



**"Dedication"**  
**Sermon by Rev. David D. Colby**  
**Romans 12:1-18**

NOVEMBER 11, 2018

So many acts of dedication occur right here in this play. A couple stands here in this sanctuary with a look of anticipation and excitement on their faces. And with a few simple words they make a declaration, a dedication. In hindsight, years later, it will seem like they were so young, their words so bold.

There are people here today who moved to Saint Paul and decided that it was time to find a church and so they set out with the hope of finding one that fit. They came to Central for the first time, and part way through the service looked over at one another and nodded. Later, on their way home, they said, well, that felt not perfect, but just about right. We were welcomed and not pounced upon. I guess that the church exploration is done. We have found our church.

The person who is here in worship on a Sunday and maybe they heard a beautiful choir anthem. Or maybe that morning the usher who greeted them remembered their

name and it mattered - that they needed to hear their name called that day. Or perhaps they heard words like these in our passage from Romans,

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord (Romans 12:9-11).*

Whatever was the spark, they decided that for them, it was not enough to just come on Sunday morning for worship, they realized that they needed and wanted to get more involved. And so they send an email asking for some volunteer opportunities, and before the very next Sunday, they followed up on two different projects.

So many acts of dedication take place right here within this church. Acts of dedication take place in so many other settings as well, of course. The church does not have a monopoly on putting ideals into action.

Couples make promises in parks and flower gardens and in courthouses, and they offer promises in front of witnesses. And staying on the theme of marriages and relationships, marriages are made not just on the day in the sanctuary or park or courthouse. Some months or years later when that same couple realizes that they have fallen into a bad pattern or two and says gosh golley, let's not throw what we have away. Let's get some help. Let's turn this around. Life is too precious. Call it a renewal, call it a dedication with the awareness that waking up each morning requires and deserves a new dedication to live in certain ways. Call it rededication to what brought you here.

Paul, writing to the church in Rome, said,

*Do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12:16-18).*

These words from Romans are wise, and worthy of being heard and absorbed and remembered and lived out. Words that will help when life is good, and for those moments when life as we know it comes crashing in. And then they offer comfort, and gradually, a chance to rededicate ourselves to what is good and holy.

So we often see important acts of dedication can occur on places that saw terrible bloodshed. The bravery of the kids at Parkland who decided that what happened at their school should not have to happen anywhere else and became involved

in leadership in their own community and – around the country. Determined, dedicated.

This weekend world leaders gathered to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. With a planned ceremony at the foot of the hill where the Battle of Belleau Wood was fought. And that made me think of a different time, on a different battlefield, when Abraham Lincoln stood to speak. He began, "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

It was a short speech, the Gettysburg Address. Perhaps just three paragraphs. Only 278 words. Yet six times President Lincoln used the word dedicate or dedicated or dedication.

*It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

"Dedicated to that great task of government of the people, by the people, for the people." In this week of elections in our state and country, there was so much uncertainty and so much anxiety. As the results of the elections became known, and

as votes were counted and winners declared, I was inspired not just by the candidates who were gracious and unifying in victory, but perhaps even more so by candidates who were gracious in defeat.

The candidate who comes up on the short end of the count on election night and says to their supporters, "We gave it our best shot, and we really tried, and I thought I was the right person for this job . . . but sometimes God has other plans, and I want to wish my former opponent the very best of luck and pledge to do what I can to support them and make this city, this state, this country the strongest we can together."

In some ways that sounds like it came from a different era in this time of sharpened polarization and close votes and attacks. And yet in more than one race, words such as those were spoken, and gave me hope that the great task of democracy might endure.

So no, the church has no monopoly on dedication to ideals. What happens here at Central is shaped by the events around us. We react with concern and compassion and bring our faith to new questions that emerge in our time. But we are not simply reactive, we gather here also trusting that the Word of God can help shape a community, and that we as a community shaped by God, have something important to offer to this city and to God's world.

We are hosting Project Home this month. I took an overnight shift on our first night and I was reminded again of how incredibly stressful it is to be homeless. To have the overhead lights turned off all at the same time, and to have a baby crying and a

new unfamiliar place and wondering does this church even really want us here? Will we find people who are judgmental, or will we encounter people who are kind and interested in understanding?

One moment this first week was touching. An act of dedication and love. One of our guests, a teenage girl, brought cupcakes back to the church and created a birthday party for her mother. Right here in our Dining Room. And for those who witnessed that kindness, for those who heard about it, we were once again reminded that especially for those who are stressed out and at the limits of their resources, a warm and safe space matters. That acts of love endure and multiply. That generosity can come in unexpected ways.

And that is what we are trying to cultivate here – not just for Project Home, and not just in this month of November. A community built upon kindness to friends and strangers, a community known for its courage and for its generosity.

We learned that for homeless parents, one of the most expensive needs – and one underserved by other supportive agencies, are for diapers. And so we have done diaper drives, and we explain why that need exists and invite people to buy them and bring them in. And the response is amazing.

There are people here in this community who said I cannot go on the Puerto Rico trip - but I wish that I could and I want to make it possible for someone else to go.

Within the living memory of this community are people who put this church in their will and years later - it feels like it came out of the blue but was the result of a deep generosity and intentionality - this church receives something that helps those values live on and shape the lives of a new generation.

Today is a day when we dedicate ourselves to an idea older than any of us in this room. The idea that in Christ, we belong to one another. That together we are something greater than the sum of our individual parts.

*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness (Romans 12:4-8).*

Today is a day when we do something foolish - think ahead a year and assume that we can make plans that far in advance when we know that life can change in an instant. Sometimes generosity can be done on an impulse, a quick snap decision. Certainly - that happens and can make a world of difference. But I have come to learn that generosity usually needs to be cultivated and requires intentionality and thoughtfulness.

We call it pledge dedication Sunday - kind of an old school approach – looking ahead rather than asking for this immediate moment.

The children sang a beautiful anthem earlier this morning. "We Are Family." And we are trying to create a community that includes young and old, people who grew up in this church and people here for the first time. People of all socio-economic backgrounds. We Are Family. I said to Jennifer, you know, there's another song with the same name as the children's anthem you selected. And it's Stewardship Sunday. I just bet some checks would really roll in you switched it up and did the Sly and the Family Stone version.

But it's not about gimmicks. It's about remembering who we are and how we have been blessed. And trusting in the God that has called us together. Not just for the sake of the church, though an argument can be made for strengthening institutions, but for the city and for the world that God loves.

So today, as we gather, we once again dedicate gifts and pledges, we dedicate people to go on a mission trip and we dedicate people to lead the church, and we dedicate ourselves to the work of God in our time with the best of who we are and the best of what we have. For we are blessed by God to be a blessing to others.

May it be so. Amen.