It is stunning to me that we are nearing 12 months of this Covid Epidemic. How would you have reacted a year ago If I were to have told you: “Over the next year, over half a million Americans will die.” Covid has changed everything, and books and books will be written for years to come.

But we also know: God never wastes a hurt. He may not always cause it but will never waste a hurt. In fact, during Covid, God has been teaching the church:

- How to be more nimble
- How to remain connected in a disconnected time
- And how to be More Strategic, like extending our reach online around the world!

I recall the funeral for beloved Priest Peter Moore. We had 50 people in church due to Covid restrictions, and over 10 thousand people online!

Yes! God teaching the church to be more mobile and more visionary.

Covid is also helping kill off what one author calls Consumer Christianity. Author Nolan Huber defines a consumer Christian as one who:

- comes to church to be served
  - rather than to serve.
- One who comes to church to be filled up
  - verses one coming to church to pour out!
- Coming to church to be seen
  - Rather than coming to see Jesus!
Right now when we worship on-line or in person, when we take classes on zoom together, it is truly for the sake of being together! Covid is pointing us away from Consumerism and into what it means to live a **Covenant relationship** with God.

And this takes us to Abraham and Genesis 17 where the word covenant is mentioned 9 times! Before Abraham met God, Abraham was a consumer pagan, worshiping many gods, including Nannar, the moon-god idol in the city of Úr. This is when God invites Abraham into an exclusive Covenant.

What is a covenant? A covenant is everything consumerism is not! A covenant is between 2 entities. God’s part was to give Abraham heirs property, and an eternal heritage. In turn, Abraham would be a man of EXCLUSIVE FAITH! What is exclusive FAITH? FORSAKING ALL, I TRUST HIM! God appears to Abraham and says: Walk before me, be faithful ONLY TO ME, be set apart, and I in turn will, Verse 6:

- Make you fruitful;
- I will make nations of you,
- Kings will come from you.
- I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me, you, and your descendants after you.

The covenant of God is confirmed with blood. God tells Abraham: Make sure you and your new nation get circumcised. What is Circumcision? Circumcision was the identifying sign that this nation was ALL IN, set apart exclusively for **that exclusive Covenant**! It was the sign that they belonged to the one true God and He with them!

Covenants come with a good news bad news side. The good news of the covenant with God is that humans always get the best end of the deal. Abraham, in return for being faithful and obedient, God would give him many descendants and all he would need to live!

The bad news? God is so serious about it, that disobeying the covenant in Old Testament brought death. There was always blood sacrificed when people failed obedience. Which is why lambs were sacrificed for breaches of the covenant. You break one of the 10 commandments, a sacrifice of blood had to be made! Those lambs died in your place. Leading to the best news of all time--Galatians 3:13, Paul said: “Jesus Christ on the cross redeemed us from the curse of disobeying the covenant, by becoming a curse for us.” Knowing we were and are not able to keep that covenant on our own, Jesus, out of pure love, paid the price of our disobedience with the blood of his own life!

God’s blessing to Abraham comes true! Genesis 17:6: kings will come from you Abraham. One of those Kings is Jesus. God redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to us all through Abraham’s great great great by 42 generations: grandson Jesus!
Meaning when I fail the covenant, when we fail God, WHICH WE WILL, the blood of Jesus covers us! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Does Mark 8 now make MORE sense to you? Jesus telling the Disciples about his impending death, that he would have to die for our inability to keep the covenant on our own! Which is why Jesus said, “This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” You and I desiring to be all in with exclusive faith in the covenant because Jesus died to make it so! What does this require? Self-denial.

Mark 8: verse 34: Jesus said…If anyone wishes to come after me, He must deny himself. **And so we ask ourselves this question:** What needs to die in here to live the exclusive Covenant of FORSAKING ALL-I-TRUST-ONLY HIM? This is why attic time which I talked about last week is so important. Putting yourself in a room and doing that Lenten audit, LORD, HOW CAN I REPLACE WHAT IS CURRENTLY FIRST IN MY LIFE WITH YOU? Give me a covenantal hunger TO make OTHER things second, **not out of external guilt, but out of an internal covenantal desire and commitment!**

Remember: Obedience is a way of saying:

- Thank you JESUS
- And a way of becoming like JESUS
- Not a way to earn my way in-to-Heaven.

