

GOD'S COVENANT WITH US



OUR COVENANT WITH GOD

Scripture:

Genesis 9:12-17

¹² God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:
¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,
¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.
¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'
¹⁷ God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Luke 1:67-80

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:
⁶⁸ 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'
⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.



GOD'S COVENANT WITH US

This morning I would like to share some of the history of these stained glass windows and how they affect us today, because I feel they are very symbolic of our covenant with God.

Somewhere along about 1976, these eight sections consisting of four panes of window here on the east wall of the sanctuary were covered with

strips of colored stained glass. These strips were about the length of the panes and were somewhere about three to four inches wide. I believe there are still some of those pieces of stained glass in the narthex.

Well, there was no concern about the windows. It was thought that someday something would be done about the windows, but at that time there was

no problem until one day one of those long slender pieces of stained glass came loose and impaled itself in a pew. That got our attention. Immediately people went up ladders and removed all the strips.

Since the stained glass did shield the sanctuary from sunlight, it was decided that those sections would be covered with shellac to block out the sunshine. It was very ugly.

A COMMITTEE

A committee was formed (*after all this is a Presbyterian Church*) to try to do something about the dilemma of these 32 panes of glass. The committee, as far as I can remember, was chaired by Bill Bramson; his wife Joan was on the committee as were Cal and Joan Huntoon, Julie and Buzz Withington, and my wife, Pat. I was an ex-officio member.

We approached several stained glass artists in the area and developed a very unique relationship with Dean Hooper, a stained glass artist in Glen Ellen where he and his wife had a studio. Dean told us up front that he had always wanted to do a church.

THE EARLY PLANNING

We got our heads together and started looking at it. We shared the history of the church and what we thought was important in our personal lives and the life of the congregation. But there was still this idea of these eight slender sections of glass containing four panes each that just didn't seem to fit into any kind of overall structure or picture. It was difficult to compose the overall plan trying to get thirty-two pictures that would blend together. Then Dean came up with the idea of striking the arc across all eight sections. It was like a rainbow in the sky that we might relate symbolically to the bow, the rainbow in the sky that God used as a sign of the covenant for Noah after the Great Flood.

IMPORTANT SYMBOLS

Once we got this arc across the panels, then we started thinking of the symbols that were important for the church. In working with the committee and Dean and his wife, we came up with a composition that put the symbols of the church in a time line above the arc and then below the arc were forms of plant life that symbolized our relationship with God, also in a timeline fashion.

THE STAR OF DAVID

We start with the very left side of the window and work our way over. We wanted to be sure that we got our basics, our grounding in the ancient Hebrew, and that of course was through King David. The Star of David is just not any star. It is a star that was researched by Dean and the way the two triangles are intermeshed is the way that the Star of David is supposed to be. It's not just a six pointed star, but consists of those two triangles woven within each other. The monarchy of King David was the model or the symbol of the messianic hope. The Kingdom of David would be restored by the Messiah and the world would be at peace again.

THE SCROLL

After the split of the Kingdom of Israel into Israel and Judah, the prophets came along and the scroll up there is symbolic of the writing of the prophets. The writings of the prophets were God's way of communicating with his people. The one emphasis we find, especially in Isaiah and Jeremiah was this prediction of a Messiah. Then we have the Bethlehem star below the scroll.

WHEAT AND GRAPES

We move on in time and, of course, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, brought to us the sacrament of Communion. This is an interesting window because we had the grains of wheat and the grapes to symbolize the bread and wine, but we weren't quite sure why there was a chalice under the grapes. After we were finished, we realized that we have to reach out and grasp the chalice.

We have to take part in communion with an overt effort. We can't just sit around and be spoon fed. We must reach out and grasp the chalice.

CELTIC CROSS

The Celtic cross as depicted on your web site is the universal symbol of Christians of the sacrificial death of Christ and His resurrection to everlasting life.

TWO TYPES OF STAINED GLASS

I want to point out that there are two types of stained glass utilized in this whole panorama both above and below the arc. Part of the stained glass is opaque and part is clear. Now the opaque glass does not allow much of the light to come through; you might wonder why they did that. The stained glass requires light to come through to brighten it up, to give it color. When it's dark outside and there is no light to shine through, the clear glass appears to be almost black. The light on the inside of the church reflects off the opaque pieces of glass and we have visibility of color to display the symbols.

This cross is a good illustration of this. Half of the cross disappears at night. The darkness prevents the clear stained glass from having any color but the interior lights reflect off the opaque glass. That goes through all of the items of the windows. All the panels have a combination of the stained glass and opaque glass.

Before I go any further, I want to back off and talk about this committee that got together and worked. We were commissioned by the session to come up with a plan. Bill Bramson was the chairperson, and Bill was very astute politically and he knew how to work with the session. When the design was finalized, it was presented to the session; of course, there was cost involved. As I recollect, the cost was \$12,800.00. Thirty years ago that was quite a bit of money. Elders just shook their heads and said that was no way we could afford it. FORGET IT. But Bill, in his astute planning, had already solicited people to subscribe to \$400.00 a panel and the full amount was already pledged. This got the elders a bit shook up, but then they said okay, go ahead if you've already got all these people to pay for it.

