come:

Let the nations put their trust in us.

Stuart Townend

FAMILY TIME

*(*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which teenagers and children will leave for their groups)*

MP151/BPW483

For I'm building a people of power
And 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*

DAVE RICHARDS/ROGER MAYOR © 1977 THANKYOU MUSIC.

PRAYER

Living God,
We praise You for Your extended covenant -
a promise of love wide enough for everyone.
Thank You for shattering our human boundaries and seating us all
at one table as equal heirs to Your grace.
Merciful God,
We confess that we often rebuild the walls you tore down.
We sort people into categories of wealth, status and background.
We protect our own comfort instead of extending Your radical hospitality.
Forgive our narrow hearts and heal our divisions.
Amen.

BIBLE READING 1: Colossians 4:7-11

BIBLE READING 2: Colossians 4: 12-17

HYMN BP&W 536

Master, speak! Your servant's listening,
Waiting for Your gracious word,
For Your gladdening voice I'm longing;
Master, let it now be heard.
As I listen, Lord, I pray:
"Speak Your word to me today!"

Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! You know the deepest
Fears and longings of my heart,
Fully know my truest need;
Speak and make me blessed indeed.

Speak to me by name, dear Master!
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock,
In the shadow of the rock!

Master speak! And make me ready,
With Your voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady,
Still to follow every word.
As I listen, Lord, I pray;
Master, speak to me today!
Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79)

SERMON

Extending the Covenant: connecting with other churches (Colossians 4:7-17)

As we come to this passage, we are also coming towards the end of our series on covenant and covenanting. Over these weeks we have seen that covenant is not just an old theological word; it is the way God binds himself to his people and binds his people to one another.

Last Sunday we reflected on the new covenant. We saw that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God sets up a new covenant with his people. But we also noticed something important. The new covenant is never simply about "me and God." God's covenants have always created a people. They gather individuals into a community. They form relationships that reflect God's own faithfulness. That has been true throughout this series: covenants always draw people together for God's purposes.

So today I want us to take one final step. If the new covenant creates a people, and if each local church is a covenanted community, then what is the relationship between churches? Are we simply independent congregations, each doing our own thing, or does the gospel call churches into covenant relationships?

At first sight, Colossians 4 doesn't seem the obvious place to answer that question. It looks like one of those passages we are tempted to skip. It is full of names—people we know very little about—and greetings that seem rather boring. But when we look closely, we discover that these closing greetings open a window into the life of the early Church. And what we see when we look beneath the surface can be very inspiring.

We see churches connected to one another: people travelling between congregations, letters being shared, encouragement flowing from one church to another, and the gospel advancing through relationships.

I. How did churches in the Bible bonded

1. The early churches priorities connections with each other

Paul begins, "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me... I am sending him to you... that he may encourage your hearts." Alongside him comes Onesimus, and together they help us see that this is more than a delivery route. Why does Paul send them? Are they Paul's personal postman? Yes and No. Yes they carry Paul's letters, but they carry more than that. They are bringing news, encouragement and fellowship.

Imagine the excitement in Colossae as Tychicus arrives. The questions would come quickly: "How is Paul?"; "How are the churches?"; "What is God doing elsewhere?"

And as those questions are answered, the church doesn't simply receive an newsletter, they receive information that interacts and brings them hope.

Isn't that still true today?

Whenever we hear what God is doing in another congregation, our faith is strengthened. When another church is planted, we rejoice. When another church experiences renewal, we give thanks. When another church suffers, we pray. Why? Because we belong to one body. That is the first movement of this passage: the gospel creates connections.

2. The early churches shared their ministers with each other

But Paul does not stop with the connection between churches. He begins naming people: Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. Every name represents a story: different backgrounds, different personalities, different gifts. Some travel, some preach, some pray. Luke practises medicine. Aristarchus shares Paul's imprisonment. Mark, who once failed Paul, has been restored and is now "useful."

The gospel is carried forward by ordinary people whom God graciously uses. These people do not all belong to one congregation. Paul's ministry stretches across cities because churches are willing to share their people. The kingdom has never advanced because one church tried to do everything. It advances because God's people recognise that they belong to one another.

3. The early churches were willing to learn from each other

That shared life is not only practical; it is also spiritual and theological. Then Paul says something fascinating. "When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of Laodicea. And you, in turn, read the letter from Laodicea."

Imagine that: the Scriptures themselves were first shared between churches. Nobody says, "That's our letter." No, the churches expect to learn from one another. One congregation does not possess all wisdom. One congregation does not possess every gift.

