

# A Sermon for DaySpring on Commitment Sunday

By Eric Howell

*Fruitful Abundance*

John 15.9-17

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Four months ago, on the first Sunday in January, we began a journey together that reaches a major milestone today. On that day, we prayed an epiphany blessing on the church house. We prayed that the threshold would be smooth to be no stumbling block to children nor to straying feet, the doors wide to receive all who need love and fellowship but narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife. I recall that day as we remember Psalm 98 which calls on us to sing a new song. But in my sermon 4 months ago, at the beginning of this journey, I turned to an old song.

Kurt Kaiser's *Pass it On* is probably now an old song. But once upon a time, 50 years ago, it was a new song. And that new song touched the lives of countless people. Find it online and read the comments—usually terrible advice—but in this case, read the comments from people all over the world when they hear his song again. For those of you who are new among us, Kurt was one of ours.

The song is so simple, almost childlike, but it means something more than the words or the tune. It speaks to all of those people of moments in their life when they touched something holy, good, and lasting. And that something, that experience they felt called them out of themselves. They didn't just receive it, but they became conduits of it.

That something something is alive and well here. It always has been through folks like Kurt and Pat, the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of DaySpringers in those early days, those jazz improvisation days of the 1<sup>st</sup> decade. And it flowed through the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, the building years of the 2000's, the punk rock era around here. And it flowed through the third season, the bluegrass season of getting our hands in the soil and getting our hands dirty with the work of community and the ministry in the wider community and, as we would learn, with new friends from around the world.

And now we begin the 4<sup>th</sup> verse, our 4<sup>th</sup> era. I don't know yet what style the song will take—but we're off to a pretty good start I'd say! We can just begin to hear the music. I know the lyrics. Kurt left them for us like a signpost:

*I wish for you my friend, this happiness that I've found.*

*You can depend on him; it matters now where you're bound.*

*I want my world to know, the Lord of love has come to me, I want to pass it on.*

A new song turned into an old song, made new again. Today, on the first Sunday in May, the end of the Easter season, we bless the church house again. This time, we don't just say blessings, we enact them. The commitments today will help make the threshold smooth, the doors wide, the welcome expansive--that the doorway of this house would be the

gateway to God's eternal kingdom for us and for all who come. These commitments we make to ourselves, to one another, and to God have been a long time coming, years for some of us. And also, perhaps, for some who responded in just these last days to the movement of the Spirit. I'm sure there are still unresolved workings out in fear and trembling for what a commitment looks like for finances and family. But God's grace is good. And today is a day to celebrate and to pass it on. Many of you will remember our friend Solange Balikunde from Rwanda. She served on staff with us for several years while she was here in seminary. Solange was back here visiting recently and asked me all about the campaign. "What's happening at DaySpring? Tell me everything." After I told her, she said, "I'd like to make a contribution." "You don't have to do that," I jumped in. She looked back at me. "It will have to be small, but I want to. You're my church. You are my family. You're my American family, my Texas family." That was one of many moments in the last few months that have touched my heart.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples to abide in him. After having compared himself to a vine and us to branches, Jesus explains what fruit is borne by those who remain united in him: this fruit is love. And it is sweet. Again and again, he repeats the keyword: abide. He invites us to abide in his love so that his joy may be in us and our joy may be full. This is the essence of what this journey and this day is all about.

It's all relational. This is profoundly and foundationally what it means to be a Christian, to know yourself loved by a love beyond yourself, and to be a channel of God's love. Just two chapters before this, Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples and told them to do the same. Here in chapter 15, he could have said, "Greater love has no one than this, that a person wash the feet of another." And that would be something for sure. We're already not too sure about that. But he goes further: "Greater love has no one than this, that a person lay down their life for their friends." In a way the disciples could not understand, he was telling them the meaning of what they were about to see him do and the life he was calling them to embody. Soon, he would lay down his life for them and for the whole world. He does so willingly, as an act of the greatest love from the one who is love.

And so likewise, this is the essential shape of Christian life—not just a set of rules to follow or a checklist of activities. It is a relationship characterized by sacrificial love. Like life rising through the vine to the branches, and through the branches to the fruit.

This, it seems to me, is the essence of these signs of commitment set before us at the altar table. Behind each card is a story of the relationship that led to this moment. Each represents a sacrifice of love of some kind. They represent love for this place, for what it has been and will continue to become, and love for you. Every card here, anything ever put into the offering plate, every name on the chart, every person who pulls a weed, teaches a class, cleans a bathroom, goes to youth camp as chaperone... does so as an act of love for God, for this community, and for the people God loves. Each commitment on each card--big or small is totally irrelevant--each produces fruit that will be borne from it. Because of you, people will come here who are desperate to taste the goodness of the Lord again in

their lives. People who are desperate to taste and drink from the water of life, but their well has run dry. They will come, and they will be welcomed into a relationship of God's love through and by you.

Next Sunday, Becky Kueck, who has guided us so well in this campaign--and for years, let's say-- is going to tell us the total pledged by DaySpring folks for Giving Back, Building Forward. The Big Number. I think it will be a big number. In a way, it doesn't matter. This journey has been so beautiful, so rich, and so life-giving that it transcends the number. I've thought that and said it several times this spring. But the number is the tangible fruit of what this is about. You're going to feel your part of that number. She's going to tell us the number, and from there, we'll go forward. Now, in this moment's pause, between now and then—between what has been and what will be, what can we do but say thank you, to God, to one another, and to all of those who have brought us to this point and for all of those with whom will share our lives in the days to come.

I said, we all said, from the beginning, this is all celebration, and so it is this day. We celebrate the journey to this point; we celebrate all that will be. We celebrate Jesus, who abides with us and walks with us in all of life's seasons and is with us now.

Our prayer is that all that takes place in God's timing and God's purpose would find in us a spirit of trust in the one who gives us life and love. The God who makes us fruitful in all we do as we abide in the vine that is Jesus Christ. It is in his name that we lift our prayers and our hearts always. Amen.