

# Preparing for Covenant



Paarl Methodist Church  
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# Introduction

The words of the Methodist Covenant Prayer are hard to say if you mean them. They're big words, with large implications.

This week, as you prepare to say the covenant prayer I would like you to consider the words carefully. For each day of the following week – Monday through to Saturday I've included a line or two from the prayer; a scripture reading to spark your thinking – and a prayer sourced from a book called *Prayers from the Heart*, by Richard Foster.

As we covenant with God remember that this is a special covenant. It is our *voluntary* response to God's love for us – God's love which is already an established fact; revealed to us in Jesus death on the cross. It is not in our power to change the fact that God loves us more than we can understand or imagine. We can do nothing good enough, or bad enough, to make God love us more or less.

In our covenant prayer we simply offer ourselves to God.

As you begin this week of preparation remember the words below from our baptism liturgy in which we declare Jesus love which comes before our response:

## Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but yours.  
Put me to what you will,  
rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you  
or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you  
or brought low for you;  
let me be full, let me be empty;  
let me have all things;  
let me have nothing;  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all  
things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You are  
mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.

**Amen**

## Baptism Liturgy

\_\_\_\_\_ for you Jesus Christ came into the world;  
for you he lived and showed God's love;  
for you he suffered death on the Cross;  
for you he triumphed over death,  
rising to newness of life;

for you he prays at God's right hand:  
all this for you,  
before you could know anything of it.

In your Baptism,  
the word of Scripture is fulfilled:  
'We love, because God first loved us.'

- British Worship Book 1998

# Monday

**I am no longer my own, but yours...  
...I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure  
and disposal.**

## Read:

<sup>22</sup> He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I

tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

- Luke 12:22-31 (NRSV)

## Think:

When I was a teenager there was a lot of talk about ‘giving yourself to Jesus’; and ‘surrendering to the Holy Spirit.’ I was terrified of that idea – I prefer to be in control. I wasn’t quite sure what would happen to me if one day I said to God – ‘OK you can have control of my life now.’ And then one day; after much thought and debate in my mind I thought I would ‘give myself to Jesus’ and ‘surrender to the Holy Spirit’.

Nothing too terrifying happened (as I’d imagined it might). I didn’t suddenly become a holy Joe; I didn’t lose my identity; all I felt was a sense of relief as I allowed God to take responsibility for me.

In the passage above Jesus encourages his disciples not to worry about anything because God loves them and will care for them. As you consider our covenant prayer of surrender – can you trust God enough to entrust yourself to him?

## Pray

Take, Lord, all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my whole will.  
You have given me all that I have,  
all that I am,  
and I surrender all to your divine will.  
You have given me all that I have,  
all that I am,  
and I surrender all to your divine will.  
Give me only your love and your grace.  
With this I am rich enough,  
and I have no more to ask.  
Amen.

- *Ignatius of Loyola*

# Tuesday

## Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

### Read:

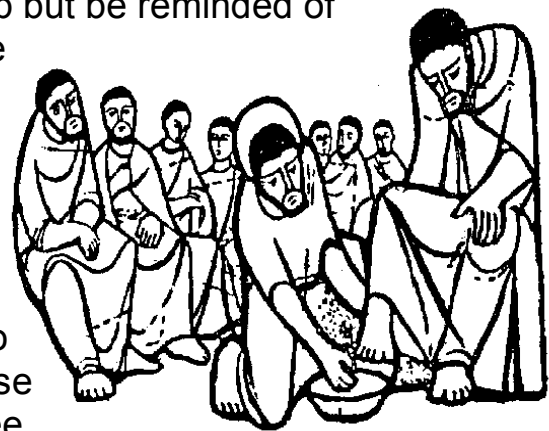
<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all

baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

### Think:

As I reflect on this line of the prayer I can't help but be reminded of several scenes from Jesus' life. How often the 'Pharisees and teachers of the law' were scandalised by the company Jesus kept: 'Sinners and tax collectors'. And as the church grew – it maintained Jesus' tradition of reaching out to all sorts of people.



And so we witness a church where Paul has to remind the church that it is made up of a diverse bunch of people; Jews, Greeks, slaves and free.

Christian community is characterised by diversity; and also by servanthood – no matter how important we think we are; we must be willing to serve. Jesus takes on the role of a servant as he washes his disciple's feet (John 13:1-20) the work of a slave.

### Pray

Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick, and, while nursing them, minister unto you. Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognise you, and say, 'Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you.'

- *Mother Theresa of Calcutta*

Are you willing to be a part of the community that God loves; in all its diversity?

Are you willing to do the work of a servant, without grumbling or congratulating or feeling sorry for yourself?

