

**Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading**  
**Sunday Worship Service 10:30AM 31st May 2026**  
**Jill Bird leading & Rev Zoltan Biro preaching**  
[www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk)  
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Our God is a faithful, promise keeping Father. The Lord is good, his unfailing love continues forever and his faithfulness continues to each generation Psalm 100

I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved Joel 2

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. Acts 2

#### **Hymn BPW 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 sends His Holy Spirit  
To show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

#### **Hymn BPW 293**

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

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

O breath of life come sweeping through us  
Revive thy church with life and power  
O breath of life come cleanse renew us  
And fit your church to meet this hour

**As Peter did on the day of Pentecost we declare Jesus, that you are our Lord and Saviour.  
Spirit of God draw me close and shape me into the likeness of Jesus.  
Clothe me with power from on high and fill me with love and compassion for others.  
Give me the courage and boldness of Pentecost and send me out as your witness wherever I go. AMEN**

**Family time** Families – living together well

**HYMN** BPW 338

How good is the God we adore,  
Our faithful unchangeable friend;  
His love is as great as His power,  
And knows neither measure nor end.

It's Jesus the first and the last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home,  
We'll praise Him for all that is past,  
And trust Him for all that's to come.

**BIBLE READING 1:** *Genesis 8:20–9:17*

**BIBLE READING 2:** *Hebrews 8:6–13*

**Song** MP 825

Faithful One, so unchanging; Ageless One, You're my rock of peace.  
Lord of all, I depend on You, I call out to You again and again. I call out to You again and again.  
You are my rock in times of trouble, You lift me up when I fall down;  
All through the storm Your love is the anchor. My hope is in You alone.

**SERMON Covenant as a Promise and Obligation:** *What does the bible teach about covenants?*

Today we begin a new series by exploring a concept in the Bible: covenant, which forms one of the core values of Baptist identity. For some of us, especially new Christians or those for whom English is not our first language, covenant sounds like an old, difficult, and complicated word. So, let's start by simplifying it. Covenant is often described as a contract, but a covenant is more than that, because it also involves a serious relationship built on promises. A contract usually says, "You do your part, and I will do mine." A covenant says, "I give myself to you, and we belong to one another."

This is why Christian marriage is a covenant, not simply a contract. This is why church membership is a covenant. And that is why salvation is not just about getting help from God; it is about belonging to God. Covenanting means entering that relationship together. It means making promises before God and committing ourselves faithfully to him and to one another. From Genesis to Revelation, God relates to people through covenant. Again and again, he says, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." This is where we begin today. Covenant is God tying himself to his promises and calling his people to be bound to him in faith.

### **1. Covenant begins with God**

Our first reading was the story of Noah after the flood in Genesis 8 and 9. Noah steps out of the ark into a world that has been washed clean, but also wounded by judgment. And the first thing Noah does is worship. Then God spoke: "I establish my covenant with you."

Have you noticed the order. Noah is not the one who sets the terms. Noah does not bargain with God. God takes the initiative. God begins the relationship. This is one of the most important truths in the Scripture: covenant starts with grace. Before there is any human response, there is divine initiative. Before we reach for God, God has already reached toward us. This is important because some people imagine Christianity is mainly about humans finding God. But the Bible is clear that God sought us before we sought him.

God promises Noah that never again will the earth be destroyed by flood. He promises preservation. He promises mercy. He promises faithfulness to the created order. And he gives a sign: the rainbow. Every rainbow is a witness that judgment will not have the last word. And notice how wide this covenant is. It is not only for Noah and his family. It reaches to every living creature and all creation. The covenant with Noah is universal in its scope.

Illustration: umbrella. An umbrella does not stop the rain from ever falling. It is a sign of protection in the rain storm. In a similar way, the rainbow is not a denial that judgment happened; it is a sign that mercy and preservation stand over God's world.

## 2. Covenant examples in the Bible

When we read the Bible, we begin to see two major covenant patterns.

