

We are doing a Sermon Series on Baptism, using the words that we use when an infant is baptized. But there is a twist: we are looking at those words from our own adult perspective: we are speaking the words of the Baptism service to ourselves. The words are on the screen. Please say the words with me:

I will attend the services of God's house.

I will grow in the Christian faith through learning the Lord's Prayer, the Creeds, the 10 Commandments, and holding the Scriptures in my hands.

I will live in the covenant of my Baptism.

I will live in communion with the Church.

I will seek to live a godly life.

This morning we are looking at the first phrase: I will attend the services of God's house. Obviously you have taken those words to heart this day, since you are indeed in a House of God.

What I want to emphasize for me and for you today is that God builds his House, and that God builds his House for the long run.

Did you hear about the two men in a pickup truck? They drove to a lumberyard. One of the men walked into the office and said, "We need some **four-by-twos**." The lumberyard worker said, "You mean two-by-fours, don't you?" The man said, "I'll go check." He went back to the truck. He returned in a minute and said, "Yeah, I meant two-by-fours."

The lumberyard worker then asked, "How long do you want the two-by-fours?" The customer scratched his head and said, "I better check on that, too." The customer went and talked to his friend about how long they needed the two-by-fours. He returned to the office and said, 'We need them for a long time. We're gonna build us a house.'

God's House is built for the long run. That is why we are invited to attend the services of God's house. God does not intend the things of his House to be short term. So, three things this morning about why we go to the services of God's House:

1. We go to the services of God's House because it is a Permanent Place.

So much of your life and my life is short term.

- How many of you have noticed that you have less hair now than you did a few years ago? Yep, hair can be short term. How many of you have noticed that the person sitting in front of you... Never mind!
 - How many of you have noticed that it takes twice as many breaths now to climb the same set of stairs? I notice that every two years when I climb Harney Peak with our Junior High students. Yep, breathing can be a short term thing.
 - How many of you have noticed that no one has called you "Young Fella" or "Little Girl" for a long time now? So many short term things in life.
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We can surround ourselves with short term thoughts and short term activities. And that affects our minds and it affects our spirits. We start thinking and acting as short term people – people who no longer have a future and a hope.

If you spend all of your days and all of your time in the short term places of life, you are going to forget the truth of the tamarisk tree.

The Bible says, "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba..." [Genesis 21:33] There is more to that Bible verse, but before you hear the end of the verse this morning, think about the tamarisk tree, and what it might teach you about God.

- The tamarisk tree is deeply rooted.

Some tamarisks have roots that go down through rock for 70 feet, in order to have the gallons and gallons of water they need to live.

God is also deeply rooted – deeply dedicated – deeply committed. When we spend time in the presence of God our roots grow deep.

- The tamarisk tree survives harsh conditions.

They often grow where nothing else can be found alive. They grow in arid conditions and in paved parking lots. The tamarisk survives.

God also has the power of survival. He leads people through dry deserts and through stormy seas. God leads people through cold times when we have no friends and through hot times of trouble.

Life can be tough. We might lose some of our vision, or some of our health. We might lose some of our freedoms, or some of our relationships. Our lives can be lived in harsh conditions. When we spend time in the presence of God we are given the gift of surviving all that life slings at us. Look at the tamarisk tree – look at God.

- The tamarisk tree is unbending.

Little enemies like ants and other bugs cannot bring it down. Big enemies like fire and winds cannot bring it down. Long time enemies like drought cannot bring it down. Short time enemies like overbearing heat or extreme desert cold cannot bring it down. Everything eventually bends the knee to the tamarisk tree.

God is also unbending. The rules of nature that God puts in place do not change. The rules of life do not change. God is unbending – and that includes God's unbending and unchanging love for you.

These are three things about the tamarisk tree that also picture for us our God: deeply rooted, enduring, unbending.

So the Bible says, "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there Abraham worshiped the LORD, the Eternal God." [Genesis 21:33] I think that whenever Abraham walked past that tamarisk tree it was a reminder for him – an example. Abraham must have thought, "Well, tree, you live a long time, but the God I worship is eternal."

We need a tamarisk tree. A place to remind us that God is eternal. In the swirlingness of change, we need a permanent place.

