

Christ Presbyterian Church

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Confirmation and Reception of the Commitment Class

Luke 17:21-22

Growing up, I was an avid reader. I loved stories from *See Spot Run* in first grade to the Goosebumps series, probably for too long a period of my life. I loved to read and watch stories. One of my favorite stories growing up was *The NeverEnding Story*. Yup, it turned into a movie in 1984, a primo year for movie goers. This movie ended up being the most expensive movie made outside of the U.S. in 1984, ironically. Once you see this clip you will see why I say *ironically* to that fun fact.

(Video clip is shown)

“What is the secret of this enchanted book? What wonders are hidden within its pages? What magical spell does it cast on all who read it? What is the secret of *The NeverEnding Story*?”

“But that’s impossible!”

“You will enter a world where a young boy’s imagination becomes a vivid reality. The world of Atreyu and Artax, The Rock Biter and the good and kind gnome; a world that is vast and eternal, treacherous and dazzling, unforgettable and free. For anyone who’s ever made a wish, believed in a fantasy, or had a dream, this is *The NeverEnding Story*.”

(End of clip)

Wow! It sure is! Who has seen that movie? I mean, not many people, but it’s real good! Wow! I said *ironic* earlier because if you see the rest of the movie, you truly will wonder what they spent so much money on making that movie. Unfortunately, this movie turned into a trilogy, and as with all good 80s movies, the third time was not the charm. They really should have stopped after one or two. Basically, though, the story is about a young boy who finds a book, and the book sucks him into this story about a magical land called Fantasia that he has to save from a force called The Nothing or the bad guy. I loved this movie because it was weird, and I was a weird kid. And, there was a giant pink flying dog so, really, I had all my bases covered.

I loved the idea of the boy becoming a part of a story he was reading because I was a reader, and I wanted to become a part of a story that I read. It’s about a big adventure that a kid gets to

choose what to do. I would watch this movie over and over again. Do you guys have the movies that you watch just an obscene amount that is not okay for anyone's mental health? Too much of a good thing is never enough. That's not the phrase, but I forget it....

Basically, this is a story that I wanted to hear over and over again because it was my biggest wish to be a part of it. Maybe you guys have that, too, for the movies that you watched over and over again. Really you just wanted to be a part of a big adventure so that you, too, could ride the giant pink flying dog with your friend on a giant snail racing past you. It's weird, I know. We all have our weird things, but maybe you guys want to hop into a more exciting story sometimes.

Commitment class! Today you don't have to *wish* to be a part of a bigger story or a bigger make-believe adventure. We actually get to *be* a part of a story that's real and tangible. We get to choose today to become a part of a giant magnificent adventure that's even better than *The NeverEnding Story*. Hard to believe! It's not make-believe. It's a story that's reality, and it is here, and it is now!

Luke, a doctor who writes about Jesus' life, shares a story about Jesus interacting with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were this political, religious group who adhered to the strict religious laws of the Old Testament. Chapter 17 in Luke, the Pharisees ask Jesus when the Kingdom of God will come. Jesus answers them, "The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation. Nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is' because the Kingdom of God is within you."

This story is a really important one for us. Jesus loved talking about the Kingdom of God, and He does this a lot in the Gospels. In this story Jesus reveals to us two things in this simple statement. He says, "The Kingdom of God is within you." In Greek the word *within* is also translated to mean *among* so He is saying, the Kingdom of God is *among you*. It is a riddle of sorts. Jesus is the great "riddler" in the Gospels, and He is saying, "*I am the Kingdom of God. I am among you. The Kingdom of God is among you, and it is Me.*" So what, you say. Actually, it's commitment class Sunday. I am here in this dress. I am in this itchy tie. What does this have to do with anything?

I am telling you, commitment class, that the Jesus you are committing yourself to today is the Kingdom of God. He is a new way of life. That means for you, you don't have to die to live in the Kingdom because Jesus started it here on earth. This is a far more miraculous story than the one with the flying dog, and it's a way bigger adventure because it's real and it's true and it's human. The adventure God has for you guys, it starts now. It doesn't start later. Jesus started the Kingdom here on earth, and what will you do with it?

