

The Celebration and Affirmation of the Life Covenant of N. and N.

Prelude

Processional

Introduction

The Celebrant: We have come together in the presence of God, sharing the belief that the joining of two human beings, in heart, body, and mind is a sign and sacrament of the intimate, loving relationship God desires with the human community and has with the Church in Jesus Christ. We come sharing our belief that such a relationship is also a sign of God's purpose for humanity, in which human wholeness and fulfillment are found only as the incompleteness of each individual is complemented by another, whether in friendship, marriage or same gender commitments. Basic Christian compassion presses us to affirm and support this tenet of health and wholeness for all persons.

At this point in history, the Episcopal Church does not corporately and officially share that belief with regard to lesbian and gay unions, and so it is not possible for us to bless them formally for the Church. Nevertheless, we have come together here so that N. and N. may formally declare, in the presence of God and before the Church and the world, their commitment to one another in a sacred, binding covenant. By tradition and theological precept, couples are themselves the ministers of their covenants. The church celebrates and affirms that which already exists.

We are here to witness and celebrate this covenant and also to pledge our support of N. and N. in their life together. We, as witnesses, pledge our intention to accompany them on their pilgrimage and our commitment to work in every way we can for the Church's provision for the blessing of such unions.

The Greeting and Opening Prayers

The Celebrant: Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The People: Thanks be to God.

The Celebrant: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The People: Amen.

The Celebrant: The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The People: Amen.

The Celebrant: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace.

The People: Amen.

The Celebrant: Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp to put it under a bushel, but on a lamp-stand where it gives light for everyone in the house. And you, like the lamp, must shed light among all people, so that they may see the good you do, and give glory to God in heaven."

The Deacon then says: Let us pray.

O God, Creator of the universe, instill in the hearts of *N.* and *N.* the dedication to fulfill those promises which they will make before you and this company.

We pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: Guide them in all they do. Empower them to share their joys, sorrows and challenges. Give them the strength to acknowledge fault so that they may live together in peace and harmony. We pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: Bless our families, friends, and neighbors, that they may live in joy, peace and health. We pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: O God, the Creator of all: Lead us from prejudice to truth; deliver us from fear and ignorance; give to us all understanding to respect each other and to discern the truth, that our society may be enlightened and strengthened. We pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: Awaken our hearts to your presence in all people, so that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace, we pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: Grant that all persons, single and united, who witness these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. We pray to you,

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Deacon: Lord, We pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart and united to one another in pure affection through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Celebrant: O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth. *Amen.*

Ministry of the Word

The First Lesson (Read by...)

Reader: A reading from the Book of Ruth 1:8-10, 14-18.

Then Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and took her leave, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her god. Go, follow her." Ruth answered, "Do not urge me to go back and desert you. Where you go, I shall go, and where you stay, I shall stay. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I shall die, and there be buried. I solemnly declare before the Lord that nothing but death will part me from you." When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Antbem

The Second Lesson (Read by...)

Reader: A reading from Ecclesiasticus 6:5-13

A sweet word multiplies friends and appeases enemies, and a gracious tongue in a good person abounds. Be at peace with many but let one of a thousand be your counselor. When you would get a friend, do not accept her easily, but try her, and be in no hurry to give her your trust. Some friends are loyal when it suits them but desert you in time of trouble. Some friends turn into enemies and shame you by making the quarrel public. He that has found a friend has found a treasure, and no measure of silver or gold can countervail his worth. A faithful friend is the elixir of life, found only by those who fear the Lord.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

The Reading of the Gospel

All stand, and the Deacon says: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Mark 7:24-30

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

He moved on from there into the territory of Tyre. He found a house to stay in, and would have liked to remain unrecognized, but that was impossible. Almost at once a woman whose small daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell at his feet. (The woman was a Gentile, a Phoenician of Syria by nationality.) She begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let children be satisfied first; it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." "Sir," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." He said to her, "For saying that, go, and you will find the demon has left your daughter." And when she returned home, she found the child lying in bed; the demon had left her.

The Deacon: The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Meditation

The Covenant of N. and N.

The Celebrant addresses the couple, saying: N. and N., you have come here so God may confirm and strengthen your love in the presence of this company. Therefore, I ask you to declare and affirm the intention of your covenant.

