

2.28.21 L2 Not Contract, but Covenant of the Cross

- If you haven't seen "The Big Bang Theory," a television series now only in reruns about four nerdy but brilliant science-guys who eventually fall in love with strong women – and these women put up with the guy's rather unique personalities and ground them in reality
 - Clearly the most unique character is a genius, but totally out of touch human being named Sheldon Cooper
 - Unable to relate to people or their feelings, throughout the episodes Sheldon has an extremely legalistic view of the world and life
 - And nowhere is this legalistic view of the world made more clearly than in the ROOMMATE AGREEMENT that his friend Leonard had to sign to live there
 - Thick as a term paper, Sheldon points to the roommate agreement – a legal and binding contract that covers everything imaginable – whenever there is a disagreement
 - It covers everything from the very practical control of the thermostat, to what one of them would do if the other one ever gets superpowers
 - These clauses in the roommate contract are witty in their granular detail. Here is one about dinner: "Thursday nights are Franconi's Pizza nights. Also, the selection of a new take-out restaurant requires public hearings and a 60-day comment period."
- Much less fanciful than a TV sitcom, is the ordinary contract that all of us have seen, and many of us have participated in, and that is the agreement of marriage
 - Usually not written out like a term paper, in a marriage two people make verbal promises to love one another, be faithful to one another, and not just to be roommates, but to spend their lives together
 - And of course when these promises, these vows, are exchanged during a church service, people of faith seek the public blessing of God on their lifelong mutual contract
- But whether we are talking about Sheldon Cooper and his outrageously legalistic understanding of friendship, or whether

we are talking about the much more real agreement of marriage, we are talking about a contract between two parties

- Whether it is how to control the thermostat, or how to decide what to have for dinner on Thursday evenings, or more seriously with God's blessing on how two people promise to live out their lives together – it takes two parties to AGREE, and TOGETHER TO WORK at keeping the contract
- But in our reading from Genesis today, we hear about something that is vastly different
 - Initially there ARE TWO parties – God and Abram
 - But it is a *very unbalanced* contract
 - The way today's verses were lifted out of scripture, did you notice how many words Abram says in this part of the story?
 - You can count the number of words that Abram says to God on the fingers of just one hand, and number of those words is exactly zero [make sign for 0]
 - In the rest of Genesis, Abram DOES speak a little bit to God, but God speaks MUCH more than Abram ever does
 - So why does Abram say so little? Or in these particular verses, why does Abram say NOTHING?
 - Because this contract is so unbalanced, that Abram did NOTHING – God did it all, God made the whole agreement without Abram doing anything on his own to earn it, and so we call this not just a contract, but a covenant
- The covenant with Abram, where Abram does and promises nothing, and God does all the work... this covenant with Abram leads to God FINALLY bringing in a third party – Abram's wife Sarai who WILL have to do some work
 - God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah, and then with Abram almost 100 years old, and his wife Sarai the same age, the impossible would happen to them
 - In their advanced age, God would finally give a son to this elderly childless couple, and of course Sarah would do the work of carrying the child and going through childbirth
 - And why would God unilaterally do this crazy thing?

- Because God had chosen Abraham and Sarah to receive the impossible gift of a child, and through this child's descendants, they would become the parents of nations: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [Gen. 17:6-7]"
- Through this one-sided covenant between God and Sarah and Abraham – through this one-sided covenant stretching about twelve centuries – through all kinds of events that their descendants endure, FINALLY Jesus was born
- And through Jesus, once again God placed a one-sided covenant on the nations of the world – without the nations' asking, without humanity's asking, without anyone's help, the covenant of the cross was made solely by God
 - Through the cross of Christ, without our input or agreement, God nailed our sins to the cross with Jesus, and all of humanity's sin was defeated and forgiven when God raised Jesus Christ from the power of sin, death, and the grave
 - And THERE'S STILL MORE!
 - In our baptisms, yet another one-sided covenant has been made between God and us – the covenant of Holy Baptism
 - We didn't ask for Jesus to be crucified and raised
 - But nevertheless, Saint Paul tells us that through the water and promise of Holy Baptism we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ [Romans 6]
 - In the gift of Holy Baptism sin is drowned, and life is promised!
- The contract between God and Abraham and Sarah, and between us and Jesus Christ, and between God the Father Son and Holy Spirit in Baptism – this contract is so one-side, that it is a holy covenant that simply has been given to you... and to me... and even to others
- All that is left, is to thank God, and to take up the cross of discipleship and to follow Jesus even when it is difficult.