- a. **Covenant as promise.** We see this with Noah, with Abraham, and later with David. In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David that his house will endure. The emphasis falls on what God will do. God says, in effect, "I will be faithful to you." This is an unconditional covenant. It is like a gift, which humans can not cancel or break, even if they upset God. Again and again, people fail. Israel breaks covenant. Kings become corrupt. The people wander. Human beings are unreliable. We promise much and deliver little. Yet God does not abandon his purpose.
- b. **Covenant as obligation.** We see that especially through Moses at Sinai. In Exodus 20, God gives commandments to his redeemed people. There are responsibilities now: obedience, holiness, worship, justice, faithfulness. This second pattern is conditional it is more like a duty.

**Covenant as an outcome of Grace:** In every true covenant, grace comes first. Before Sinai, God rescues Israel from Egypt. Before David sits on the throne, God chooses him. God acts first. Grace comes first. Then obedience follows. This is still the pattern of the Christian life. We are not saved by obedience. We obey because we are saved. We do not earn the love of God. We respond to the love of God.

Illustration: the fruit tree. When do fruit trees become fruit trees? Is it when they produce fruit? No. They produce fruit because they already are one. In the same way, obedience is not the root of salvation; it is the fruit of salvation. This distinction matters enormously. If we get it wrong, we turn the gospel into pressure, fear, and performance. But if we get it right, we see that holiness is a response to grace.

**Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant story** All covenants in the Bible point toward Jesus. At the Last Supper, Jesus takes the cup and says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." This means the new covenant is about restoring the broken covenant relationship between God and humankind. On the cross, Jesus pays the price of restoring this broken relationship. In Jesus, the promise side of covenant and the

obligation side of covenant meet perfectly. God keeps his promises, and Jesus fulfils the obligation we have failed to give. He is the perfect covenant mediator.

### 3. Covenants and Baptists

Now, Baptists have long believed that the church is not merely an institution people inherit. The church is a covenant community gathered by Christ. Which means the local church is not just a weekly audience. It is not a place where religious consumers come for spiritual goods and then go home recharged at best, unchanged at worst. Church is a people who belong to Christ and therefore belong to one another.

#### a. Membership and covenanting

Early Baptists often used language like this: they covenanted together to “walk together” and “watch over one another in the Lord.” This idea of covenant has two directions. *Vertically*, God binds himself to us through Christ, and *horizontally*, we bind ourselves to one another in love, accountability, prayer, worship, and mission.

Early Baptist communities, wrote covenants, in which they promised to walk together, usually starting with... “We commit to:...” And at the end they signed it, just as you sign a contract. These lists of signatures on early covenants are what became church membership. They understood that, you cannot say, “I want Christ but not Christ’s people.” The New Testament simply does not recognise that kind of discipleship.

#### b. Covenant is more than contractual

Our culture understands contracts very well. Contracts protect interests. Contracts define limits. Contracts often have escape clauses. But covenant is deeper. Covenant asks not only, “What must I do?” but also, “To whom do I belong?” In a contractual mindset, I stay as long as it benefits me. In a covenant mindset, I stay faithful because love has bound me. This is why covenant language matters so much in the context of marriage, church membership, pastoral care, discipleship, and mission.

Contract is like a hotel. In a hotel you ask, “Am I welcomed? Am I going to be fed? Am I comfortable? Am I going to come back?” Church covenant is like a home. In a hotel, you are served. In a home, you belong, contribute, clean up after yourself. You forgive and stay when things are not perfect. This is alien in our modern world when giving up is normal.

We live in an age suspicious of commitment. People keep options open. Promises are treated as temporary. Communities are entered lightly and exited quickly. But the gospel calls us into something richer: trust, belonging, forgiveness, faithfulness, and perseverance.