N., Do you believe God has called you to live together in love and to remain faithful to each other, affirming this relationship above all others and to nurture each other's ability to grow in maturity and wisdom within this relationship?

N., I do.

The Celebrant: Will you do all in your power to make your life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt and joy conquer despair?

N. and N.: We will.

In turn, N. and N. face the other, each taking the other's right hand and saying: I, N., take you, N., to be my beloved one. I give you all that I possess, all that I am and all that I will be. Your joys and sorrows will be mine. I will honor your family. I will live with you in peace, harmony and forgiveness. I will respect you and be faithful to you—heart, body and mind—through all the seasons of our life. This is my solemn vow.

They loose hands and the Celebrant continues: What token do you offer to seal the covenants you have made?

N. and N.: A ring.

The giver then gives the symbol to the other and says: N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow; receive and treasure it as a pledge of my love for you.

The Covenant of the People

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying: Will all of you witnessing these promises do everything in your power to uphold N. and N. in their covenant?

The people respond: We will.

The Celebrant: And will you do everything in your power to hasten the day when the Church's formal blessing of such unions will be authorized?

People: We will.

Celebrant: May God uphold and guide us in the covenants we now have made in God's presence, and strengthen us in our pilgrimage together.

People: Amen.

The Celebrant: Most Gracious and Everliving God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light. Enfold us in that light, that we may love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart. By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep and protect these your servants, *N. and N.*, in your grace. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders and a crown upon their foreheads. Send them out to do the work you have given them to do; dwell among them in their companionship, in their sleeping and their waking, and in their sorrow and their delight. And at that time when they are reunited in your heavenly home, bring them to your eternal banquet where all your saints are gathered. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Peace

(All stand) **The Celebrant says to the people:**

The grace, peace and love of Christ be always with you.

People: And also with you.

(Then the ministers and people may greet one another in the name of the Lord.)

The Holy Communion

Offertory Anthem

(The people remain standing. The priest faces them and says:)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

The Great Thanksgiving

The Celebrant facing the Holy Table proceeds: We praise you and we bless you, O holy and living God, Creator of heaven and earth. For you create all things that are, that have been, and that will be, made ever new and wondrous in your love.

Therefore we join in the chorus of praise that rings through eternity, with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, who together sing this song:

Sanctus
(Sung by All)

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Power and Might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory,
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

(The people stand or kneel.)

The Celebrant continues: O God, from before time you made ready the creation. Through your Wisdom, your Spirit moved over the deep and brought to birth the heavens: sun, moon, and stars; earth, winds, and waters; growing things, both plants and animals; and finally humankind. You made us in your image, to love and care for the earth and its creatures as you love and care for us, your children.

You graced us with freedom of heart and mind, but we were heedless and willful. You took us by the hand, and taught us to walk in your ways. And though you led us with cords of compassion and bands of love, we wandered far away. Yet as a mother cares for her children, you would not forget us. Time and again you called us to live in the fullness of your love.

Then you acted anew in Creation. In order that we might see and know the riches of your grace, your Spirit entered into Mary, the maiden of Nazareth, that she might conceive and bear a Son, the holy child of God. Living among us Jesus loved us. He yearned to draw all the world to himself.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.)

The Celebrant: At last the time came for him to make the sacrifice of himself, and to be glorified by you. On the night before he died, Jesus was at table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks to you, broke it, and gave it to them saying: "Take, eat: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Celebrant and People: We remember his death on the cross,
We proclaim the resurrection to new life,
We await the return of Christ in glory.

The Celebrant continues: And we join together in the love of Christ to give thanks and praise to you, our God. Here at this table we offer to you all that you have made: this bread and this cup, our time, and ourselves, a living sacrifice.

Pour out your love and your blessing on all we offer here. Breathe your Spirit into these gifts of bread and wine, to make of them the Body and Blood of Christ. Let your Spirit who broods over the whole creation dwell within us. Gather us to be your holy people, the Body of Christ given for the world you have made. Draw us, O God, to your heart at the heart of the world.

Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

And now, As Christ our Savior taught us, we are bold to say:

Celebrant and People: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.

(Celebrant and people sing Fraction Hymn, page XX)

The Celebrant, facing the people: The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on them in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion of the People

Communion Anthem

The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people. The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants. (All baptized persons are invited to share in the Lord's Supper.)