

a covenant community

a sermon preached on the
second sunday of pentecost

18 June 2017

at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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the lections: Ex 19:2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8, 9-23

Today as we read the book of the Exodus we hear a fragment of the salvation history of Israel. Moses, has left Rephidim, travelled through the Sinai, camped, and ascended the mountain to encounter God. We know that the sequence of events has started that leads to the giving of the commandments. God signals to Moses his part in this history when God says: 'Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples'.

Moses knows immediately from God's use of the word covenant that he, Moses, is being placed in a sequence that commenced with Abraham.

The concept of a covenant is introduced when Abraham encounters God and God exchanges promises with Abraham. God offers Abraham a perpetual holding in the land between the two rivers, from The Nile in the south to the Euphrates in the north, a homeland for Abraham and his offspring for all time. In return, Abraham and his male offspring are to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth - that is to say they are to be obedient to God.

This bargain that Abraham and God made is known as the Covenant and it occupies a central place in Jewish identity and also for us and for our Muslim sisters and brothers.

Moses returns to the people, gathering them to tell them what God had said and the people responded: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do'.

So the Covenant is ratified in each new generation – in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. When we reach the first century and read Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul reaffirms the Law and obedience to God's demands, but in the process reinterprets circumcision as circumcision of the heart – to cut away its hardness and impenetrability to make it soft, to make it malleable to God's will and open to faith that grace will bring and ultimately righteousness. In less florid language, perhaps, responsive to the Covenant with Abraham to be obedient and to enjoy a perpetual holding with God.

So a covenant we understand to be an agreement, made between a group of people. It sets out a relationship for which there are some conditions that govern the relationship and agreement that is made. In constituting a relationship, a covenant establishes a community and defines its purpose. For us this purpose is found in the Gospel, pointing to our discipleship and mission to the people of God. But the fundamental bases of the covenant remains, as it was affirmed with Moses in Exodus 6:7: 'I will take you as my people, and I will be your God'.

To be God's people, to be open to God's will and to remain in the perpetuity of God's promise, to be disciples.

As a Christian community we inherit this Covenant and we are called to reaffirm it in our own generation. And the discipleship implicit in our own affirmation must be based in a community that is properly formed.

For this we need to define and manage how we live together. We have heard this reaffirmation called for during our consultations over recent weeks, to have a code of our own. It was proposed when we met to consider the way forward for the parish, it has been suggested to the Wardens in on-on-one conversations. It is a practice already in place in every parish in Bendigo diocese. So the wardens and I took this task on in consultation with the Parish Council.

This work has been done and I invite Cynthia, representing the Parish Council to introduce it to you.