

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: Psalm 106:1-5

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: Philippians 4:10-20

MEMORY VERSE: “They [your gifts] are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.” Philippians 4:18b

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

This is a morning that has been filled with anticipation. We have a family who has come bringing their child to us giving us the opportunity to become members of her church family. Such an act on the part of her parents can be seen as an act of faith.

First of all, baptism is a ritual that should not be entered into lightly. Rather it is a time of planning and anticipation; it is a decision by the parents to publically declare that they want their child to know and love God. Admittedly, some of today’s anticipation for the family is based in practical issues. Choosing a date when family members are available to attend and support them during this special occasion, hoping the baby will be in a good mood, planning any festivities that will follow. These are all part of such a special occasion.

There is additional anticipation for the parents because baptism is the first step in baby Haley’s spiritual life. Her parents and godparents have just made promises before God to bring her up in an atmosphere where she will know how much God loves her. We, as her church family, made a promise as well – we promised to do all we can to help Haley know of God’s love – in ways that will show her that we love her as well.

Pastor Doug and I take these promises seriously. When we meet with parents to plan a baptism we stress the importance of the promises they will make. We go over the questions at that time – we want the parents to think about their answers to the questions – we want them to understand the importance of what they are promising. We also stress to the parents our strong desire for them to bring their child to church and Sunday school on a regular basis so that the promise the church makes to them is not an empty promise. It is difficult for us to help in the Christian nurture of a child we don’t see on a regular basis.

Baptism is a ritual based in faith – the parents’ faith in God and their desire to help their child into the same faith. Baptism also shows the faith the parents have in the church – that we will help them raise their child in such an atmosphere. That faith is based on the conviction that this faith community will be here to offer such a godly environment for their child.

Baptism is definitely a time to step out in faith as well as a time of making promises and seeing the promises of the future. This Sunday of baptism, anticipation, faith, and promise is an appropriate time for us as a congregation to consider our promises to carry on God’s work here at First Church. We all received Faith Promise cards recently in the mail. They were also available as you entered the sanctuary this morning.

Over the past several weeks we have heard representatives from the congregation tell us why they have chosen to give of their time, their talents, and their treasure. They were only a representative group since there are many, many others who also give generously of their time, talent, and treasure.

I believe it was clear that each of these folks chose to give because they felt they were acting as instrument of God – giving the care and comfort, the sweat and energy that Jesus would give if he still walked the earth. These folks are committed to giving to First Church. One of the reasons to give to the church is to ensure its continued health and presence in the community. This presence is important both to those of us who claim First Church as our community of faith and also to others in Quakertown who see First Church as a community partner interested in improving life here in Upper Buck County.

First Church is a presence within Quakertown and in the lives of its members, visitors, and friends. Giving to the church is a faith promise. None of us knows for sure that First Church will still be here fifty or a hundred years from now. It is our prayer that it will continue to be a positive presence here. We make that statement in faith that God will continue to bless our ministry here. This morning we are making a promise for the coming year that we, in faith, will support the mission and ministries of First Church.

It is a promise we are making to Haley’s parents this morning. It is a promise we are making to ourselves and to one another. It is a promise we are making

to God. We want to do as much as we can for as long as we can to spread the Gospel and to care for our church family. We are called to this kind of ministry by our God who loved us so much that He was willing to take on human form to teach us, to become an example of how we should deal with one another, and finally to die in our place.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, congratulates them because of their faithful support of his ministry. He says in chapter 4:15 that even when they were a young church, newly acquainted with the gospel, they willingly supported him. He was grateful to them for this support. It allowed him to spread the gospel; it also encouraged him – he was not alone – others were helping him, caring for him, praying for him. Paul calls their gifts in vs. 17, our memory verse, “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”

That is what we will do in just a few moments. We will be offering our time, our talents, our treasure to support the mission and ministry of First Church. May these gifts, gifts offered in faith and in promise, be a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Let us take a few moments now to prayerfully consider how we will fill out our Faith Promise cards.

Members of the Stewardship team will shortly pass baskets through the congregation to collect our Faith Promise cards while the choir sings our anthem. This is not something we take lightly. On the other hand, this is not a commitment cast in stone. If circumstances change, commitments may need to change. However, it is an act of faithfulness, to promise to return to God some of what God has given us.

Let us pray: Most holy and wonderful God, we ask that you guide us in our desire to serve You through our Faith Promise cards. Give us the courage, we pray, to give what You want us to give to You. Let us give of our first fruits and let us wait in anticipation to see how You will bless our offerings of time, talent, and treasure. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen. Let us now collect our Faith Promise cards.