

**SERMON TITLE:** “Lead Me In Your Truth”

**TEXT:** Psalm 25:1-10

**PREACHED AT:** Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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We have arrived at the First Sunday of the Season of Lent—a season where Christians around the world focus on repentance and preparation for the Easter.

Our theme for Lent this year is, “Where do I sign?”

We sign up for many things in our lives.

We have credit cards and debit cards and health care cards and library cards and passports and drivers’ licenses and bookstore cards and gym memberships....

For many of us who conduct a lot of our business online, we are familiar with then endless prompts to set up new accounts, to provide information for the services we are receiving.

We are asked for addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, gender, religious denomination, credit card information, age, income, number of children, hobbies and interests, etc, etc.

**In each of these cases, we “sign up” because we are getting something valuable out of the deal. We perform a kind of cost-benefit analysis, and determine to proceed because there is something in it for us.**

We like the convenience of being able to do our banking on the computer. Or getting automatic reminders when our library books are due. Or being able to download music quickly. Or being able to purchase cheaper books. Or being able to drive a car. Or... the list goes on.

It is a straightforward transaction—we allow access to information about ourselves (and often money) in exchange for the services we desire. The

service providers obtain the information they need to provide better services—and to more effectively try to sell you more things you probably don't need or sell your information to others who will do this (cynical, I know!!)

And despite the fact that we routinely “sign up,” many of us are hesitant to do so.

We are suspicious of the motives of the one asking us. We wonder if there are hidden terms to the contract that are being deliberately withheld from us.

We find contracts and covenants restrictive because they close us off to other options.

For better or worse, when we sign up for any of the products and services we use in daily life, we are bound to them for a period of time.

And we don't like being bound.

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Our theme for Lent this year is “where do I sign?” It is about signing up to follow Jesus. It is about binding ourselves to Jesus into a covenant relationship and a life of discipleship.

We don't use the word “covenant” very often, but this word figures prominently in Scripture

There are at least five covenants commonly cited from Scripture.

- Noah
  - o God promises blessing to Noah and his offspring if they observe certain commands; never again would God destroy the earth
- Abraham
  - o God would make a nation out of him, and that this nation would be a blessing to all the earth (Gen 12-17)
- Moses

- The giving of the Law (Exodus 19-24)
- David
  - Establish throne forever (2 Samuel 7)
- Jesus
  - The sacrifice for sins and the promise of new life for all (symbolized by the celebration of communion)

In each of these covenants, God agreed to do certain things for his people—provide blessing, care, protection, forgiveness, new life—in exchange for things like obedience, trust, and fidelity.

We perhaps don't use the word "covenant" much today, but as the examples I began with show, we still do routinely enter into covenants.

There are more serious and significant covenants, as well. In marriage, for instance, we covenant to our spouse to love them for better or worse, as long as we both shall live. We bind ourselves to another human being.

In baptism and church membership, we covenant with Christ and with a body of believers. We promise to contribute to the life of the local church, and to do what we can to grow in love for Christ and one another. The church promises to instruct, encourage, discipline (if necessary) members.

In child dedication (as we just saw this morning), we covenant with God and with parents and with young children to each play our part in helping in the raising of children to know God and to recognize his call on their life.

So, we are familiar with the making of covenants. We are also familiar with the breaking of covenants.

This has been true right from the beginning. From the people of Israel, right down to people in the present day, human beings have never been very good covenant-keepers.

Israel routinely wandered off after other gods, and failed to keep covenant with God. The entire section of the prophets in our Old Testaments could be read as a response to Israel's inability to keep their end of the bargain

We also break covenants. The rate of marital breakdown attests to this—at least half of the time, we break covenant.

Church commitment, in a time of church shopping and church hopping, has perhaps never been so tenuous as it is today. We break covenant.

We human beings have never been very good at keeping our covenants.

We don't like being bound.

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So, we have these two realities:

1. We are covenant makers
2. We are covenant breakers

What are we to do? Specifically, in the case of our covenant with God—how are we to live in light of the fact that the covenant breaking is always from our side?