Coming back to the verse, Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God is within you." This verse also implies that the Kingdom of God is something that can reside within us. We can understand this idea more if we look at John 14, which is one of my favorite chapters to learn about the Holy Spirit. It's got a lot of really good lines about what the Holy Spirit is in its complexity and its fullness and richness. Jesus says, "And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth." He goes on to say, "This Counselor will live inside of us." So if you connect these points with me, Jesus was the Kingdom, and God sends a Counselor in Jesus' Name, and this Counselor lives in *us*; then that means we, *too*, can

be the Kingdom of God. Because of the Holy Spirit in us, we have the ability to continue the Kingdom project that Jesus started. It's our choice, and it's our adventure to choose to live in.

Now I did not invent commitment class. It did not start with me. I may have invented some really awesome dance moves, but the verdict is still out on that one, I don't know why. Commitment class has existed for a long time. People have come and gone in my position, and each have left their amazing imprint on the program to make it better and more meaningful. When I came in to CPC, my girlfriend Kristi was leading the program. She left me wonderful, color-coded Excel sheets and labeled boxes and laminated signs. It was like commitment class Christmas every time I opened up a folder on my desktop.

Likewise, the Kingdom of God was not invented in church. It is not a program or a building or a Bible study. The Kingdom of God is not just here on Wednesday night. It's not just in room 204, you guys, and it's not just at CPC. The Kingdom of God is in people who love Jesus and whom the Holy Spirit abides in. I've gotten to see the Kingdom of God weekly from students, leaders, and coaches. I saw the Kingdom of Heaven on the spring retreat as we did the early church experience that Mark described where students gathered in this dark room with candles all around and prayed together and ate together and did Communion. They washed feet, and they opened letters from their families that had words of pride and love and celebration. That's the Kingdom of Heaven.

I got to see the Kingdom of Heaven as students came up one by one at the end of that night and thanked God in front of everyone for the things that He had shown them this year through their small groups, leaders, friends, and families. I saw the Kingdom of Heaven later that night as we were cleaning up everything, and I saw two of my leaders walk in with a bucket of water and wash their coach's feet while everyone else was out hanging out. I saw the Kingdom of Heaven when our leaders led in worship on retreats as students sang along to their God. I saw the Kingdom of Heaven on Wednesday nights when leaders would come up to me after a long night and say, "Ash, I just had the coolest conversation with one of my students, and God was in that room." That is music to my ears.

I saw the Kingdom of Heaven as a group of girls chose for their group bonding night to go outside in the cold and sing to raise money for the poor. I saw the Kingdom of Heaven at the bonfire in our fall retreat as students cast cards that they had written their sins on into the fire to feel forgiveness deeply in their bones.

Jesus came before us, and He started the Kingdom on earth. It is a new way of doing life. It is a way of life that's built on hope, justice, love, and togetherness and now today you guys are part of the Kingdom project that Jesus started. Now your job is to find where in this project you can contribute. How will you leave today and continue the Kingdom? It's inside of you guys by the Holy Spirit. You have this ability to love and believe and celebrate God's creation. You each will do something very specific and very good if you choose this Kingdom adventure that Jesus offers you.

Congregation, your story is changing today. Your family just got bigger today. You now have a slew of new brothers and sisters who are going to be a part of this adventure with us. They will add something to the Kingdom that we did not have before them. They are each uniquely gifted to love and serve and continue the Kingdom in their own special way. *You* are now responsible

for making sure they continue to ask good questions and seek out answers and to pursue God in their lifestyles. *You* are responsible for doing this adventure with them.

You must walk alongside of them and make sure that they don't just choose Jesus *today* but that they choose Him every moment of every day so that their story with God will continue, and it will never end. You must help them figure out what they are gifted in by affirming them and helping them explore life and figure out what their gifts are and what their passions are by trying new things.

Commitment class, you are a blessing to us. We are so excited to be able to do this story with you. Today I welcome you, commitment class, into this family of ours. We don't always get things right, but we are trying daily to pursue God with our full hearts. May you go and do the same. We get to live the *actual* never-ending story, the *actual* Kingdom that will reign in the end over everything. May you continue the biggest story and adventure of all, the Kingdom here on earth! Please bow your heads and pray with me.

God, today is a celebration. Your Kingdom is growing, and it's all to Your credit. We thank You for sending us Your Son to be the Kingdom among us. We praise You for leaving the Spirit with us that we may continue Your Kingdom project. We praise You for inviting us into Your magnificent adventure. May we honor and worship You in all we say and do. Thank You for allowing us to be a part of Your big adventure. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.