

**Sermon**

**“Moments of Commitment”**

January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 ~ First Presbyterian Church

Baptism of the Lord

Based on Isaiah 6:1-8 and Matthew 3:13-17

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup> The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup> The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” <sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” [NRSV]

**Matthew 3:13-17**

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” [NRSV]

**OPENING PRAYER:** Glorious God, when Jesus was baptized for your healing mission in the world, the heavens opened, and the Spirit descended as your voice was heard. May your Spirit so burn in us today that we hear your Word and then commit to translating it by our deeds and actions, as we follow Jesus no matter what the cost may be; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray; and let all God’s people say ... Amen.

## **Turning Over a New Leaf**

We're still close enough to the beginning of this New Year that the topics of new beginnings and resolutions made are still very relevant. It's safe to assume that everyone here today has either made one or more resolutions in this New Year, or you have made some sort of resolution in the past. The turning over of the calendar to a new month in a new year always provides an opportunity to embrace the age-old sentiment of "turning over a new leaf"—of leaving the past behind and looking forward to what lies ahead, hoping to do better than before.

But, it's never as easy as physically turning over an actual leaf, is it? Depending on your particular resolution, it may actually require some measure of sacrifice on your part to accomplish your goal. There certainly may be a cost associated with pursuing your dream. And, usually when there's a cost involved, the difficulty increases. But, hopefully, when something in your life feels important enough to make promises about changing or improving it, then maybe it's worth the sacrifice. Maybe it's worth the cost. And, maybe it's worth making the commitment to do whatever it takes to fulfill the promise you've made.

## **Important Enough to Make a Promise**

Now, I'm mainly talking about the types of things we do in our personal lives—regarding our health, our families, our jobs, or whatever. And, in my mind, I'm thinking about things like the time it takes out of a busy schedule to exercise more; or the dedication it requires to be a better spouse, parent, friend, boss, or employee; or the inconveniences involved with saving more money for a special gift, a vacation trip, retirement, and more. The list goes on and on.

But, these same ideas also apply to our faith lives and how all of us are joined together as a church family, too. Now, we don't particularly make New Year's resolutions as a community of faith, but we do make promises to each other, and to God, on an ongoing basis throughout the year—promises that require some level of sacrifice, cost, and commitment on our part.

## **A Moment of Commitment—Pledges on Commitment Sunday**

For example, at the end of October every year we celebrate *Commitment Sunday* and we make pledges of our time, talent, and money—a moment when we

commit ourselves and our resources for God's work through this congregation—God's work that ranges from ministries of education, worship, fellowship, mission and service, caregiving, and more, and includes being both good stewards and good servants of all the resources we have been given. Sometimes the Lord's work involves some small cost on our part—a sacrifice of the time it may take out of a busy schedule to invest yourself in your faith and your church family, or the dedication it may require to be a better servant, or the inconvenience it may involve to answer an email or phone call, attend a meeting or worship service or a class, volunteer for one of our awesome ministries, go on a mission trip or youth conference, and more. As in our personal lives, there's often a price to pay for faith communities to make a change or an improvement—in peoples' lives and in the community in which we live.

### **Other Moments of Commitment—Ordination, Installation, and Baptism**

But, as I also said earlier in reference to our personal lives, when something in the life of this congregation feels important enough to make promises about changing or improving it, then maybe it's worth the sacrifice. Maybe it's worth the cost. And, maybe it's worth making the commitment to do whatever it takes to fulfill the promises and commitments we've made. And, so another example of a moment when we make commitments is when we ordain and install elders to serve on the Session (which we did last Sunday). Each January we pause to celebrate God's call in the lives of certain church members to serve in a particular way that requires making commitments—they making commitments to God and this congregation, and this congregation making commitments to them.

And, of course, the ultimate moment of commitment in the life of any congregation is when we celebrate a baptism—a time when people of faith make promises to God on behalf of themselves as they are baptized, or on behalf of a child of God being baptized who is not yet able to even know who God is—and a time when both family members, and the congregation as a whole, makes promises to both God and the baptized persons to guide and protect, and love and nurture them.

## Jesus' Baptism

We do this because Christ himself was first baptized by John in the river long ago—a moment of commitment in more ways than one—a moment we celebrate and remember on this *Baptism of the Lord* Sunday. For God, it was a moment of commitment to all the things that God would accomplish in this world through Jesus, his beloved Son—things recorded in scripture and countless things never recorded and things that God is still accomplishing even now. And, for Jesus, it was a moment of commitment to a life that he knew would end with the ultimate cost—his sacrifice on the cross—but it was a commitment to a life he knew had to be lived, to show this world God's love and grace in action. Jesus knew that the salvation of God's creation was important enough to make promises and commitments about changing and improving it, even if would mean his death.

## Baptism of the Lord Sunday

As I mentioned a few moments ago, today is what our liturgical calendar calls *Baptism of the Lord* Sunday, which means it's a time to leave the past behind and look forward to what lies ahead—a time to mark another new beginning on our journey of the hard work of discipleship—hard work that took a measure of sacrifice, cost, and commitment from Christ himself, and so it will require the same from us as well. So as we recognize the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry as recorded in Matthew's gospel, let us also recognize our own opportunity to begin anew—to perhaps take this chance to turn over a new leaf this year.

## “Here I Am, Lord”

As both individuals and as a congregation, as we lean into this new year of 2020 and prepare for a new future here at FPC, there are goals to accomplish, dreams to pursue, promises to fulfill, and moments of commitment to be made in God's name this year and going forward. So whether we are simply being faithful to our stewardship pledge, or helping feed the hungry through our support of the Community Food Pantry, or sheltering homeless families multiple times a year with Family Promise, or attending a meeting or a class or a Bible Study, or being installed to the Session, or making a baptismal vow, or doing *anything* productive in God's name—ask yourself, will we commit ourselves to doing the Lord's work

no matter what the cost? Because God needs us to do so. Because God needs each of us, working together, to change and improve this world. It's worth any amount of our time and dedication, and it's worth any inconvenience it may require.

Just as God has called to Isaiah and Jesus and anyone who has ever been a servant of the Lord, God is calling to each of us, asking, "Whom shall I send?" So may we all have the courage in our own moments of commitment to respond by saying, "Here I am, Lord." "I'm ready." "It's worth it." Amen.