

There is a common thread to our scriptures this morning.

That God honors relationship with us. He encourages “covenant”

The term covenant (Latin *con venire*) meaning coming together.

It presupposes two or more parties are coming together to make a contract, to agree on promises, stipulations, privileges and responsibilities.

It can be applied to simple contracts or political situations, or it can refer to a marriage covenant.

A covenant usually occurs between two relatively equals, (like two human beings).

But a covenant with God, all things are not equal.

It is not unilateral and people are recipients, not necessarily contributors; because God is so much greater than we are.

We are therefore called to accept it as offered to us by God.

To keep the commands and to receive the results that God, by oath, assures will not be withheld.

So we see God in Genesis 17 saying “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Abram is promised that he will become a father of many nations.

That he will be fruitful and that through him God will establish an everlasting covenant for generations to come.

Having walked with God, as the Psalmist puts it, we can know that God is loving and true to His word.

Numbers 23:19 19 **God** is not human, that he should lie, **not a human** being, **that he should** change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

As Paul speaks to us from Romans 4:13 “It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”

God makes provision for generations to be grafted into the relationship with God through the act of Christ on the cross.

We come into being through faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross.

We trust God and believe God because He is worthy to be believed.

God has demonstrated His love toward us faithfully and as we read in Psalm 22 “The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him...”

Because He is worthy of praise.

In the covenant relationship because God cannot fail, because God always keeps His word. God is ever faithful.

If anything, God assumes more risk because us humans are so fickle and undeserving of God’s trust.

Yet God loves us anyway.

He loves us so much that He demonstrated it not only by sending His one and only Son for us (John 3:16), but by continually reaching out for us, even when we are not reaching out to Him.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

And in the midst of our finding God, it is Jesus who introduces and new dimension to our relationship with God.

Jesus, begins to talk to us about ‘discipleship’.

When we meet Jesus in the pages of Mark this morning, Jesus and His disciples have been together for some time now.

They have traveled with Him throughout Galilee and have watched as Jesus healed the diseased, fed the hungry, changed the outlook and the lives of those who were disabled, down trodden, as he opened his heart to those whom society had forgotten about.

They have listened to him tell parables, they have watched him draw crowds, .and they have begun a change within themselves as their own hearts are expanding by his presence.

And then this one day, Mark tells us, Jesus walking along the road begins to teach. It was difficult teaching.

Because Jesus is foretelling His death and His resurrection.

This one whom they had seen do wondrous things is now telling them that he is going to suffer.

That the crowds will turn on him.

That the elders, the chief priests, the scribes will all have him killed.

How difficult this must have seemed for them.

They had some belief that Jesus was the Christ.

That surely this was God's Messiah. After all, just a few verses before Christ asks the disciples 'Who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:29).

And it is Peter that speaks up and gives the winning answer "You are the Messiah"

How can one who is so aligned with God, who walks with God, for the benefit of the kingdom, suffer so much as Jesus is teaching them now in verse 31.

Surely that's not in the contract with God.

How human Peter's comments appear.

Because that's what we really want to think isn't it?

That good people should not suffer bad things.

So Peter takes Jesus aside, and rebukes Jesus for saying such bad things will happen to him.

To which Jesus responds harshly to Peter, “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (v33).

As soon as Jesus began to teach the disciples what it means that Jesus is the Christ—“Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him.”

After Jesus rebukes Peter, He calls the crowd over to Him, for there were many more people than just the 12 disciples who were following Jesus.

And Jesus said to everyone who was hanging on and hanging out: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

Jesus pretty straight forward says, this ‘journey to the cross’ is so much more than just fulfilling your end of the covenant agreement.

Jesus essentially says, I came all the way from heaven, lived and walked upon the earth, so that you might have a new relationship mindset.

So that you might be disciples.

If you’re going to follow me, let me demonstrate what following God is all about.

It’s about denying self and taking up the cross.

It’s about a new level of walking with me.

It’s more than just studying The Word. It’s now about letting The Word change you.

It’s more than praying daily. It’s now about having a real conversation with God.

It’s about getting out of the comfortable and allowing God to expand your horizons and your sights.

It’s about now having a real walk with Jesus.

Jesus is giving us a call to discipleship. A deeper relationship and a deeper covenant meaning.

The covenant stipulates the more you reach out to me, the more I'll reach back to you.

I challenge you this morning to pray this week about what Mark 8:34-35 means in your life

Mark 8:34-35 "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it."

Self-denial for the sake of the agenda of the Kingdom of God is what Christ modeled for us, His disciples.

He suffered and died, because we needed redemption and couldn't do it on our own.

Walking with Christ as His disciple is not an easy thing at times, but Christ himself tell us that it is so worthwhile.

Mark 8:35 paraphrased says that God is willing to go the extra mile on the covenant with us. That's what Jesus demonstrated.

He calls us each now to a closer walk with Him.

AMEN.