In this life, when we go to the services in God's house, we are reminded of the eternal God. Keep the pattern of being refreshed in the eternal things of God.

2. We go to the services of God's House because it is a place of Permanent Values.

There is a picture in the 7th chapter of 2 Samuel. King David is pictured as having it made.

- He has a house made of cedar, which was the best building product of the time, and the most expensive by far. David has it made.
 - He has conquered nation after nation until Israel is as large a nation as it will ever be. David has it made.
 - David finally has peace in a land that has only known war for hundreds of years. David has it made.
 - David comes home at the end of a day of ruling his empire to several hundred wives. David has it... Well, not every life is perfect.
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David is relaxing in his house of cedar – just smelling that special wood smell. Then David looks out his huge picture window and sees God living in his tent. You see, the Ark of the Covenant at that time was kept in a large Bedouin-style tent.

And David starts feeling guilty in his cedar house, looking at God's motley tent right next door. What will people think of such a God?

David decides to build God a house. That is what all of the people in all of those nations that David had conquered had done. They built their gods a house. David is going to build God a house.

But the LORD says to David: "You have it backwards. I will build you a house!" [2 Samuel 7:11] A writer in the NT reminds us of this truth: "Every house has a builder, but the Builder behind them all is God." [Hebrews 3:4 TMSG]

We go to services of God's House to be built up by God in the permanent values of our God.

David got wrapped up in his own values. David got all bound up in thinking that he was a self-made man. We can fall into the same trap – the same thoughts.

We can think: I am a self-made woman. I am a self-made man. People who believe they are self-made men and women eventually start acting like Donald Trump and Rosie O'Donnell. And it is really embarrassing to even read about their antics. Then, if we are willing to admit it, we have to say: I act like that sometimes. Full of myself...

There are deeper values, folks. Paul spelled out some of them when he wrote his parting words to the people in Philippi: "Summing it all up, friends," Paul said, "I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse." [Philippians 4:8 TMSG]

We go to the services of God's House and we humble ourselves. We bow before God. We say to God, "I need the real values. The ones that Jesus lived. Lord God! I need to listen to you. I am here to find the best, the noble, the beautiful." We come to the services in God's House for the permanent values.

3. We go to the services of God's House because it is the home place of our Permanent Friend.

Warren Buffett, that really rich guy who is giving away most of his money to charity, once had to hire someone. It was, he said, one of the most important business decisions in his life.

Buffet said about that choice: "In looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence and energy. If they don't have the first, the other two will kill you."¹

Sometimes when I read the sports page in the newspaper I think I am reading "Lifestyles of the gifted and fallen." There is a lot of intelligence and a lot of energy, but sometimes integrity is missing.

Then I read a story like this from the National Racquetball Magazine. A player by the name of Reuben Gonzales was in the final match of a racquetball tournament.

In the fourth and final game – match point – Gonzales made a super shot into the front wall to win. The referee called it good.

But Gonzales, after a moment's hesitation, turned around, shook his opponent's hand, and declared that his shot had hit the court floor first. As a result of that act of integrity, he lost the match.

The next issue of National Racquetball Magazine had Reuben Gonzales on its front cover. A player, with everything officially in his favor, who disqualified himself at match point and lost! When asked why he did it, Reuben replied, "It was the only thing I could do to maintain my integrity."

God always act with full integrity. We believe that in our hearts. Even if the whole world caves in, God will not. God acts with integrity – and calls us to live the same way.

You and I need to be close to this honesty, this reliability. We need to quit measuring ourselves against athletes and movie stars and next door neighbors. We need to let God measure us.

I used to stand against a wall and Mom would measure my height. I would think: I can't wait to be tall like Mom and Dad!

We need to be in God's House and let God measure us. We need to feel repentance for our shortness in love and service. We need to look up to God and grow. We need to say in our hearts: "I can't wait to grow up like Jesus."

Remember the two gentlemen who needed a **four-by-two**? They needed it for a long time because they were gonna build a house?

God has built a House for you. We need to be in the services of God's House. A permanent place, with permanent values, and a Friend with integrity. Amen.

¹ Of Permanent Value: The Story of Warren Buffet