

# Marjory Zoet Bankson: Recommitment

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A Sermon for Seekers Church

By Marjory Zoet Bankson

## Recommitment

**Scripture:** [Proverbs 31:10-31, Mark 9:30-37](#)

Surely, the woman described in Proverbs 31 is a great model – an ideal wife and partner even if the list of her accomplishments leaves me feeling tired and overwhelmed. Nevertheless, in the New Testament reading, Jesus is not impressed by anyone's accomplishments. Instead, he gathers a little child into his arms and proclaims that "whoever would be first will be last" and "whoever would be great must serve." Jesus upends the definition of "the greatest" and he makes space for the lost, the least and the lonely.

This is also Recommitment Season at Seekers. It is time to examine our souls, our goals, our life together. We hardly know how revolutionary it is to choose in or out each year but this past week I was at Laity Lodge for a conference on "the Entrepreneurial Church" and Keith Miller spoke of our practice of recommitment as a marked contrast to the usual practice of "show up and put money in the plate" kind of community.

For most of us, Recommitment is simply "the tradition." We expect to take time each year for reflection and evaluation, measuring our growth in learning to love like Jesus did. For some, yearly recommitment is a way to manage the fear of making such a radical promise of time, energy, direction and money. On the third Sunday in October, both Members and

Stewards will stand here together to pledge **as much of ourselves as we know** to **as much of God as we know**.

To me, it is like recommitting to marriage. Forty years ago, when Peter proposed, I cried because it was such a **big** commitment to an unknown future.

*"Do you know what you're asking?" I said,*

*"Yes," he said, "I do."*

*"Then my answer is **yes!**"*

Moreover, every year the choice grows easier because I can look back and see how the way opened. I know I am ready to say "Yes" again. As I worked with the lectionary scripture and thought about my own life as a member of Seekers, I could identify three main areas.

**The first commitment is** to let the life of Jesus shape my life.

In the Gospel lesson for today, the context is important. Jesus had taken his special favorites, Peter, James and John, up to a high mountain where they saw Jesus in the company of Moses and Elijah. Meanwhile, the outer circle of nine disciples were down below, trying to heal an epileptic boy, eager to prove that they have learned their lessons well. When they fail, Jesus seems impatient, irritated: "**How long must I be with you?**" He says. "**That kind of thing can only be done by prayer.**" Surely, they have been praying! Then they really felt like outsiders.

It reminds me of some conversations I have heard around here, about insiders and outsiders, about those who have pledged money for renovations at Carroll Street and those who have not. Some feel like outsiders because they cannot give. Others will not speak up because they have not given.

- Is this a place where you must give to have a voice?

Alternatively, is there another standard at work?

Then we come to the Gospel lesson. The disciples are arguing who would be the greatest when Jesus gathers a child into his arms and tells them that in God's realm, the first will be last and the greatest will be the servant of all. It is a message of inclusion, a welcome to all. That is the standard we want to be living at Seekers.

**The second commitment** is to this community as a place to practice loving one another – to extend ourselves beyond easy companionship to share the struggles and mistakes that mark growth and change. It is really the practical application of letting Jesus' life be manifested in the way we deal with each other.

I look at the confusion and misguided attempts that the "outer 9" were making to heal the epileptic boy because that's what they thought they were supposed to be doing and I catch a glimpse of myself, in this community, trying to do the right thing. It's not always clear what following Jesus might mean in practice, but the Bible text makes it pretty clear that Jesus used the occasion of bickering over "who is the greatest" to encourage the disciples to lay themselves out before God in prayer ... that the journey was not so much about results as it was about intention and practice.

Loving one another can be about learning to let go of certain dutiful behaviors, recognizing (as I did) that we are not indispensable.

**The third commitment** is to grow in our capacity to care for others who are truly different from us because God's intention for diversity is planted in our hearts.

In my childhood home, I remember that mother wanted us to "stick with our own kind" while my dad was curious about differences. Mother was concerned about people who could be a "bad influence" and dad seemed confident that he could

maintain his own integrity in a very different environment. As I look at the life of Jesus, I see a man who could eat with Gentiles, with sinners and outcasts, and still be comfortable in his relationship with God.

I think we are called to do both ... to deepen and care for our family connection and recognize that God is at work among other people and in other parts of the created order in ways we cannot even imagine. For me, this third dimension of Recommitment is where we are "growing our souls" the most. It is the place of risk and aliveness.

**By this time next year**, we will be worshiping in our new home on Carroll Street in Takoma. This year, Recommitment season is the time of gathering our resources to make the move.

The Stewardship Group has asked everyone who will be making a financial gift for renovations to do that by Recommitment Sunday, the third week in October, so we can begin paying the bills that are beginning to come in. Be sure to identify your gifts for the build-out so we can keep our normal operations funded.

People in this community have already been amazingly generous:

- We had \$345K to purchase the building outright – \$315 from accumulated bequests, designated giving, income over expenses in the last four years and three \$10K bridge loans from members of Seekers which have been forgiven. In other words, we have already spent \$30K in one-time gifts to buy the building.
- In addition, \$240K in one-time gifts has been pledged toward renovations. That is what we hope to have in the bank by this time next month. Any gift, large or small, is welcome and needed. The more we get in one-time gifts, the less we will have to borrow and repay!
- Finally, we plan to borrow the remaining funds for renovations from ourselves. If you can make a loan but

not a gift, we need to know that too. Stewards have already pledged a major portion of the loans we need, but we need to hear from everyone – even if you tell us that you cannot do anything right now. Forms are on the piano.

Going Back To The Scripture, we can be proud of the portrait that the Hebrew scripture offered of a **great** wife in Proverbs 31-it is an amazingly modern picture of mutual respect. Nevertheless, Jesus said that **true greatness** depends more on serving the outcasts and misfits of society – making sure they are also included in the realm of God's love.

That is what our storefront church on Carroll Street will be about!

- Letting the life of Jesus inform our values, our hopes and our decisions.
- Learning to love one another at deeper and more transformative levels.
- Serving the community where their needs and our call meet.

**Recommitment Season is a chance to step back and see where we are growing.**

As we talk about money, plans, and mission in our new neighborhood, let us remember that God is more interested in what is happening to our hearts and souls. Amen.