The church should be one of the few places left in the world where people can see covenant made visible: people who forgive, people who serve, people who carry one another’s burdens, people who tell the truth, people who keep showing up

#### c. Covenant practice So let me ask gently:

- Are you living as someone who belongs to God, or only as someone who occasionally thinks about God?
- Are you committed to Christ’s people, or only attending Church to feel good?
- Are your promises shallow and temporary, or are they being shaped by the God of covenant?

Perhaps today you feel the pain of broken promises, and guilt. Maybe someone failed you. Maybe you have failed others. Maybe you hear the word covenant and feel more sadness more comfort.

So here is the good news, our hope does not rest finally on the strength of human promise-keeping. Our hope rests on the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He is the covenant-keeping God. He does not walk away from his redeemed people. And because he is faithful, there is forgiveness for our failures, healing for our wounds, and strength for new obedience. My prayer is that God may make us a church that does not merely speak of covenant, but lives it, with faith, love, patience, and joy. Amen.

**HYMN MP 1046**

Give thanks to the Lord our God and King His love endures forever  
For He is good, He is above all things His love endures forever  
Sing praise, sing praise

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm His love endures forever  
For the life that's been reborn His love endures forever  
Sing praise, sing praise sing praise, sing praise

Forever God is faithful    Forever God is strong  
Forever God is with us    Forever

From the rising to the setting sun His love endures forever  
And by the grace of God we will carry on His love endures forever  
Sing praise, sing praise sing praise, sing praise

His love endures forever    His love endures forever  
His love endures forever    Forever and ever

**HYMN MP 381**

Jesus stand among us At the meeting of our lives;  
Be our sweet agreement At the meeting of our eyes.  
O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here;  
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.  
So to You we're gathering Out of each and every land;  
Christ the love between us At the joining of our hands.  
O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here;  
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

**Intercessions Mary**

Dear Father God.

We come before you as part of your creation, that creation which contains all life on earth, in the air, below the ground and in the seas. We pray that you will never allow us to forget that we all belong together and we all belong to you.

So, it is important that we care for all your creation, those we share it with and see around us all the time – the birds, the animals, the insects, the air we breathe – those we look at and whose beauty we admire, and particularly those we know are useful to us in so many ways – animals, birds, fish, plants – which we make use of as food, clothing and shelter. May we never forget that they are your gifts and use them with care and thanksgiving.

We also live in and share your world with our human brothers and sisters all around it. We do not know them all personally but we can, and do, know that they are all your children and that you know them all as individuals. Some of our friends here in Abbey Church have great concerns: many for the families they have left behind in dangerous situations; some have anxieties for their own future in what is to them a new and

strange country We share their concerns with them and pray that they may know your presence and calm in their lives.

As we continue in the season of Pentecost, we pray that your Holy Spirit will fill all our lives with joy and peace and comfort. **In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen**

### **HYMN BPW 553**

Great is your faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with you  
You never change, your compassions, they fail not  
As you have been, you forever wilt be.

Great is your faithfulness, Great is your faithfulness!"  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed your hand has provided  
Great is your faithfulness, Lord, unto me

2

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To your great faithfulness, mercy and love.

3

Pardon for sin and a peace everlasting  
Your own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside

### **Blessing**

**Your faithful promises to us, O heavenly Father are for ever and we thank you and trust you. May your love and covenant with us be so real and near this week that we can't help but daily run into your arms. And may we understand more deeply the gift of belonging to each other in the family of the church. 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.

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### **Events to highlight next week:**

Wednesday 3 <sup>rd</sup>	10:30am	Renew Wellbeing
	12noon	Bible Study
	2pm	This is JESUS Mark's gospel
Thursday 4 <sup>th</sup>	10:30am	Bible Study
	10:30am	Toddlers
Friday 5 <sup>th</sup>	10.30am	Prayer meeting
	4.30pm	Table tennis club
	6.30 -9.30pm	Reading Worship together at St Lawrence church
Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Church lunch	
	Cross Reading prayer and worship gathering	7pm Globe church

**QR Code for Financial Offering:**

