



Oct 15: No Strings Attached Acts 2:43-47 The gifts given by the Spirit are not to be used only in the local church community, but also to bless the wider community.

A hen and a pig approached a church and read the advertised sermon topic: **“What can we do to help the poor?”** Immediately the hen suggested, “Feed them bacon and eggs!”

The pig thought about that for a moment and said, **“There is only one thing wrong with feeding bacon and eggs to the poor. For you it requires only a contribution, but for me it requires total commitment!”** Right?!

Oh, we know! We know what it is like to be that pig! We know how to save our own bacon!

Today is commitment Sunday. All month it may have looked like we were simply asking for hen-like contributions...a little of your time here, a dash of a spiritual gift there...

But as Christians, you know as well as I do, Jesus asks and calls forth from us commitment, total commitment.

It was Jesus who said in Luke chapter 9, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”**

Nothing against hens, but Jesus wants us to be “All In!” in following him.

I was around 17 or 18 when I first sensed a call to ministry. When I sensed that kind of complete commitment kind of call in my career.

I just kept seeing myself BEHIND the pulpit and not in the pews. And I would feel so energized and excited and I felt the importance of the whole thing. It was exciting to think about. But it was also scary to think about.

Scary, because my dad was very anti-God and anti-church. At first, he didn’t like me going to church at all. My older brother Mark, who I looked up to a lot, thought I was weird now that I had gone to camp and came back changed. It was the worst thing that could have happened to me.

But my mom was happy for me to go to church, as long as I didn’t get too serious about spiritual things. **“Amy, just get married!”**

I knew early on my family was not going to be a source of guidance or support in helping me follow Jesus. As a disciple, I was experiencing those first few steps we all have to take in following God.

My need to turn down the dial a little on my commitment to my family SO THAT I could make sure I was more committed to God.

It was also scary because I already knew what I wanted to be. I knew what I wanted to do as a career, ever since 7th grade. I wanted to be an English teacher.

The only slight deviation I ever made over the next 10 years was to want to become an English professor.

So, pfhhht...I'm not going to be a pastor. Silly daydream. I am committed to English, to stability, to owning a home and a quiet life. Thank you very much!

It wasn't until 12 years later that I started attending seminary. Long process of letting go of my dream to teach English. And being committed to attending seminary to at least test this call out.

That was my first big commitment to God. Which turned into a "60,000 dollar and 13 years of living in limbo as a student" - kind of commitment.

About two weeks ago in this series, we talked about how we are all called to serve because all of us have been given spiritual gifts. We are to commit to using them in ways that bless others.

And then we have all encountered moments in life...those hen verses pig kind of moments where we had to take the risk of committing to some life change. Where we couldn't just contribute but we had to fully commit.

Whether it was a new job, getting married, moving and getting a new home, or going back to school, or starting a family. All BIG commitments. Some lifelong and being ALL IN.

Those are big changes. Change is hard. One reason we resist change is, just like that pig, we focus on what we have to lose rather than what we might gain. Admittedly, the pig had a lot to lose.

But once we focus on the loss, then we can get stuck in the decision-making process, frozen, reluctant to take the next step.

However, if we want to move forward in life, experience life, see real change, commitment is necessary. It is how things work. Like many things in life, we commit to follow Jesus, even when the way is not clear, even when the way is difficult.

A mission society is reported to have written to David Livingstone (famous missionary in Africa) they wrote: **"Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send others to join you."**

Livingstone replied: **"If you have others who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I only want those who will come if there is no road at all."**

Following Jesus is not about having a clear easy path to follow. It is about having faith. And often God will make the path hard to see. It's the only thing that grows our faith.

That's why I am especially grateful for this teaching from the Apostle Paul. Grateful for this ordinary clear example that is easy to see and understand. As Paul teaches us more of what it is like to live a life of faith.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul uses the imagery of taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes to describe the life of faith.

In the EarlyWord we took off old smelly socks and put on new clean socks; took off bad behaviors and put on good behaviors.

Before Christ we were in our old ways, old patterns in life. But...“**...if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**”

This amazing proclamation is from 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17. We do not and cannot make ourselves new. But when we recognize that Christ has already done the work to make us new, we are called to live differently.

We just can't keep living like we used to.

Instead, we have to lean into this lifestyle change, we have to “**clothe ourselves with the new self.**” OFF with the old, and ON with the new.

We also allow, we let Christ clothe us in his righteousness on a daily basis.

What good is being made new if we do not live in new ways, if we do not live into our new selves? We can change and grow, it's another amazing gift God gives to us that we have to unwrap, to use it and live into or new selves.

My Grandmother Lula was a unique woman, a unique character. Ate an apple a day and wore the Libby fruit stickers on her t-shirt as proof.

She lived to the good ole age of 96 and she had another quirky trait she adhered to her whole life.

If you bought a gift for her...for Christmas or her birthday. If you bought her something special and wrapped it up nice and gave it to her. She would unwrap the paper but never take it out of the plastic wrapping or box. Never open it, use it or wear it.

She would never use or enjoy what you bought her! Never!

She saved them and stored them all in one room. As grandkids we'd rummage through her old unused gifts.

Four-year-old gift box of jams, 20 year old NEW slippers under the plastic, a nice sweater in the gift box never worn. It was so sad to think of all the fun she denied herself. All the life she could have lived in bigger and brighter ways.

That's just like us when we fail to live into this gift of new life God has given us. When we simply keep living like we've always done, no risks, no commitments. It's a little sad and completely unnecessary.

God has a new life for us, for each of us, for us to put on.

Yes, this new life requires effort and commitment from us. God won't dress us.

Paul describes what this looks like in today's reading – it is “putting away” our former self, turning away from our sins, taking off the old behaviors.

And then committing “to be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” taking on new behaviors, asking for help to keep growing ever more like Christ.

For some, this may sound overwhelming. The point is not that we must suddenly become perfect, but that we choose to say “yes” to what God is doing in us and fully commit to the process of growth and renewal.

Putting on clean socks each day. It's just about taking small steps each day.

Just like Aesop's fable of the Crow and the Pitcher.

In a spell of dry weather, when birds could rarely find water to drink. One thirsty Crow found a pitcher with a little water in it.

But alas the pitcher had a narrow neck, and no matter how he tried, the Crow could not reach the water. The poor thing felt as if he must die of thirst.

Then an idea came to him. Picking up some small pebbles, he dropped them into the pitcher one by one. With each pebble the water rose a little higher and higher. Until at last it was near enough for the crow to drink.

Our daily small actions of taking off a bad behavior and putting on a new good behavior, small steps over time accumulate and build on each other.

Until we taste and experience new life in Christ, the new behavior is reached and available to us.

Today, is our commitment Sunday, remember the hen and the pig? Contribution or fully commit, be all in?

A friend of the late George Muller, that great prayer warrior from England, was once asked, “**Would you not advise young Christians to do something for the Lord?**” “**No,**” was the reply, “**I should advise them to do everything for the Lord.**”

Being “all in” will require taking a risk now and then, putting on new behaviors, surrendering our money to God...SO THAT we can be ALL IN for God and His Kingdom. Amen.

Time of Reflection:

Once again, simply come before the Lord in prayer, and ask, “How do you want ME to be ALL IN for you, Lord?”