# Wednesday

**put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;**

## Read:

<sup>39</sup> He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." <sup>41</sup> Then he

withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, <sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

- Luke 22:39-42

## Think

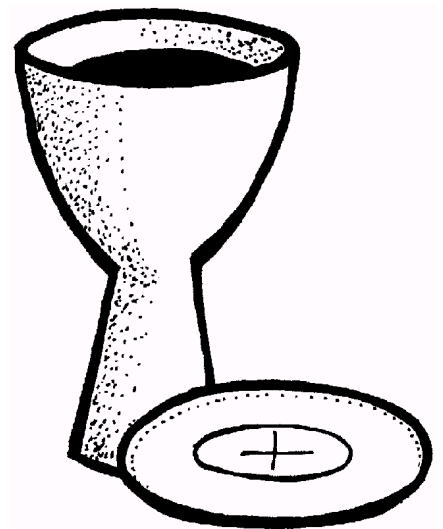
The words of the Lord's Prayer, "lead us not into temptation" may be translated as "deliver us from the time of trial." The time of trial is a time when one's faith is tested - when the call to be a Christian is so difficult that we might just give up.

God plants ideas in our head of things to do – but so often we reject them as too risky; too big; too small – when we give up on those ideas that God gives us; we come into the time of trial and we give up.

On the Mount of Olives Jesus invited the disciples to pray that they would not come into the time of trial.

The garden of Gethsemane, the decision to take up his cross is a time of trial for Jesus. A trial which he passes.

The disciples however, are not even able to stay awake.



## Pray

Govern everything by your wisdom, O Lord, so that my soul may always be serving you.

in the way you will  
and not as I choose.

Let me die to myself so that I may serve you;  
let me live to you who are life itself.

Amen

- *Teresa of Avila*

Are you willing to be  
'inconvenienced' for Jesus?

# Thursday

**let me be employed for you  
or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you or brought low for you;**

## Read:

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your

towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

- Exodus 20:8-11

## Think:

Sabbath keeping is not a popular discipline. When we were children who grew up in the city we would go with my parents to the coast for holidays. For some reason we often travelled back on a Sunday – we would marvel at the small towns on the way home – where absolutely NOTHING happened on a Sunday. Even the petrol stations were closed.

It seemed like an awful idea then – but as I've grown up a bit; I long to find that kind of town; where 'being laid aside' is as important as being busy. What task is God calling you to take up? What is God asking you to let go of?



## A Prayer of Relinquishment

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to you.  
May your will be my delight today.  
May your way have perfect sway in me.  
May your love be the pattern of my living.

\* \* \*

I surrender to you  
my hopes,  
my dreams,  
my ambitions.  
Do with them what you will,  
when you will, as you will.

\* \* \*

I place into your loving care  
my family,  
my friends,  
my future.  
Care for them with a care  
that I can never give.

\* \* \*

I release into your hands  
my need to control,  
my craving for status.  
my fear of obscurity.  
Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and  
establish your kingdom on earth.  
For Jesus' sake,  
Amen.

- Richard Foster

## let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing;

### Read:

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions...

### Think

If we let go of our ‘stuff’ Jesus promises us houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields & persecutions (Mark 10:30). Most of us stop at houses – but in this teaching Jesus, through teaching us to share – teaches us to become members of a wider human family; joined in joy and in suffering.

Do you own your ‘stuff’?

Or does it own you?

(23-27)

<sup>28</sup> ...Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

- Mark 10:17-31

### Pray:

O Lord,  
open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;  
open my ears that I may hear their cries;  
open my heart so that they need not be without succour;

Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong, nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed, and use me to bring them to those places.

And so open my eyes and my ears that I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee.

Amen.

- Alan Paton

# Saturday

**And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.**

**Amen**

## Read:

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son

to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- 1 John 4:7-12

## Think

1 John 4:10 is key: 'In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.' The rest of what John has to say is a little confusing – perhaps you should count how many times he uses the word 'Love' in the above passage.

The covenant between people and God is not a covenant of law – it is a covenant of love. As we say this prayer of surrender we are volunteering ourselves in response. Nothing we can say or do can change God's love for us. God's love for us is complete. The story of the Bible testifies to God's constant love – despite humanities constant rebellion.

In response to the giant wave of love that washes over us – when we say the

### A Prayer of Covenant

Today, O Lord, I say YES!  
to you,  
to life,  
to all that is true, and good and beautiful.  
Amen

- Richard Foster

covenant prayer we agree to stop fighting the wave and allow it to have sway in our lives. The ultimate goal is that finally we would be perfected; that we would love perfectly – as God loves us perfectly.

Will you surrender to that love?

