

SLD01.14.07 2nd Ordinary
EPC
John 15:1-8
Jill Oglesby Evans

A Re-Commitment to Christ

You'll notice in your bulletins this morning that instead of the typical sermon with a capital "S," cum clever and evocative sermon title, what's listed today after the scripture reading is a "Brief Homily." This is meant to come as a relief to you. Sure, the bulletin weighs more than usual because there's an awful lot going on in the service. But most of it is not about what I have to say. Most of it is about what you and I are willing to do. The choices we're invited to take. The decisions we're invited to make.

If there were one theme to the seemingly disparate elements of today's worship, that theme would be "commitment." Commitment to Christ. Or perhaps more accurately, re-commitment to Christ. What today's service really is about is an opportunity for you and me to make an intimate, personal, intentional choice to re-commit and re-dedicate our lives to God through Christ Jesus.

Sounds downright Baptist, doesn't it? Or at least Methodist?

Well, maybe we people of the book have something to learn from those people of the heart. I maintain that each denomination, and faith, for that matter, has something to teach the others, some special wisdom to contribute toward the building of God's Beloved Community.

The special wisdom we're dipping into this morning comes from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who had a special understanding of the deep, heartfelt need Jesus' disciples have periodically to commit, and recommit, their lives to God. It was out of that understanding that, in August of 1755, Wesley created the Covenant service

we're using, with some modification, today. The way I see it, Wesley's Covenant service provides those of us who seek to lead faithful lives but often forget why it's worth the trouble, an opportunity to renew our covenant with God. To reup *our* end of the bargain of faith.

You know, how in Jeremiah 31 God says, "the days are surely coming when I will make a new covenant (with my people.) I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jer. 31:31-33)

Well, *this* is the part where we sign on the dotted line testifying that "yes, you are our God, and we are your people."

So we're not going to do an altar call or anything – I mean, you gotta draw the line *somewhere* – but we will be invited in just a minute to rededicate our lives to God.

Now I realize this is a very personal matter. Maybe for some of us, even a private matter between us and God. Late at night. In the silence of our hearts. For many of us, our personal relationship with our Creator either is, or we wish it would be, way beyond words, or creeds, or language of any kind, never mind dogma.

So let me just say that the covenant we make today is not an exercise of dogma or creed. Nor is it the promise of doing or being something other than who we really are. It is simply the setting of an intention to trust God, and to surrender our lives to God. Simply the setting of an intention. More a hope than a promise. But without that hope, without that intention, all the busyness and duties and demands of church life really don't mean a thing.

So that part of today's service is really just an opportunity for each of us to remember and renew our personal covenant with the One who created and redeems

and sustains us, a covenant to which Jesus will respond both by reminding us first, of the blessing of our baptism, and then, by feeding us, yet again, with the gift of his love. Today's Covenant service is just another way to choose to abide in Jesus, and he in us, knowing that apart from him we can do nothing.

After that, some of us - a chosen few, elected, trained, examined and approved - will push their commitment to Jesus Christ even further, by allowing themselves to be ordained and installed in the service of Christ's Body as ruling elders. Talk about trust and surrender! Here is yet another sacred covenant between a person and their God, one that can be trying in its demands and expectations. A commitment that can stretch a body's faith, sure enough, but also challenge and grow it. A confederacy that can reveal the unpleasant underbelly of church bidnis' just as easily as highlight the pinnacle of its possibilities.

It flat ain't easy being an elder in a Presbyterian church, as so many of you know. If ever there were an office wherein one learns humility and reliance on God's grace, that would be it. Yet those who accept the office grow from it, as does the larger body. And so it is a blessing – that you can literally feel during the laying on of hands – it is a blessing to be called to office in the service of Jesus Christ.

All right, so I'm already longer than I meant to be. Let's you and I get on with re-commit our lives to God, both individually and as officers of the church. And let us do so with full heart and intention, knowing that with God all things are possible, that in any covenant God doesn't meet us halfway, but *all* the way...the moment...even before...we breathe our assent.

To the glory of God. Amen.