Every local church is complete as a church under Christ. Yet every local church is enriched through fellowship with others. That has always been God's design, and it is not only a New Testament pattern; it is also part of our own Baptist story.

II. How did Baptist churches associated with each other?

1. Early Baptists connected with each other

Baptists are often regarded as strongly independent, because we believe in the autonomy of the local church. This is true. Every Baptist church is responsible directly to Jesus Christ, we have no bishop who tells us what to do, No hierarchy governs our decisions. This principle is precious, but sometimes autonomy has been misunderstood as independence.

Historically, Baptists never believed churches should stand alone. Our forebears spoke not only about church covenant; they also spoke about association. One of the earliest Baptist Associations was formed in 1652, between three churches planted only couple of years earlier. They were the Abingdon, Henley and our church, then known as Reading Baptist Church. They gathered not because anyone ordered them to, but because they wanted to discuss questions like: Which churches need help?; Where should we plant another congregation?; Which ministers need encouragement?; How can we strengthen one another?. One record speaks of seeking **"the common good of all the churches."**

Doesn't that sound like Colossians? Independent churches, shared responsibility, voluntary covenant. One historian describes Baptist Associations as friendships in the gospel. I like that: friendships rooted in Christ and directed towards his mission.

By the end of the 17th century religious freedom was given to many independent or non-conformist churches and in 1689 Baptist churches from all around the country gathered together to have their first national assembly. Delegates travelled for days. Some could barely afford the journey.

So why did they make such a sacrifice? Not because attendance was compulsory, but because they believed churches should, as they put it: **"Maintain communion among themselves."**

This phrase has stays with me: maintain communion. Remain connected. Stay in fellowship. Walk together. That is exactly what Paul is describing in Colossians, and it is what later generations of Baptists put into practice in mission.

2. Early Baptist Churches joined together in mission

Perhaps no story illustrates this better than William Carey.

In 1792 Carey preached those famous words: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." Wonderful words. But there was an obvious problem. One tiny Baptist church could never send a missionary to India. It simply didn't have the people, the money or the influence.

So, twelve ministers gathered in a widow's house in Kettering, and together they formed what became the Baptist Missionary Society. One church couldn't do it. Together they could. Carey later talked about foreign mission and used the image of descending into a deep mine while others remained above holding the ropes.

Mission isn't only about the one who goes. Mission belongs equally to those who pray, those who give, those who encourage, and those who hold the ropes. That is covenanting beyond the local church. And the same conviction shaped the formation of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1813.

3. Early Baptist churches united in purpose

It was never intended to become a headquarters directing churches. Rather, churches voluntarily chose to walk together: to train ministers, support mission, care for struggling churches, and encourage one another. That continues today. Many of the most important things our Union does happen quietly.

When a church face a difficult situation, the Regional Ministers come alongside to help if the church asks for such help. When a church is looking for a new minister, others may help. When new congregations are planted, churches often share people, prayer and resources.

Most of these acts never appear in the headlines. But they are deeply biblical. They are Colossians 4 in practice.

III. How should we connect with other churches

So why does this matter to Abbey Baptist Church? Because our mission is bigger than us.

There are communities we cannot reach alone, needs we cannot meet alone, and wisdom we do not have alone. But together... Together we can plant churches. Together we can send missionaries. Together we can train ministers. Together we can respond to disasters. Together we can support persecuted Christians. Together we bear witness to Christ in ways none of us could achieve separately. And that brings the question home.

So, what about us? Who is holding the ropes for us? Whose ropes are we holding? Who encourages us? Whom are we encouraging?

If our church disappeared tomorrow, would other churches notice the gap? Would they miss our prayers? Our partnership? Our generosity? Our encouragement? Those are searching questions, because covenanting is never merely about the good feeling of belonging. It is about belonging with a purpose, belonging for the sake of God's mission.

It is remarkable, isn't it, that Paul ends this magnificent letter not with an abstract idea, but with a list of names. Not doctrines. Not arguments. Only, names, people and relationships. Because that is how the kingdom grows: through faithful people, faithful churches, faithfully walking together.

May God give us grace to remain faithful to that vision, not simply for our own encouragement, but so that, together with our sisters and brothers across our Association, our Union and the worldwide Church, we may make Christ known until the day he comes. Amen

HYMN BP&W 486

Lord of the church, we pray for our renewing:
Christ overall, our undivided aim.

