

CELEBRATING LIFE together LIVING IN GOD'S Covenant

THE TERRITORIAL COMMANDER'S COVENANT SUNDAY MESSAGE

Greetings to you from Territorial Headquarters, London.

I am very pleased to wish you all a very happy New Year, knowing that at long last 2022 with all its unexpected twists and turns, joys and sorrows, frustrations and opportunities is at last consigned to history - even though the legacy of 2022 and all that happened in it will be with us well in to 2023 and way beyond that too.

Having said that, I am old enough, if not wise enough, to appreciate that for too many people the prospect of this new year becoming anywhere close to being 24/7/365 'happy' is somewhat unlikely! The possibility of the year ahead at last being one that is straightforward, predictable and trouble free is, let's be frank, just not going to happen. Shock horror!

If only there was something that we could be sure of in these early days of the New Year! Something that would begin to make sense of the inevitable twists and turns, joys and sorrows, frustrations and opportunities which I suspect will emerge as they did in 2022 and all the years before.

Well there *is* something, as well as someone, who we can be certain of to uphold us and guide us through another year. No prizes for knowing or even guessing who the someone is, and it's not Father Christmas just in case you were wondering! But the something...what could that be?

Well very soon corps and fellowships up and down the territory, from Shetland to Jersey and from Dublin to Great Yarmouth and all centres in between will be marking our Covenant Sunday 2023. Covenant being 'the something' that brings cast iron certainty in the middle of times when everything seems uncertain, unpredictable, tough beyond words, gloomy and totally chaotic.

Popular theologian and inspirational writer, Henri Nouwen once explained the concept of covenant an agreement in relationship like this:

'When God makes a covenant with us, God says: "I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me, or betray me."' In our society we don't speak much about covenants; we speak about contracts. When we make a contract with a person, we say: 'I will fulfil my part as long as you fulfil yours. When you don't live up to your promises, I no longer have to live up to mine.' Contracts are often broken because the partners are unwilling or unable to be faithful to their terms.

'But God didn't make a contract with us' writes Nouwen, 'God made a **covenant** with us, and God wants our **relationships with one another** to reflect that covenant. That's why marriage, friendship, life in community are all ways to give visibility to God's faithfulness in our lives together.'



COVENANT
SUNDAY
2023



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As we come to Covenant Sunday we will of course reflect upon the covenant of relationship that God has made with us - the scriptures of the old and new testaments. Old and new covenants to be accurate are peppered with the reminder that Father God is a covenant making God - in other words he gives himself to us in love - in relationship:

‘So I want you to realise that the Lord your God is God. He is the faithful God. He keeps his covenant for all time to come. He keeps it with those who love him and obey his commandments. He shows them his love.’ (Deuteronomy 7:9 *ESV*)

‘But the Lord’s love for those who have respect for him lasts for ever and ever. Their children’s children will know that he always does what is right. He always loves those who keep his covenant, He always does what is right for those who remember to obey his commands.’ (Psalm 103:17-18 *NIRV*)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd of the sheep. The God who gives peace brought back from the dead because of the blood of the eternal covenant. ‘Now may God supply you with everything good. Then you can do what he wants, may he do in us what is pleasing to him. We can do it only with the help of Jesus Christ. Give him glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ (Hebrews 13:20-21 *ESV*)

Covenant Sunday again allows us holy space to reflect upon the wonderful covenants of divine love that God has made with ordinary people like you and me - but Covenant Sunday also allows us to renew our part in the covenantal relationship with him:

Loving Father your love for me is unconditional and unceasing

The depth of your love is beyond my comprehension but today I respond to that love

As your love lives in me, may my thought, my words and my actions reflect you at all times and in every place

May my soul be a place where we meet - where all that I am becomes all that you want me to be in heart, mind and spirit

That being one with you, I might see you, know you and show you in every part of my life

That in me and through me your Kingdom may come now

May this covenant of Love draw me deeper and bring others closer to you.

As people of God drawn into a loving relationship with our Covenant making God renew and refresh our covenant with him in the near future, may we celebrate together what God has done, is doing and will do in and through us as we enjoy life in all its fulness, with the one who calls us to love him and love others.

In the light of such prayers and assurance of God’s love for you personally - I dare to genuinely wish you a happy, prosperous and God blessed new year as we walk with him and in his name lovingly serve the various communities in which we have our being.

God bless you!

