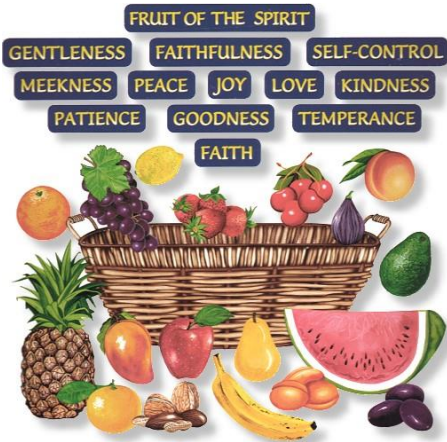


Our Covenant with God

The New Year is a special time for us all. We look back and remember and then we look forward to the unknown year ahead. Usually on December 31st we have guests arriving and others join us too for the evening. We gather for a great thanksgiving, each of us sharing a blessing that we have experienced in the last twelve months. The guitars are out and there is singing and rejoicing.

After this we look ahead. A basket comes around and in it beautiful pieces of card on which are written the



nine gifts of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We each take one – the Lord’s gift to us for the year ahead. We have to cooperate so it is also an aim to achieve. There are usually exclamations of delight or moans of despair! This is followed by prayer. Everyone present is prayed for by name for grace to live out their gift in the year ahead. After all that, we are ready for a cup of coffee or tea and mince pies. The most important part of the evening has yet to take place.

Our chapel, contrary to our usual informality in services, is set out quite formally – the chairs are placed in rows rather than our usual semi-circle and a lectern placed at the front. We are about to make a serious commitment and we don’t take it lightly. It is soon 11.15 p.m. and we gather in the chapel. The old year slips away, as using the words of the Covenant Service instituted by John Wesley in 1755, we draw near to our God and he draws near to us. Year on year, the words of this service speak to us afresh.

“Our residue of days or hours
Yours wholly yours shall be.”

Charles Wesley

The thanksgiving echoes the mercy of God towards us in the fast ebbing year. “You have remembered us when we have forgotten you, followed us when we fled from you, met us with forgiveness when we turned back to you. For all your long-suffering and the abundance of your grace, we praise your holy name, O Lord.”

The confession is searching and sheds light on every area of our life, urging us, “To examine ourselves before God ----- lest by self-deceit, we shut ourselves out from His presence”. “You have spoken and called, and we have not given heed, your beauty has shone forth and we have been blind.” “We have taken great benefits with little thanks.” The prayer echoes around our chapel, “Forgive us, we pray, the poverty of our worship, the formality and selfishness of our prayers, ----- our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace, our hesitating witness for Christ.” “Forgive us when we have wasted our time or misused our gifts,” and, “When we have made it hard for (others) to live with us.”

As midnight approaches we all stand to renew our covenant with God. The implications of what we are about to do are read out by the Sister who is leading. “Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and temporal interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves, in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is assuredly given us in Christ, who strengthens us.”

As the New Year dawns and the fireworks light up the sky outside, we say, “I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me full, let

me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing;, I freely and heartily yield all thing to your pleasure and disposal.”

“The covenant we this moment make
Be ever kept in mind;
We will no more our God forsake,
Or cast his words behind.”

Charles Wesley