

FROM THE PULPIT

Find a covenant relationship with God

By Brad Bryant

FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

A favorite Community of Christ hymn states: "We limit not the truth of God, to our poor reach of mind..."

As mortal humans, our ability to understand the fullness of God is extremely limited. Yet during our "human experience" we are challenged to constantly grow our understanding of God and our relationship with him.

We often perceive God as "far away," but God wants to be in daily relationship with you. God shared these words through the prophet Jeremiah (29:13): "And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart."

God invites every person into a covenant relationship. Think of a "covenant" as an unbreakable contract. So a covenant relationship is one that we enter into willingly, and expect to always honor. Nearly all covenant

relationships are "conditional," meaning that God offers his unbreakable promise if we will do "our part." Rewording the Jeremiah Scripture above into covenant form:

"If you will search for me with all your heart, then I, God, will allow you to find me!"

But "seeking God" is not enough. Many are content with just learning "about God," studying books and enjoying some "knowledge." But God wants more! God wants a covenant relationship with you!

Here's the covenant part of being in Jesus' family (John 14:15-17): "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of Truth."

Rewording again:

If you will love me, and obey my commandments, then I, God, will give you the "Counselor," "my presence" to be with you always.

What a powerful promise! God wants to be part of your everyday life! Not just Sunday. Not only when things are broken in your life. God himself offers to walk with you, no matter what you're facing daily! "I will be with you always."

Jesus instructed his apostles in Matthew 28:19-20 to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always."

Disciples are disciplined followers who want to learn and obey Jesus' instructions, and want to enter into that covenant relationship, unlocking God's promise: "I am with you always."

So, how do we encounter Jesus "beyond the books"? Consider these important steps:

► Desire to believe in and encounter Jesus.

► Pray to him, to help your de-

sire grow, and to lead you into knowledge, faith and experience with him.

► Learn about him and his life/ministry.

► Choose to be around his followers and learn from their experience.

► Recognize that some of your life decisions have been bad (sin), repent (sorry), work to undo damage you may have done in people's lives, and commit yourself to trying to not do that again.

► Participate in the eight sacraments, which bring us closer to God, especially both baptisms (baptism in water, and baptism of the Holy Spirit).

► Begin to serve others in a way that Jesus would serve them.

It is through the baptism sacraments that we publicly commit to entering this covenant relationship with God. We begin to provide the "action" that shows a changing life, and willingness to "obey his instruc-

tions." In response, God gives his covenantal promise: "Then I will never leave you alone!"

Our earlier hymn continues: "The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word." Yes! God wants to open our eyes to new understanding, but more importantly, to greater experience with him. There is more "light and truth" available to you, as you choose to join God in a covenant relationship.

Jesus' message is for you today: God loves you unconditionally, and wants you to find him and choose to be with him. Search until you find a church family that helps you meet the "living, loving God," who knows you personally, and wants to be your life partner. It is in this covenant relationship that you will find the peace you seek.

Bryant is a missionary, serving the 29 Community of Christ congregations in Central and Southern Illinois. Contact him at brad.bryant@hp.com.

Tennessee church leads way in ministering to deaf people

By Rose French

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ground for deaf pastors and church leaders, because most

more meaningful to be able to feel the music from the floor,"

Religion Briefs

Bioethics seminar

LINCOLN — Lincoln Circuit churches will present a bioethics seminar from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday at Zion Lutheran

Woman writes devotions

DELAVAN — Julie Riddle, wife of pastor Derek Riddle, is the author of the devotions

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