A number of years ago, I went to see friends in San Antonio, TX. Now of course, I wanted to see my friends, but I really wanted to see the Alamo, San Antonio’s premier attraction! You’ve heard of the Alamo haven’t you; the Spanish mission that became a dramatic symbol of liberty, resulting in the creation of the state of Texas. The Alamo’s transformation occurred during the battle of the Alamo as Davy Crockett and others shed blood, taking on the evil Mexican Santa Anna. Well at first it looked as if Santa Anna had won; I mean, after all, Santa Anna technically won the battle of the Alamo. But the shed blood of the Alamo brought the ultimate victory, as Sam Houston went on to defeat Santa Anna at San Jacinto, rallying his troops with the battle cry: “Remember the Alamo!” And so the final victory was won, because of the sacrifice made at the Alamo; in fact, the document declaring that victory and the independence of Texas, was signed with blood shed at the Alamo! And so knowing all that, you can imagine my excitement in wanting to actually visit the Alamo. But here’s the shocker: when I asked my friends to take me to the Alamo, they resisted! “If you insist,” they said. “Insist? I mean: don’t you remember the significance of this place?” “Not really. I mean people in San Antonio don’t go to the Alamo anymore. Why the Alamo’s old hat, the Alamo’s ‘the same old, same old, the Alamo is all too familiar.’

In many respects our ‘Alamo,’ Christ’s shed blood at Calvary, is also too familiar. I mean Christ at Calvary gained our final victory, but in spite of such heroic effort, Calvary, for a lot of us, has become ‘old hat.’; we don’t ‘visit’ there anymore. But friends: we must visit Calvary. We must remember our ‘Alamo’: the incredible sacrifice of Jesus, assuring our independence and freedom from sin. Frankly that’s why God is pouring out his Spirit on this Commitment Weekend, so that, in the words of Acts 2:17, “Young men will see visions [and] old men will dream dreams…” that all of us, at any age, will wake up from our lethargy, from our over-familiarity with the Gospel, and see again the wonder -- the power -- the glory of Jesus. And then share that glory with all!

It’s amazing to see this pattern in the early church. I mean the early preaching of the Apostles centered on a repetitive declaration of the basics: the shed blood, victory and Lordship of Jesus. Commonly called the kerygma or Gospel, it declared ‘what God has done in Jesus.’ It was followed by what the early church called the didache or catechism which declared ‘what we are to do in Jesus.’ Frankly, this morning is about both kerygma and didache; what God has done in Jesus, and what we are to do in Jesus. But we begin with kerygma, for unless we comprehend what God has done in Jesus, we will never be empowered to do for Jesus. For we can only do, we can only work out, what first has been worked into us: the Work of Jesus, on Calvary, on the Cross.

Years ago, theologian Paul Tillich wrestled with all this, summarizing the Work of Jesus in a single word: grace. You see, Tillich concluded, we cannot transform life, unless we allow life to first be struck by grace. But be prepared Tillich noted, grace often comes as an ambush, startling us. It “…strikes when our disgust…our indifference, our weakness, our hostility…our lack of
direction: become intolerable...It strikes when the...perfection of life does not appear, when...despair [searches and] destroys...Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks [in]...and it is as [if] a voice were saying: “You are accepted”. “You are accepted”. Accepted by [the God who is greater than...you]...Do not...do anything...do not seek...anything. Do not perform anything. Do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact, that you are accepted”. - (Paul Tillich, You Are Accepted).

Friends: that’s my prayer as we move through this commitment morning: that you will accept the fact that you are accepted. For scripture overflows with a repetitive message: God is for us, not against us (Romans 8:31). I mean “...God did not keep back his own Son, but [God] gave [His own Son] for us. If God did this,” The Apostle Paul reasons in Romans 8 “…won’t [God] freely give us everything else? (Romans 8:32) And so Paul concludes: what can separate us from such acceptance and love. Can “…trouble or hardship...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him [through Jesus] who loved us. (Romans 8:35; 37-38). And so the prophet Zephaniah concludes: “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with [his] singing…” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Can you sense that? The Lord is with us. The Lord is mighty to save. The Lord is quieting us with His love. The Lord is rejoicing over us with His singing. Why when folks in Acts 2 heard such truth, Luke tells us, they were ‘cut to the heart…” (Acts 2:37). May we be ‘cut to the heart,’ allowing the Work of Jesus to work for us, cutting through everything else. A few weeks ago I was consumed by everything else; stuck, immobilized. But then I ran into Jo Ann Tichnell of our congregation, who’s a great listener. And so, I just poured out my frustrations about feeling stuck, overwhelmed. And with that, Jo Ann ambushed me with a profound truth. “But Pastor Paul you’re missing the most important thing?” “What’s that?” “We love you; we love you!” And with that the weight began to lift, the overload began to ease, and my life began to flow, again.

Where are you overloaded; where do you need to flow? Well, maybe you need to hear the most important thing: we love you; your brothers and sisters here at FCOB love you. But more importantly: God loves you! It’s amazing to note the impact of such truth. Why as we comprehend God’s love, what God has done for us -- we then want to do, sharing God’s love and Gospel with all! For Peter is ‘spot on’ at the end of our text; ultimately: “The promise [the Gospel], is [not just] for [us]...[but] for all who are far off…” (Acts 2:39). And so yes, allow God to quiet you with His love; hear God rejoicing over you with singing, but then go and share that singing, share that Gospel with all! Sacrifice and pour out your life. Surrender everything, give everything, to Jesus and His Gospel Cause. For we are loved!

You know: it is tempting for all this God stuff/Jesus stuff to become too familiar; you know, ‘the same old, same old.’ But it doesn’t have to be that way: remember the Alamo: our Alamo, the shed blood of Christ at Calvary. For God is pouring out His Spirit this morning so that “young men will see visions [and] old men will dream dreams…” (Acts 2:15) so that all of us will wake up and see again, the wonder, the power, the glory of the Gospel of Jesus. We are loved!! Affirm: we are loved!! But then go and share that love. Sacrificing life. Pouring out life. Surrendering everything. Giving everything -- to Jesus and His Gospel Cause! For the promise is not just for us -- the love is not just for us – but for all who are far off!