

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
St George's Cathedral – All Saints and Stewardship
31 October 2010
8 Minute Short Version for 8am!!!

Jeremiah: 31: 31-34
Revelation 7: 2-4, 9-12
Matthew 5: 1-12

May I speak in the love of God, who covenants with his people.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ it is good to be with you once again.

As well as concluding our month of reflections on Stewardship of all the gifts God gives us, we also celebrate the feast of All Saints – rejoicing that God calls each one of us to live in love with him.

Covenant is the most wonderful picture of God's commitment to his creation, and to humanity, made in his image.

The Bible has a great number of covenants. Some are promises between individuals, like Jacob and his father-in-law Laban (Gen 31:44)

Marriage, too, is of course a covenant, in which we promise that no matter what happens to us, we will do our best to stay together 'till death us do part'.

But human covenanting is just a reflection of the promises that God makes to us.

God makes an everlasting covenant with individuals, such as Abram – promising that he will have numerous descendants (Gen 17).

God makes a covenant with the Hebrew nation, as he does through Moses at Sinai – even though it is not upheld by ancient Israel.

And because of such failings, God promises a New Covenant – the covenant of our first reading, from of the Prophet Jeremiah; the new covenant fulfilled by Jesus.

I will come onto this New Covenant in a moment.

But first I want to go back to the earliest of God's covenant – the covenant he makes with Noah, and with all of creation, after the great flood.

After the flood subsides, God warns Noah and his sons not to shed human life – for humanity bears the image of God – and God adds, 'I am establishing my covenant

with you and your descendents, and with every living creature ... never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth ... and this is the sign of my covenant: the rainbow.'

This is a covenant for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

In it you can see three foundational, and everlasting, principles:

First, it is a covenant about the sanctity of human life

Second, it is about the integrity of the created world, which God will never again destroy

And third, it is about the dignity of difference, symbolised by the rainbow.

These three principles are the bedrock of the life for which God created us – to live in harmony with one another, and with creation.

This is why the church so often supports human rights and promotes good environmental policies – because God created us to treat every life as sacred; honouring every human person no matter how different; and to care for our planet that God has generously given to us.

God's overwhelming generosity points us to a very important aspect of covenant.

A covenant is not a contract.

In contracts, parties give legal undertakings to effect transactions for reciprocal benefit. No one is required to do anything more than the legal minimum.

In covenants, people bind themselves together, in pledges of faithfulness and loyalty, to promote mutual well-being.

Covenants, unlike contracts, are living things – designed for relationships that grow and flourish.

It is a living, growing, flourishing relationship with us, that God desires – a relationship that is fuelled by inexhaustible love, and by limitless generosity.

This is what we find fulfilled in God's New Covenant. As Jeremiah says, it is a covenant of the heart.

'I shall be their God' says the Lord, 'and they shall be my people.'

This is the definition of what it is to be a saint – to belong to God, to belong to his Church!

This is what we celebrate today. He is our God, and we are his people, the Saints of St George's Cathedral!

We are the ones who have responded to God's offer of overflowing love, shown to us in Jesus Christ.

As Jesus also said 'No one has greater love than this – to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15:13).

Jesus indeed laid down his life, saying 'this is my blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many'.

What, then, is our response to the limitless generosity of God's love for us – love greater than life itself?

Our response comes in the shape of our time, our talents, our money – freely given back to God, just as he has freely given to us.

And for us too, the heart of the matter should be covenant.

For if we have a mindset of contract, we will find that giving is a deadening thing – following the old law of a tithe, and not a cent more.

But if we give from a covenant mindset, we will be set free to give with the same love and generosity that knows no bounds – yes, 10%, and yes, wherever there is a need to which God's love propels us to respond.

So let us live in response to God's love for us – let us be his saints – let us be his covenant people, sharing life with others as freely as he shared his with us.

Amen