Okay, how does this work in our lives? Go deeper with me on Covenant here. The Rev. Tim Keller says it this way: A covenant agreement between two parties:

- Is more loving and intimate
  - than a legal relationship...
- **Yet** more
  - Binding
  - Exclusive
  - Enduring
  - Accountable
  - Legal
  - **And MORE Lethal** than a merely personal relationship.

Keller continues saying a covenantal Christian is one who can say: I will be what I should be whether you God are being what you should be or not! The truth is, you may not always understand why God does what He does. Why Pre-mature death happens to loved ones or a prayer goes unanswered. A covenant is exclusive faithfulness no matter the circumstances.

Let me contrast this with the opposite of covenant, which is consumerism. Consumerism works like this. Back to Keller: I will be what I should be as long as and to the degree that you God are what you should be, and if you’re not…I’m out. I will be faithful if God is acting the way I think He should act.

But remember, marriage is also a covenant. We make a covenant with the bride of Christ the Church!
And so, if we are consumers we might say, I will be faithful in my marriage if I like what the other is doing. I will be faithful with the church as long as the church does what I want it to do.

Covenant Christians who say: I will still be faithful whether

- You Lord
- You Spouse
- You Church

are being what I think you should be or not! This doesn’t mean we put up with abuse, or unrepentant sin. No...But being able to say:

- In my Christian faith,
  - I will be a person of the covenant.
- In my marriage,
  - I will be a person of the covenant!
- In my church
  - I will be a person of the covenant!

Each of these requires a denial of self.

Okay, quick humorous disclaimer. There is one area of your life where you need to be a consumer...and that is where you get your haircut! As one dear parishioner told me after a haircut...She said: Fr. Al, where did you get your haircut? I told her, and in a reply I’ll never forget it, she says with a smile and sweet southern accent: You don’t need to go back there again!

Consumerism is only good for haircuts!

Let me give you an example of a covenant Christian. I think of Eric Liddell, that Christian sprinter from England in the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. Liddell qualifies for the 100 meter dash, but the dash is scheduled for Sunday. To everyone’s shock, Liddell says I will not run! He refuses to compete out of the covenantal relationship with Christ. He would obey the commandment of Sabbath rest. A self-denial that shocked England!

Here’s the crazy thing! When we deny self to live for the EXCLUSIVE covenant, again, in our walk with Christ, his bride the church...our marriages...that’s when our lives begin to cook with gas.

When we go from consumer to covenant, we get to CONQUEST.
The deep end of the pool...where God does something amazing.

Just like He did for Abraham, he changes our:

- Name
- our motivations
- and inner desires!
- Abram becomes Abraham
- Sarai becomes Sarah!
We are renamed!
- Victim becomes victor!
- Aimless becomes purpose driven!
- Lost life becomes THE FOUND life!
- The conquered becomes the conqueror!

Yes! As Abraham obeys, **God leads him on conquest** to take the promised land!
*Conquest* Comes from the word conquer. We begin conquering territory for Christ! Those dark places become places of light and strength!
- Consumer,
- to Covenant
- to Conquest!

Eric Liddell covenantally obeys and God supernaturally gives Liddell the strength to win the 440 meter race - a race for which he had never trained. From there it’s conquest! God gives Eric the hunger to be a missionary to China! Covenantal Christians on Conquest!

Here’s what that looks like Sunday by Sunday: Covenantal Christians on conquest come to church and say: I am a covenantal Christian. I’m ready for conquest Lord-Here I am, I’m all in! Change my name from static to mobile! I will be what I should be, whether you GOD, or you CHURCH, or you SPOUSE are being what I think you should be or not! I’m all in! Come Holy Spirit, help me be what I should be UNCONDITION-ALLY! A covenant Christian.

Finally today, It doesn’t even matter how old you are! **Abram** enters that covenant and becomes ABRAHAM at age 99! This is what’s happening with our own Ted McNabb! Okay, Ted’s not quite 99…but his name could be Retirement. God is changing Ted’s name to **The first director of the Michaelmas Institute**, an institute on conquest to transform the Four Corners! An institute on conquest to empower and train up St. Michaelites to minister within the four corners of law right here!

I will be what I should be:
- Faithful
- willing even to fail,
- as together we go from:

Consumer-
to-
Covenant
to
Conquest.

Amen!