



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Living the Covenant: God, what are you up to?”

**Matthew 25:31-45 Revelations 21:1-6
Will Sparks November 23, 2014**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

This past summer while I was on sabbatical, I had the opportunity to attend other churches at worship time and at other times as well. I got to experience Jazz Vespers in New York City at St. Peter's, the place where it all started in the 60s. I went to a Celtic Mass at Westminster Presbyterian where they hosted Phillip Newell, one of the key proponents of the revival of interest Celtic Christianity and Spirituality.

But the place that keeps coming back to me in life and work here at Northwood was a church we attended in downtown Minneapolis Minn. called First Covenant Church. I had never been to a Covenant church, although I have come to be friends with Andy Sebec, the minister at Green Timbers Covenant Church just down 88th here. 10 years ago, First Covenant was near the end of its life. They had dwindled in numbers of attendees to the point where they clearly could not afford the building they were in, could not afford to pay their minister, and could not really see how it might turn around. They decided that they would, in one last bold attempt to turn things around, do a bold thing. They took all their savings, a little money from their denomination, and they hired Dan Collison, and committed to go down with a bang rather than a wimper.

Well it was a bang, but it wasn't a going down. They have experienced an amazing rebirth thanks be to God. And although there is no one magic formula to that turn around, and no one person responsible, everyone says that Dan challenged them to know their neighbors in the downtown core, to open their doors even if somebody came in that made them uncomfortable. And they did. They have a thriving intergenerational ministry with the community. First is a place of gathering, of belonging, or home for a dazzling mix of people every day of the week. I got the sense that they had taken this story from Matthew's gospel about whenever you do this for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it for me, and ingested it.

Interesting, they don't talk about church membership at First. You don't join up and become a member. You make your way into the life of the church and at a certain point if you feel called, you become a covenant partner. A covenant partner is one who has chosen to share in the covenant that is at the core of the church. A covenant partner is one who says, yes, my Christian life and my Christian community, my relationship with God and my relationship with these people matter to me, and I'm in. They say yes to a relationship agreement, as Sheldon puts it in the Big Bang Theory, but this is a relationship agreement that is intended to set people free in faith.

I think about First Covenant when I am here because I think of us as covenant partners who need each other, who commit to one another wellbeing. I have asked a couple of people to speak for a couple of minutes each about the difference it has made to them to be connected here at Northwood.

With Dawn Cox, Chadd Little, Tammy Madigan

We say that our core purpose, the reason we are here at Northwood is to embrace our community with the love of Christ. Whenever you do this for the least of these my sisters and brothers, you do it to me. And when we open ourselves up in this way, lives change by the grace of God. We become partners in a life changing relationship, a covenant way bigger than any of us. That is our hope in Christ. That is the invitation. Thanks be to God.