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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Beginning in the fall of 2004, St. John's Leadership Team introduced a program theme for the 2004-2005 program year which was "Believing, Belonging, Building". It immediately became affectionately known as the BBB emphasis. And continued on for two more program years to follow, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. Attached to that BBB emphasis was a capital appeal that produced three-year pledges that completed the payments on our land and enabled the building of our current facility and the mortgage upon which we are about to close.

In 2004 St. John's Church was looking at some very challenging years that would immediately follow. It included the proposed sale of our former building and the proposed design and building of a new facility. One reason for the BBB emphasis, "Believing, Belonging, Building", was to emphasize that those years were not to be primarily about building a building. Rather, the BBB emphasis was to remind us that our life of faith was first and foremost about believing. And, secondarily, it was about belonging to the community of faith which believing produces. And finally, it was about the building of a community of faith and, secondarily, about the building of a new facility which would more adequately headquarter that growing community of faith.

This fall marked the end of the BBB emphasis. As it was one of my responsibilities to propose a new program theme for 2007-2008, I thought about what should follow the BBB. Some of you know that I am pretty sequential. I like things to be done, as the Bible says, "decently and in order." So, in the back of my mind I had the idea that a CCC emphasis might logically follow a BBB emphasis.

But, at the same time, I had other thoughts in my mind. 2007 was to be our first fall in our new facility. But as pastor, I didn't want the fall to be all about the new facility. Ultimately, I wanted the fall of 2007 to be about Christ. And I thought it would be great if a new facility, one that presented in a major way in the sanctuary the cross of Christ, I thought it would be great if that new facility helped inspire a renewed commitment to Christ. And it was my hope that the fall of 2007 would experience a new sense of celebration amongst the people of St. John's Church. And that the celebration would not just be about a new facility, but in a much more major way that the celebration would be about our common relationship in Christ.

So was born the program theme for 2007-2008, "Celebrating our Commitment to Christ." CCC. It was embraced by the leadership team of the congregation. And the streamer running through St. John's cross this morning is a nod to that very celebration which we now embrace also as a congregation.

It was my decision to expand on this theme educationally and Biblically in St. John's Sunday morning adult education during the month of September, 2007. So, in the month of August I was busy working away at developing the three-part series which was, 1) Who is Christ? 2) What is Commitment? And 3) How Do We Celebrate?

The most fun session of the three sessions for me was the second one, "What is Commitment?" It is possible for a pastor to work along over three decades of being a pastor and, on occasion, lose focus on, perhaps, some major truth of the Bible. It is why, I think, it is important for any pastor to be preaching and teaching on a regular basis. The preparation for that preaching and teaching serves to keep the pastor sharply focused on the great truths of the Bible. I would hope that it is also the reason why a growing number of people at St. John's Church are participating in ongoing adult Christian education, not least of all on Sunday morning. For surely the people, too, along with the pastor, need ongoing help in staying sharply focused on the great truths of the Bible.

Well, the reason why the second session of the ACE series, "What is Commitment?" was the most fun of the three sessions for me was because of what happened when I went to the Bible to look up good examples of strong commitment to Christ in the Bible. And much to my surprise, my study served to remind me of something that I had learned and for the moment forgotten – and that was that the word, "commitment" is not even in the Bible.

But as I worked on with my theme, what I was reminded of was that the preferred words in the Bible for what I would call "commitment" were, "steadfast love" and "faithfulness". But an added reminder I received through my study was that even though the words "steadfast love" and "faithfulness" were in the Bible, when they occurred it was not usually the "steadfast love" and "faithfulness" of humankind that were being

referenced. Rather, it was usually, over and over again, the “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” of the Lord that was being referenced.

This is true from the beginning of the Bible to the very end. And, as a case in point, it is true in our second reading for this morning in Paul’s second letter to Timothy as well. For it is in this reading that Paul reminds Timothy of the faithfulness of Christ, quoting what is believed to be an early Christian hymn, “...if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.” The hymn could just as well have said, “when we are faithless – for Paul knows that we are - Christ remains faithful – for it is of his very nature to remain faithful. Christ will always remain faithful in steadfast love for the world and to his desire for salvation for you and for me and for all humankind.

This, then, dear friend in Christ, is the word of the Lord to you and to me today. If there is any “commitment” to be found in the Bible, it is always, first and foremost, the commitment of a good and gracious God exemplified most greatly by the gracious and obedient Lord Jesus Christ. And if there is any “commitment” to be found among humankind in the Bible, it is always a commitment of gratitude in response to the good and gracious presence of God in the life of the one who then desires to respond to God in kind.

In the second ACE session I went into some extended detail in telling about a recent experience I had in my married life. It had to do with a time when I went above and beyond in my desire to please Debbie. But the important part of the story had to do with the fact that my desire to go above and beyond to please Debbie was not the result of my being such a great guy or such a wonderful husband or such a passionate lover. No, the desire I had to go above and beyond to please Debbie was due to having been humbled by what she, in a specific instance, had done for me as my wife. And what I was attempting to do was respond in kind.

This is the nature, dear friend in Christ, of Christian commitment. It is my hope and prayer that in this hour of worship this morning you have known Christ coming to you. And that in his coming to you it has been your renewed sense that he is committed to you and that it is his promise to you that he will be faithful to you throughout the rest of this day and the coming week and your entire life as well. It remains to be seen what that grace in your life will do to you, in terms of your desire to respond, this day, and throughout the coming week, in gratitude, in kind. Amen.