

TITLE: "Ponder Anew What the Almighty Can Do"

TEXT: John 15:12-16 (NT pp. 109-110)

12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

#### Introduction – Commitments shared with our founders

201 years ago our congregation was simply the gathering of a dozen or so people who met in log cabins and simple barns. They did not even dream of things like electricity, internal combustion engines, telephones or airplanes little own computers, hybrid cars, I-phones, MacDonald's and rockets to Mars.

Different as their lives were, they did share some commitments in common with us today:

- They were committed to missions.
- They were committed to nurturing the faith of those in our church family.
- And they were committed to sharing their faith with others.

#### 1. Sharing our founders' commitment to missions

Our church founders wanted to leave our community, and the world, a better place than they found it. And they did. Each generation since our founding has supported local and world mission projects that helped people around here and around the world.

We are carrying on that tradition locally through:

- Our Kitchen Cupboard,
- Weekend Backpack Program,
- Mitten Tree,
- Thanksgiving Baskets and
- Providing Christmas presents for a local family.

We also help people in need in our church family through the Deacon's Fund.

I recently received this letter I would like to share with you:

“I would like pass along my deep appreciation to your congregation for assisting so many of our families during this past Christmas season. While society would have us believe that it is a joyous time for all, the sad reality is that it is not so for many children. Your church, however, has embraced your faith and truly made a difference. Thanks to your help, many of our students had a reason to celebrate at Christmas. I appreciate all that you do for our children here at Dryden Elementary throughout the year, and especially at Christmas.”

It is from David J. Thon, Dryden Elementary School Principal:

We are carrying out our church’s tradition of helping people in need around the world:

Through Heifer International, which provides farm animals for poor people to raise. Our annual kick off for Heifer will be on Valentine’s Day, February 14<sup>th</sup>.

We support One Great Hour of Sharing. These funds go to help people affected by disasters such as typhoons, tsunamis, floods, earthquakes and droughts.

We pitch in each spring to buy blankets for Blanket Sunday.

We support Presbyterian Missions all around the world as part of our annual budget.

Our youth group supports Jay Vee a little girl in the Philippines.

We help retired ministers and missionaries with medical and housing costs and help racial ethnic students attend college through our Christmas Joy Offering.

Right now we are raising money to help the poor people of Haiti who are desperately trying to recover from a devastating earthquake.

It’s nice to know that in heaven there will be people we have never met who will come up to us and say, “Thank you for helping me and my family when we were on earth!”

## 2. Sharing our founders' commitment to nurture our faith

The second commitment we share with our church founders is our commitment to nurturing the faith of those in our church family. We do this through:

Services of worship,  
Baptisms,  
Membership classes,  
Sunday school and  
Bible studies.

One of the many joys of my ministry is our Sunday morning adult class, which meets at 9:30 in the Library. We talk, we share, and we grow in the Lord together. It's a great time and I invite you to join us.

## 3. Sharing our founders' commitment to sharing our faith

The third thing we share with our founders is our commitment to sharing our faith in Jesus Christ. We believe, as they did, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in [Jesus] may not perish but may have eternal life." So, while there are many in our community who care about the well being of people who are, 90, 100 or even 110 years old, we care for the well being of people 120 years, 1,020 years and 1,000,020 years old.

We know THE Way, THE Truth and THE LIFE because we know Jesus. And therefore we are very special to God and we are precious in God's sight. And I am just as excited about my faith in Jesus Christ today as I was 24 years ago when I interviewed to be your pastor.

We are sharing our faith in several new and amazing ways:

Last year, we held our first Women's retreat. It was beautifully done and women came to attend from near and far. This year, another is scheduled for March 20<sup>th</sup>. This is a wonderfully exciting opportunity to share our faith with others and I encourage each and every woman to get involved in the process of helping. We also may need some men to help with the luncheon.

Another way our church family is sharing our faith with others is through our youth group. I have noticed that kids who do not attend our church are included in many of the activities. I am thrilled with all the wonderful projects and programs our youth group is involved with and I hope more new kids will join them.

The third way we are sharing our faith is through the MOPS Program. Mothers and their pre-school children come to our church a couple times a month and are supported in their mothering and encouraged to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ. New mothers have been coming and the 8 Steering Team members are so committed to having MOPS grow that 5 of them are either pregnant or have had children in the past year. That's commitment!

In our text for this morning, Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." A couple weeks ago, I mentioned that bearing fruit means that we are to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Bearing fruit also means that we are to share our faith with others. If you have a new idea that would encourage unchurched people in our communities to become part of our church family, or encourage parents to bring children to Sunday school, please share it with an elder or with me. While I love our church family just the way we are, I know that there are many people out there who would love to be part of our church family and love to share our faith in Jesus Christ.

#### Conclusion – Ponder anew what the Almighty can do

This year we have some challenges before us such as rebuilding the hallway between the church and administrative wing, meeting our budget and expanding our church family. If we didn't have challenges, we might not trust in the Lord and might not be as strong as we are.

After seminary when I was looking for my first church, there was a church in Massachusetts looking for a minister. This church seats about 400 people and it is beautifully preserved. This church had such a HUGE endowment that members no longer had to give and any there was money available for any repair or renovation. What kind of minister were they looking for? One who could give tours of the facility and do weddings. Their average attendance? Twelve people.

As I mentioned, this year we have some challenges to face. Will we meet those challenges? ...Of course! With the Lord's guidance and help our church has been facing and overcoming challenges for 201 years. This year will be no different. 2010 is going to be a wonderful year, a year full of wonders. I am looking forward to sharing it together with the Lord and with you.

We are now going to share our hymn, which is #8, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." It has one of my favorite stanzas, which goes:

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;  
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.  
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,  
If with His love He befriend thee.