Well, the solution is as simple as it is profound.

**We keep on signing up and signing on.**

We say that we are sorry for our sins, and we renew our commitment to obey and to follow.

The season of Lent is a very appropriate one for this. It is one in which we examine ourselves—our motives, our behaviour, our daily inability or unwillingness to love God and others as we ought to—and we ask for forgiveness.

We repent of our sin, and we turn, again and again, toward God

It is not popular in our culture to acknowledge that we are sinful creatures. We have no problem acknowledging that we are victims of unjust social structures, or that the world we live in is affected by generic “sin.”

But we don't like to be told that we are accountable—that we are contributors to what is wrong with the world.

Psalm 25 shows us the way—for Lent, and for all of the Christian life.

I thought it would be an appropriate place to start because it is, like all of the Psalms, the language of prayer, and it is good to begin the season of Lent in prayer.

David begins by locating his confidence in God—“O God, in you I trust...” (25:1)

He moves on to acknowledging his need and asking God for guidance—“make me to know your ways...” (25:4-5).

Then, to confession— “Do not remember the sins of my youth...” (25:6-7)

He ends back at character of God—“Good and upright is the Lord...” (25:8-10)

This prayer from Psalm 25 is about telling the truth.

The truth about us:

- That we finite and fallen
- That we do not always think and see and do as we ought to
- That we have sins that need confessing—that rebellion and pride haunt our steps
- That we need to be led into truth—that God's ways and paths are not intuitive to us
- That we need a Teacher and a Guide

The truth about God

- God is good and upright
- He is willing and able to instruct us, guide us, and teach us
- All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful to those who keep the demands of his covenant

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A final word about signing up and renewing covenants.

Covenants require freedom. They presume that human beings have the ability to choose what they will sign up for.

This past week we were visiting my brother and his family in Saskatchewan, and on Friday morning I had the opportunity to sit in on a second-year ethics class that my brother taught at Bethany College.

One of the things that came up during this class was the default “individualism” of our culture and how this colours our ethical views.

We talked about how the word “autonomous” is derived from two Greek words: *autos* = self, and *nomos* = law.

As modern individuals, we often consider ourselves to be a “law unto our selves.” We choose. Nobody tells us what to do. We are free to engage in whatever behaviours we prefer, so long as they don’t hurt others. We make the rules. The self is the final authority.

And yet, we see the destructive results of this approach to life all around us. We see addiction—to substances, to pornography, to technology, to work, to... \_\_\_\_.

Our freedom to do what we want when we want and how we want, has led to many people today being enslaved by the very desires that they have “freely” chosen to act upon.

Ironically, the freedom that we have exalted has led to enslavement, for many people. One of the things that Gil said in the class was that everyone has a master; our only choice is who or what we will be mastered by. And why.

Will we choose to be mastered by our impulses and desires for pleasure, happiness, and comfort? Will we be a law unto ourselves?

Or, will we choose to sign up with Jesus and allow him to lead us into the truth about who he is and who we are, and how to be most fully human? Will we acknowledge that there is a higher law and a higher purpose to being human than ourselves?

Which brings us all the way back to where we began this sermon.

We typically sign covenants because of *what* we will get out of the deal.

But from a Christian perspective, we sign up because of *who* we get. We sign up for a new master because we realize that the other masters on offer out there are inadequate and untrustworthy.

We sign up again and again because, like David, we know that we are not OK as we are. We need a guide for our paths (25:4). We need instruction in our ways (25:8).

We need to be led into truth—about God and about ourselves (25:5).

We are not autonomous. Lent is a reminder that we are *not* a law unto ourselves—that there is a truth of the matter of who God is, about what he has done in Christ, and about who we are that we must align ourselves with.

As we head out into the season of Lent, may we keep in mind this image of continually “signing up” for the life of discipleship.

May we be grateful that we have a covenant partner who is surer and wiser and more reliable than our own mixed motives and inconsistent efforts.

May we sign up, as often as necessary, for the life of discipleship—the life of following the one who has promised to lead us into truth.

Amen.

