

“Who’s the Greatest?” by Marjory Bankson

September 23, 2018



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

This is the season of REcommitment at Seekers, and so we might ask – What was the original commitment? Why yearly REcommitment? How is that related to our gospel reading for today? And finally, what can WE do about that?

Let me start with commitment.

When Peter and I arrived here at Seekers in 1976, we had already read about Church of the Saviour in Elizabeth O'Connor's book, *Call to Commitment*. We already knew that the church required serious preparation for membership, but we really had no concept of the degree of commitment required for the inner work that would continue to unfold over the years. What we didn't know then was that joining the church was not

the end of our preparation. It was just the beginning!

In the original Church of the Saviour, commitment to Christ was a prerequisite for membership in a mission group. And that was reserved for people who were on the path to membership – what we here at Seekers call Stewards.

Not long after Seekers (and five other communities) emerged from Church of the Saviour mission groups in 1976, Seekers rejected the notion of a congregation made up of members and non-members. We saw that commitment to this community might be enough to allow people more freedom to search for a viable faith and make sense of their religious experience. We decided to open membership to anyone who wanted to be intentional about their spiritual growth AND to continue the practice of having a committed core of Christian stewards.

To be a member of Seekers now, you do not even have to be a Christian. You just have to be intentional about your seeking, your desire to know more about yourself and God. Wanting to be on a journey with Jesus is enough to start with. Trusting that this community can be a safe place to learn and grow is all that we ask of new members.

But if, on the third Sunday of October, you choose to stand and make your commitment as a member of Seekers, then WE do expect you to take the initiative and find a place to get involved. It could be cleaning up after coffee hour once a month, or putting out hymnals before worship, or attending a class at the Tuesday night School for Christian Growth. And, after two classes in the school, you might also explore membership in a mission group.

Beyond this initial commitment, REcommitment was another surprise. Wasn't a one-time commitment good enough? But after awhile, I realized that yearly recommitment helps me stay conscious of how my relationship with God and this community has evolved over time.

Before recommitment Sunday in October, we encourage everyone to spend an hour here, in the empty sanctuary, reflecting on what, why, and how your commitment is taking shape. Some of us will be doing that on silent retreat next weekend.

I keep a journal specifically for those recommitment reflections because it's given me a glimpse of my own questions over time. It's probably the only journal I will keep to the end. Here are some of the questions I've asked myself regularly:

- What things have changed in my personal life this year? How does that affect my faith?
- Where at Seekers do I feel restless? Bored? Excited? What does that suggest?
- How about my mission group call? My role in the group? What am I learning?
- Are there things I'd like to try? Experiment with? Who might encourage that?

Each year, I try to come to recommitment season with a beginner's mind and an open heart. It's a little like recommitting to a marriage. Things change. We change. Our needs shift. God keeps peeling away my preconceptions. And I keep growing.

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus has just revealed that he expects to be killed for offering an alternative to Temple worship – and that he will rise again in three days.

The disciples completely ignore the meaning of what Jesus has just said. I suspect they are terrified! So, instead of asking what he means, they begin to speculate about who will move up into his spot as the resident rabbi. Who will be the greatest?

They know enough to be embarrassed and secretive about their conversation, but that's what they do. The hierarchy and power of Temple worship still framed their thinking. They just wanted to know who would be in charge.

They didn't really "get" what Jesus had been teaching all along and they were afraid to ask. It's a deadly combination. Not knowing is no sin, but being afraid to ask hints of pride and prejudice. They preferred to stay with their own understanding, their own needs and their own answers. Those old habits are hard to change.

Yet one more time, Jesus gives them an object lesson about the meaning of his life. He takes a child in his arms and says something like this: "Embrace the beginner, the not-knowing, the foolish question. Face your fears. Be who you are."

By his action, Jesus challenges the hierarchy, power structures and domination patterns of Temple worship. He demonstrates that the realm of God includes the young, the weak and the outcast. He shows that goodness will be discovered in common, ordinary ways. When we let down the armor of accomplishment and move through our fear of seeming foolish, we will discover life itself. We will find the "fruits of the spirit" hidden in plain sight. As Jacqie said in her sermon last week, "Befriend reality."

These values have shaped Seekers from the beginning. Commitment to this community provides a safe place to learn and grow – just as the disciples did over their time with Jesus. Recommitment makes space for change, for movement and maturity. Our measure of greatness will be our capacity for caring and inclusion, for servant ministry in daily life.

At Seekers, the School for Christian Growth was my first real introduction to this kind of community. Because the school begins with dinner, breaking bread together was an easy way to ask questions and share some of my own story. When I began coming regularly, I was surprised that some of the long-time members continued to come as students and as teachers, and I loved assignments that asked for personal application rather than testing our book knowledge. I began to realize that classes were a way to test my readiness for a mission group.

If I could show up six weeks in a row, maybe I could show up regularly for a mission group – and so that seed was planted. Commitment grew with my participation beyond coming to worship.

The real work of commitment took place in a mission group. For me, it was learning to love the people who shared my call to learning and teaching. They were not necessarily people I liked or would have chosen to be with [not the current group of course], but they were called by the Spirit to the same work.

Mission group was really my first experience of real intimacy beyond family and marriage. My inner work began with showing up every week, doing the work that was ours to do, keeping the daily disciplines of prayer, reading and writing a spiritual report.

Getting acquainted with my soul through writing those reports every week was a stretch. We were encouraged by Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* to include even those unmentionables: money, anger and sexuality. Old habits of staying on the surface, recounting activities, have been hard to change. I did it mostly because it was expected. But over time, I realize that I have been shaped by the practices and the people in each mission group. After long years of faith and practice, I am beginning to go beyond a faith IN Jesus to the faith OF Jesus.

And that brings me to my final point, which is to urge your participation in the School for Christian Growth on Tuesday nights. I often think of this time as a school for the soul of Seekers, a place where we can learn and grow and ask foolish questions that we didn't know how to ask before. It's a safe place to practice intimacy and trust, to let love be our guide.

There are no grades, no class ranks, no gold stars. You will

not be rewarded for coming – except by deepening your own journey with Jesus. However, there are expectations – that you will come regularly, participate fully, and do your homework.

I remember a young woman, fresh out of college, who never turned in a written assignment – until the last week, when she said “Oh, now I get it. They’re for ME, not for you!” And throughout the summer, I got papers from her that were fresh, personal and full of life. She had gotten over her need to rebel and discovered her inner geography in a new way. That’s my hope for every class in the school. It’s really the portal to commitment and recommitment at Seekers.

Two weeks ago, we bombarded everyone with a questionnaire about the school and today, those of you who didn’t fill one out, will have another chance to do that.

But more than that, we hope you will sign up for one of the two classes being offered – because this is our last chance. We’ve discovered that leaving a clipboard on the little table outside of the sanctuary is not enough visibility and right now we have too few participants in either class to start on Tuesday. David and Deborah will be offering a class on Genesis stories. Glenn Clarke and I will be offering a class on “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.” I hope you’ve looked at the lively brochure and will make a bee-line for the clipboard that Marcia will be circulating after worship. We’d like to see you here on Tuesday night!

May God bless each one of us on the way.

Amen.