

Please say the words on the screen out loud with me:

*I will attend the services of God's house.
I will grow in the Christian faith through 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.*

We are doing a Sermon Series on Baptism, by looking at this list.

- We have looked at what it means to attend the services of God's House: a Permanent Place with Permanent Values and a Permanent Friend.
 - We have looked at why it is important to hold onto the Word of God: because it saves us by leading us to Jesus, and teaches us how to walk with the Lord and to speak with the Lord.
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This morning we are looking at what it means to keep the Covenant of Baptism. I want to begin by driving home a first and important point about covenants. The point is this: A covenant is not a contract.

This week you and I will enter into countless contracts.

- At the grocery store we may agree that our thumbprint on the machine will pay for our groceries.
 - At work we might agree that we will finish the report or finish the stocking of the shelves by a certain time.
 - At home we commit to doing the dishes or having the oil changed in the car, while our spouse or children say they will clean the cat litter and take out the garbage – that is a contract.
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Life is filled with contracts. And sometime – sometimes – the attitude of contracts slips over into our spiritual life. It is easy for us to think that our – association – with God is kind-of-like a contract.

Here are two signs of treating God like God is contract help:

- When offering is seen as “dues” or “payment.” That is a contract response to God.

- And when my worship attendance is by the numbers. You know: I **need** to be in Church 1 out of 4 Sundays – that sounds about right. That is a contract response to God.

The Bible never says that we have a contractual association with God. The Bible says we have a covenant relationship with God. We need to be clear on the difference between a contract and a covenant.

Here is the difference: In a contract, the two parties remain separate. The language of contracts is usually something like this: the Party of the first part and the Party of the second part.

If we can use a food illustration: A contract is like salad dressing: oil and water, shaken up and mixed together – but never really one. Left alone and still, salad dressing will always separate into the original respective parts.

In a covenant, the two become one. The language of a covenant is usually something like this: *“Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”* [Deuteronomy 6:4]

The covenant of marriage is a great example of a covenant. The language is of the two becoming one.

Again, if we can use a food illustration: The marriage covenant is a lot like mashed potatoes. How do you make mashed potatoes? Take 2 potatoes, put them together in hot water – keep them in the hot water until they soften up. Then, mash them together until they are One!

In Baptism we are called to live in the Covenant of Baptism – to live as One with God.

God has done his part to make Oneness happen.

- God has shown the way.
- God has paid the penalties.

- God has extended the invitation.
- God has prepared the welcoming party.

Everything from God's end is open for the covenant to happen. God's grace and love and mercy are just flowing into our lives.

Now for us to be truly mashed together with God, God is watching for us to do two things in our covenant relationship.

➤ Respond to God!

Have you told God lately that you love him? Have you taken a moment to tell God – by word or by deed – that you are so grateful that he is your God?

That is a huge part of keeping the Covenant of Baptism. Tell God that you love him. How can you do that?

In our February Newsletter - which you will receive this week - is the Bridgetown Daycare page. Open to that page in the Newsletter and look for an article titled: *"How Do You Tell Someone That You Love Them."*

In that article the preschoolers at our Daycare share with us how to let the people in our lives know that we love them. Here a few of their words of wisdom on this subject:

- Preston and Treyton said: "Give them hugs and kisses."
 - Sam expanded on that by saying: "Give them hugs on the Tiger side."
 - Isabelle said: "Share with them" and Anna said "Help mommy."
 - Sabrina said: "You cuddle them" while Olivia went a little farther than a cuddle and said "You lick their neck." Now that is a response!!!
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We can tell God that we love him in much the same way. Each of us has our own way of doing that.

- ✓ We might tell God we love him by being involved in ministry. We might tell God we love him by sharing an offering.

- ✓ We might tell God we love him by being close to him in worship.
- ✓ We might tell God we love him by saying a silent “thank you.”

Each of us is unique and our way of sharing affection is unique. The Covenant of Baptism invites us to find the ways that are meaningful to us to say to God that we love what he does. Respond to God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

➤ A second way to live in the Covenant: Treasure the Gifts of God.

When God hears that we love his gifts, then God knows that we are using those gifts. God loves to hear that we are using his gifts.

There are so many gift of God – so much to treasure. I want to pick out two that have been great gifts for me this week, and that I treasure.

- **Treasure Forgiveness.**

Here is why forgiveness is so important to me.

1. Forgiveness releases me.

The Greek word for “forgive” also means “to let go.”

Last week when we were bringing in food items for the Torsk Supper I was trying to hold onto too many things. I am not going to tell you if I dropped the peas or the coleslaw or the Torsk or the potatoes – I am just going to tell you that I was carrying too much.

Sometimes you have to release the burden. In forgiveness Jesus lets us do that.

2. Forgiveness energizes me.

Almost every time Jesus forgives he also gives a mission or purpose. To one Jesus said, “Stand up and walk.” To another Jesus said, “Go and sin no more.” To yet another Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

When the burden is released you have all of this vigor, this oomph, this liveliness. The Bible is filled with stories of people who came to Jesus and picked up their crosses and carried them, who changed their occupations, who changed their attitudes, who went back changed or who went on to new ventures. The forgiving touch of Jesus gives energy!

Another great gift that I treasure this week is...

▪ **Treasure God's Guidance.**

A favorite Bible verse for many is this one: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."* [Proverbs 3:5-6]

God knows what is coming down the road. And God wants to share that with us. But sometimes we keep the conversation to ourselves.

In one of Woody Allen's movies Napoleon walked by his lady's room and heard two voices. Napoleon was very jealous so asked Josephine about the other voice.

"I was praying," said Josephine. "But I heard two voices," Napoleon said. "I speak God's part, too." she replied.

Maybe we have been speaking too much for God lately. Maybe it is time to create a little more space in our lives and in our decision making so that God might speak.

How do we seek God's guidance in our lives? Let me share how it happens for me.

- When Gordon and I were both here as Pastors I would sit every other week and listen to him preach. I would try to be open to let those words reach into me and change me. God guides through godly counsel.
- When I drive around town I turn off the talk shows and the music and listen to the Bible on CD. I try to be open to those words and let those words change me. God guides through his Holy Spirit's words touching us.

- When I have a lunch break with no meetings I park in a quiet place for a while and slip on my earphones and listen to music – I have to thank my kids for buying me a Nano iPod for Christmas! I try to be open to the message in music and let those melodies and lyrics reach in and change me.

Seeking God's guidance has to do with allowing this time with God in our lives. Treasuring those gifts of God, and making time for those gifts, is a part of living in the Covenant of our Baptism.

Let me end this Message time this morning with one of those songs I have been listening to lately. The song is titled "The Time That Is Left."

Part of the lyrics of the song are these: "What will you do with the time that's left - Will you live it all with no regret - Will they say that you loved 'til your final breath - What will you do with the time that's left."

That is such a great question. Live with that question this week as you live in the Covenant. "What will you do with the time that's left?"

I need your help to sing this song. I need you to learn some Hallelujah's...