It was an interesting process to go to Dean's studio and see these panels made and you just couldn't figure out how this arc was going to be continuous by just looking at one panel and then another. You just couldn't see how it was going to work. Well, obviously it did work.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Then we go to the next window of the dove. The dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Instead of having that dove in a nose dive, as are so many creations of art regarding the Holy Spirit, we have the dove settling down and that is why you can see

the wavy lines underneath. The Holy Spirit is descending and the fish at the bottom, of course, represents the disciples who took the message of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit into the world.

A DYNAMIC BIBLE

The Bible on its stand has its pages turning.

We definitely were wanting a Bible that was alive and moving and indicating that we were studying the Bible, turning the pages, reading it and learning about what God wanted us to do to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

It is a very dynamic Bible that we wanted to portray, not just a decorative ornament.

BENEATH THE ARC

As I said before, beneath the arc we had the same kind of timeline, so we started out with the Burning Bush where Moses was confronted by God. The flames were made so beautifully by Dean.

Then we go to the palm branches that symbolize Palm Sunday with Jesus entering Jerusalem. It's not just symbolic of Jesus entering Jerusalem; it's symbolic of Jesus entering the world.

Next there are the Easter lilies that celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lilies are very well known symbols of the new life that we've found in Jesus.

We move on in time and we find these thistles that are common here in Sonoma County and are also common in Scotland. We use that to commemorate the connection that we have historically with the early reformed church, back to the time of the struggles in Scotland and Switzerland.

THE ROSES

Finally we end up with the roses. The roses are where we are today, so both from the Star of David and the Burning Bush, with Moses and God, we are current in our faith. We are current also in our covenant. God still cares for us and has promised us life everlasting through belief in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son.

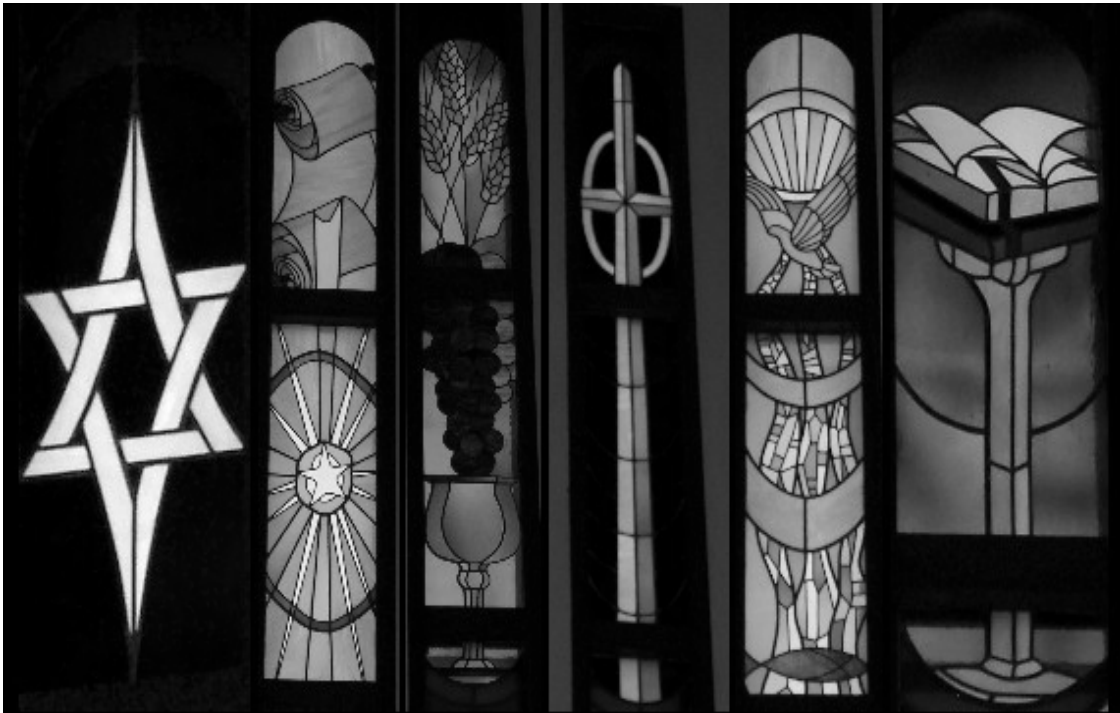
AN EVERLASTING RELATIONSHIP

I say again, this is symbolic of our roots because this is our covenant with God which is everlasting. It is not just a one time thing, but it is an everlasting relationship. The covenant was originally started with Noah and reviewed and brought again to the people throughout history and we recognize that covenant still.

It is through such things as stained glass that the churches, especially in Europe, used symbols to tell the biblical stories. In many cases it has illustrated the saints of the world, the teachings of Jesus and the happenings of the scriptures. Why did they do this? Most of the people in that time couldn't read. With many services in Latin, the only way that they could conceive or understand the scriptures was through the symbolic windows.

When we look at these pictures here today, think about the symbolism that is there, because through that you will be reminded of our history, our roots, our relationship with God through His people for many centuries. That relationship does not end, it keeps on going. Just as the Bible pages turn, time goes on and even when we are gone, at the Church of the Roses God's relationship will continue and be manifested in many, many, many ways.

It has been my pleasure to have partaken in this whole process many years ago and to be able to share with you today. Go in peace, enjoy this new year, and look forward to the Lenten Season which gives us a chance to reflect what it means to have a risen Lord. Amen



(SOME OF THE UPPER WINDOWS)



Dr. Wayne Johnson
Associate Pastor Emeritus
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
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