

SERMON: 2017/12/24 (am) (4th Sunday of Advent, Year B) - 2 Sam. 7:1-11,16 & Lk. 1:26-38
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[Invite the children to sit at the front.]

In our psalm today (from the Old Testament) there was mentioned an unusual word - a *special* word: 'covenant'.

Did you notice it?

For us, it is also a very important word; one relevant to the meaning of Christmas.

But what does it mean?
Do you know?

[Wait for response.]

A 'covenant' is "an agreement" - a promise between *two* "parties": God and us. And God's part of it is an offer to give us "blessings" - like presents - but better: things like peace and happiness, and in return we should want to do what He says; and this "arrangement" is a permanent, *eternal* one.

Or at least, it can be. Because there's a - *potential* - weakness. And a serious one at that.

We can demonstrate 'covenant' in this way:

[Make a "chair" for another child to sit on by crossing arms with a young volunteer.]

Imagine I'm God and ... is a (normal) person (like you).
... in the middle represents the (abundant) "blessings" of being a (faithful) Christian.
And this seems like a pretty solid "structure."
And we can certainly count on God to be 'steadfast' - to *always* uphold his side. He *never* grows tired or weary . [Is. 40:28.]
But what if ... let's go?
(Because I can see that ... is already struggling, and we haven't reached 'forever' yet!)

It collapses.

Let's pray: Father God, give us your strength - your perseverance, to always trust in Jesus' atoning death and to show our gratitude by doing your will. Amen.

[Ask the children to leave.]

For quite a few months now we've been steadily moving forward in time, tracing the history of the Hebrews; and, recently, we took some pretty big jumps.

Last week we were hearing from Isaiah who was announcing the imminent birth of a "Messiah" - a sort of superhero - descended from the Jewish royal house of David, who would not only fix things for Israel, but for everyone!

And then, this morning, just as we were about to hear how that prophecy was fulfilled, we go *skidding* backwards - *centuries(!)* - to the era of David himself.

Why?

Well, he was - *is* - a pivotal figure.

Once upon a time he'd been quietly minding his own business as a shepherd-boy.

No real prospects.

No career-ladder to climb.

Just him, some (smelly) sheep, and then *Bam!* Down goes Goliath and he was a superstar! Victory followed victory: He conquered a capital city; married a beauty-queen - or two or three, built himself a sweet palace, but...how?

How did He come to enjoy such success?

Because Heaven was on his side. [See: Ps. 89:19-25.]

And having reached the *pinnacle* of worldly ambition, he begins to be "pricked" by his conscience:

But what would it look like to reciprocate?

After all, what to give the God who has everything? Hmmm...

I know! A temple. Yeah, He'd love that.

That's what other kings do, right?

Build fancy shrines to their nation's deities.

And yet (the *real*) God rejects the offer.

He won't - *can't* - be "housed" in that way.

His *reality* is *too* huge.

No, a man-made temple is never going to "cut it" for the one who created the universe.

Even if you *filled* it to the brim with gemstones, and constructed it entirely from gold and other rare metals, it wouldn't be fit for the Creator: like hiding a diamond engagement ring inside a snotty tissue in an unwashed pocket.

No, *for Him* something more precious than a fabulous building is necessary:

you

He wants you.
All of you.
All of the time.
Forever.

Like He had Mary.
She wasn't going to be part-time pregnant with the Incarnation.
Only on Mondays and Thursdays.
Only when she was free.
Only when she wasn't doing anything better.
Only when she didn't have any other plans.
Only when she wasn't partying and or didn't have guests over to stay.

No.
Jesus' coming into our world was going to take over her life.
Literally, *re-define* who she was as a human being:
From the moment of His inception in her womb, she was never now *not* going to be a mother.
Even if she had given the boy away - put Him up for adoption, Mary would *always* be that.
From then on she couldn't give being Christ's mum back.
Change her mind.
Decide it wasn't worth the effort - or the embarrassment or inconvenience.
And with all that it would entail: the joys, the sleeplessness, the potty-training, the heartache and the grief.

Of course for us it is different:
We commit ourselves to Him *by faith* [Eph. 2:8], says the Bible, by "*adoption*," [Rom. 8:15].

And as such, that *is* something one *can* change one's mind about.
We have no paperwork to tear up, but a spiritual umbilical cord is easily cut; and we *can* make a shipwreck [1 Tim. 1:19] of those amazing promises that are *only* for those who persevere.

And so that's what we must do!

Persevere [Heb. 12:1].

'Watch[ing] your life and doctrine *closely*', [1 Tim. 4:16].

And yes, this'll preclude easy, care-free lives, but so it was for the Blessed Virgin, who followed her (S)on so closely that she *was* there when they crucified the Lord, in Jerusalem, when the crowds turned their back on Him - as many do now, but so she is also near Him in glory too(!):

Listening to Heavenly choirs, bathed in sumptuous light [Rev. 21:23-24], *high* above the earth and its troubles.

Pray that by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, you would become *more* like Mary. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. See: George, Timothy (1st of December , 2003), 'The Blessed Evangelical Mary', *Christianity Today*, available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/december/1.34.html> (accessed December 23, 2017).