

Sermon Title: **“Wesley’s Covenant Service”**

Bible: **2 Kings 23:1-3 & John 15:1-8**

When: on New Year’s Eve Sunday, December 31st, 2023

Where: about 40 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. About Wesley’s Covenant Service

Today is New Year’s Eve. New Year’s Eve falls on the last Sunday of this year. So, I would like to introduce Wesley’s Covenant Service. Have you heard of or participated in Wesley’s Covenant Service before? This service is one of Wesley's traditions from the 18th century. Our founder John Wesley found this service rich and meaningful and a time of remarkable blessing. It is also called a Covenant Renewal Service or a Watch Night Service, because it is most commonly held on New Year’s Eve or Day. In my observation, some big United Methodist churches still have a Watch Night Service tradition at 11pm on New Year’s Eve, even if it does not fall on a Sunday. Rather than meeting at 11pm separately, I would like to have Wesley’s Covenant Service during our regular Sunday Service, as the last Sunday of the year falls on New Year’s Eve.

Before doing Wesley’s Covenant service, I would like to share my understanding of the covenant. The word covenant is a very significant term in the Bible and in our faith journey

between God and us. Even when we have turned away, and even when our love has failed, God's love has remained steadfast. God promised us to be our God, while we were yet sinners, and even when our faith and love fail. Sometimes, we might be lost and feel doubtful. But God is with us all the time. God's grace and love is unconditional! But God does not want to only have one-sided love. God is waiting for our love and faith, too. For this year, we are so thankful for God's holy presence in our lives. And for the next new year, I hope for us to anticipate more of God's love, grace, mercy and peace.

Let us do Wesley's Covenant Service together. I need your participation. While I am leading this Covenant Renewal, please join me in your voices in the bold letters or yellow-colored letters on the screen. This is from the "Covenant Renewal Service" of the United Methodist Book of Worship.

2. Wesley's Covenant Service (from the United Methodist Book of Worship)

PROCLAMATION

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

the Christian life is redeemed from sin and consecrated to God.

Through baptism, we have entered this life

and have been admitted into the new covenant

of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator.

He sealed it with his own blood, that it might last for ever.

On the one side, God promises to give us new life in Christ,

the Source and Perfecter of our faith.

On the other side, we are pledged

to live no more for ourselves but only for Jesus Christ,

who loved us and gave himself for us.

From time to time we renew our covenant with God,
especially when we reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant
and gather at the Lord's table.

Today, however, we meet, as the generations before us have met,
to renew the covenant that binds us to God.

Let us make this covenant of God our own.

INVITATION

Commit yourselves to Christ as his servants.

Give yourselves to him, that you may belong to him.

Christ has many services to be done.

Some are more easy and honorable,

others are more difficult and disgraceful.

Some are suitable to our inclinations and interests,

others are contrary to both.

In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.

But then there are other works where we cannot please Christ
except by denying ourselves.

It is necessary, therefore,

that we consider what it means to be a servant of Christ.

Let us, therefore, go to Christ, and pray:

Let me be your servant, under your command.

I will no longer be my own.

I will give up myself to your will in all things.

Be satisfied that Christ shall give you your place and work.

Lord, make me what you will.

I put myself fully into your hands:

put me to doing, put me to suffering,

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

**let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and with a willing heart
give it all to your pleasure and disposal.**

Christ will be the Savior of none but his servants.
He is the source of all salvation to those who obey.
Christ will have no servants except by consent;
Christ will not accept anything except full consent
to all that he requires.
Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Confirm this by a holy covenant.

To make this covenant a reality in your life, listen to these admonitions:

First, set apart some time, more than once,
to be spent alone before the Lord;
in seeking earnestly God's special assistance
and gracious acceptance of you;
in carefully thinking through all the conditions of the covenant;
in searching your hearts
whether you have already freely given your life to Christ.

Consider what your sins are.

Consider the laws of Christ, how holy, strict, and spiritual they are,
and whether you, after having carefully considered them,
are willing to choose them all.

Be sure you are clear in these matters, see that you do not lie to God.

Second, be serious and in a spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant,
rely upon God's promise of giving grace and strength,
so you can keep your promise.

Trust not your own strength and power.

Fourth, resolve to be faithful.

You have given to the Lord your hearts,
you have opened your mouths to the Lord,
and you have dedicated yourself to God.

With God's power, never go back.

And last, be then prepared to renew your covenant with the Lord.

Fall down on your knees, lift your hands toward heaven,
open your hearts to the Lord, as we pray:

COVENANT PRAYER

**O righteous God, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
see me as I fall down before you.**

**Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will,
for you have promised mercy to me
if I turn to you with my whole heart.**

God requires that you shall put away all your idols.

**I here from the bottom of my heart renounce them all,
covenanting with you that no known sin shall be allowed in my life.**

Against your will, I have turned my love toward the world.

In your power

I will watch all temptations that will lead me away from you.

**For my own righteousness is riddled with sin,
unable to stand before you.**

Through Christ, God has offered to be your God again
if you would let him.

Before all heaven and earth,

**I here acknowledge you as my Lord and God.
I take you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for my portion,
and vow to give up myself, body and soul, as your servant,
to serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.**

God has given the Lord Jesus Christ
as the only way and means of coming to God.

**Jesus, I do here on bended knees accept Christ
as the only new and living Way,
and sincerely join myself in a covenant with him.
O blessed Jesus, I come to you,
hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked,
unworthy even to wash the feet of your servants.
I do here, with all my power, accept you as my Lord and Head.
I renounce my own worthiness,
and vow that you are the Lord, my righteousness.
I renounce my own wisdom, and take you for my only guide.
I renounce my own will, and take your will as my law.**

Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

**I do here covenant with you, O Christ,
to take my lot with you as it may fall.
Through your grace I promise
that neither life nor death shall part me from you.**

God has given holy laws as the rule of your life.

**I do here willingly put my neck under your yoke, to carry your burden.
All your laws are holy, just, and good.
I therefore take them as the rule for my words, thoughts, and actions,
promising that I will strive
to order my whole life according to your direction,**

and not allow myself to neglect anything I know to be my duty.

The almighty God searches and knows your heart.

**O God, you know that I make this covenant with you today
without guile or reservation.**

If any falsehood should be in it, guide me and help me to set it aright.

And now, glory be to you, O God the Father,

whom I from this day forward shall look upon as my God and Father.

Glory be to you, O God the Son,

**who have loved me and washed me from my sins in your own blood,
and now is my Savior and Redeemer.**

Glory be to you, O God the Holy Spirit,

who by your almighty power have turned my heart from sin to God.

**O mighty God, the Lord Omnipotent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you have now become my Covenant Friend.**

And I, through your infinite grace, have become your covenant servant.

So be it.

And let the covenant I have made on earth be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

3. Closing

Thank you so much for participating in Wesley's Covenant Service. I hope that some words will be not only on your lips, but also in your hearts and in your actions for the new year!

And as we read in John 15, let us abide in Jesus Christ our Lord. May God's love and grace overflow through us, and may we bear much fruit!