

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
Ephesians 4: 25 – 5:2

August 13, 2006
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25Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26In your anger do not sin^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27and do not give the devil a foothold. 28He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

29Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 5

1Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I admit that I get some kind of strange pleasure out of publishing shocking sermon titles in the bulletin. And so I am disappointed with myself this morning. Covenant. That's not even a title, it's just a word. And, it's a boring word at that. And I imagine you had the same reaction when you skimmed over your bulletin—"Oh, covenant. Boring. I should have gone out on the boat this morning." But really, there's no better word to describe who we are and what we are doing—especially this morning—than covenant.

A covenant isn't just something we say, rather it is something we do. A covenant is a kind of agreement, a promise. But unlike an agreement or promise or contract, a covenant isn't just between two parties. A covenant is an agreement between and among people and God. For example, a marriage covenant is like a triangle—it's not just a linear relationship back and forth between two people but it's a three way relationship between God and the marriage partners. And it's the same in our relationship with each other as a congregation. We covenant with each other and God, not just when we recite the words of a covenant from a bulletin, but every time we walk through the doors of this building, every time we make a casserole for someone who is sick, every time we send a card to cheer someone, every time we say a prayer for someone, every time we write a check to help someone. Because when we do these things, we enact our covenant with each other and God. Saying a few words when someone joins the church isn't being part of a covenant—caring for each other and serving God in the world is being part of a covenant.

Being part of a covenant requires us to make choices—big and small—day in and day out—to support that covenant relationship. Let's return to the marriage example. A marriage isn't a once and for all decision—that once you decide to get married you just are and that's the end of it. Rather, we choose each day whether or not we will remain married, maybe not consciously but certainly we make the choice on an unconscious level. With every word we speak and every deed we do we reveal the level of our commitment to our marriage covenant. And by virtue of those choices, we have the power to make that covenant last or to bring it to an end. Covenant depends on the choices we make and that is no where more true than in a church. The Apostle Paul knew this and wrote to the people in the church of Ephesus asking them to make choices that would support the covenant, not threaten it. He asked them to choose to put an end to their anger—at least before going to bed. He asks them to choose to do something useful so that they

might have something to share with those in need. He asks them to choose to refrain from bad mouthing each other and to only say those things which will build up the community. He asks them to choose to imitate God, to choose to live a life of love, and to choose to follow Christ. He asks them to make these choices so that their covenant relationship will survive and indeed flourish.

Today Suzie has chosen to support the covenant between herself and all of you and between herself and God by joining the church. For her, church membership is an important means of enacting that covenant. And Suzie, we welcome you, we rejoice in your presence among us, and we look forward to sharing a life of faith with you. And whether you realize it or not, each one of you choose to enact the covenant between the members and friends of this community and God when you got up and came here this morning. And I thank you for making that choice, for supporting this community, and for making a commitment to worship and praise to God. Our covenant is made ever stronger by your presence.

But that's not the end of the covenant making this morning. We will all soon be invited to participate in what Christ called "the new covenant in his blood" when we partake of this holy meal. When we eat this bread and drink this cup we're covenanting to become Christ to the world—to feed the hungry, serve the needy, be a champion of the oppressed and a friend to the lonely. That's what the new covenant is all about—doing the work of bringing about God's dominion on earth. And it's not just an out there concept, it's an in here reality—a new reality that we begin to enact right here and right now. Christ has invited you to be part of the new covenant, so come, take, eat, give thanks, and praise God for the awesome opportunity of being part of this covenant community we call the church.