Fire of the Spirit, burn for our enduing,
wind of the Spirit, fan the living flame!
We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing,
the will that lacks the courage to be free,
the weary labours, all but unavailing,
to bring us nearer what a church should be.

Lord of the church, we seek a Father's blessing,
a true repentance and a faith restored,
a swift obedience and a new possessing,
filled with the Holy Spirit of the Lord!

We turn to Christ from all our restless striving,
unnumbered voices with a single prayer:
the living water for our souls' reviving,
in Christ to live, and love and serve and care.

Lord of the church, we long for our uniting,
true to one calling, by one vision stirred;
one cross proclaiming and one creed reciting,
one in the truth of Jesus and His word;
So lead us on; till toil and trouble ended,
one church triumphant one new song shall sing,
to praise His glory, risen and ascended,
Christ over all, the everlasting King!

TIMOTHY DUDLEY-SMITH © 1984 OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION (Peggy)

Almighty God, our loving Father, you created heaven and earth, nature and mankind. You provide us with our daily bread, forgive us our sins, and told us to love one another.

We lift people in Ukraine, the Middle East and other countries who are affected by wars to you. May you comfort the broken hearts, may you provide refuge to those who are suffering, may you lead those who sinned to turn away and repent. May you change the hearts of those who are involved in the wars, so they could forgive and bring division to an end. **Amen.**

We lift our country to you. We are in a time of political leadership uncertainties and challenges, while continually facing the ongoing pressures on the cost of living and healthcare. May you guide our nation to vouch for leaders with integrity, wisdom, and long-term vision. May you guide leaders of our country to bring unity and cohesion for a better future and empower the nation to get through tough times with hope. **Amen.**

We lift to you those who are ill, those who are facing challenging times, those who needs support, and those who are suffering from the impacts of climate change. May you give them peace and rest, for your yolk is easy and your burden is light. **Amen.**

We lift our church to you. We witnessed the growth of our congregation over the past few years which created the need to evolve our approaches. May you empower people amongst us to discover their gifts and serve you, so that, we, as your disciples can extend the new covenant and spread the gospel to more people. **Amen.**

May we also remember to carry each other's burden, encourage each other to strengthen our faith in you, show fellowship and break boundaries created by human. **Amen.**

As we have the church meeting today, may you be within us and enlighten our discussion on the church's vision and mission. May you be a light on our path for our future development. May you lead our way in making good use of funding for the building. We pray for unity and solidarity, as we are your church and we are the hope on earth. **Amen.**

Lord, you said, ask and it will be given. Seek and we will find. Knock and the door will be opened. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HYMN MP

Come set Your rule and reign
In our hearts again
Increase in us we pray
Unveil why we're made
Come set our hearts ablaze with hope
Like wildfire in our very souls
Holy Spirit come invade us now
We are Your church
We need Your pow'r in us

We seek Your kingdom first
We hunger and we thirst
Refuse to waste our lives
For You're our joy and prize
To see the captives' hearts released
The hurt the sick the poor at peace
We lay down our lives for heaven's cause
We are Your church
We pray revive this earth

Build Your kingdom here
Let the darkness fear
Show Your mighty hand
Heal our streets and land
Set Your church on fire
Win this nation back
Change the atmosphere
Build Your kingdom here we pray

Unleash Your kingdom's pow'r
Reaching the near and far
No force of hell can stop
Your beauty changing hearts
You made us for much more than this
Awake the kingdom seed in us
Fill us with the strength and love of Christ
We are Your church
We are the hope on earth

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BENEDICTION

Go forth from this place not just as those who have received the covenant,
But as those commissioned to extend it.
Do not conform to the divisions of this world.
Go into your workplaces, your neighbourhoods, and your schools
to tear down the walls that separate people.
Welcome the outsider, advocate for the overlooked,
And offer the radical hospitality of Christ to someone who least expects it.

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.

After the service today: Church Meeting and Fair Trade stall

Events to highlight next week

Wednesday 15 th	10.30	Renew Wellbeing
	12.00	Bible Study
	2.00	This is Jesus – Week 5
Thursday 16 th	10.30	Bible Study
	10.30	Toddlers
Friday 17 th	10.30	Prayer meeting in Upper Room
	4.30	Table Tennis Club

Sunday 19th July 10.30 **Worship with Communion**
Service of Covenanting and a Meal of covenant
1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; 20:41-42;

QR Code for Financial Offering

