

## **Sermon for February 9, 2020 – “On My Honor...”**

Scout Sunday, Year A – Texts: Jeremiah 1:1-10 ; Matthew 18:1-7

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You know you're a Scouter, past or present, when your wardrobe is mostly olive, drab, or khaki. You enjoy going to the bathroom in the woods. You carry your own toilet paper wherever you go. You always read by a flashlight. You know what to do when someone shouts “sign's up!” You know what a Totin' Chip card is. You know at least 10 ways of building a fire, most not involving the use of matches. You know the practical uses of over a dozen knots. You have recipes for 365 one pot meals using a Dutch oven. Your pots and pans are all black. You know that food is best when cooked over an open flame. You keep a bucket of water by your side while cooking dinner. You always cook enough food for at least twelve. You wear 2 pair of socks to bed. You cannot walk by a piece of trash without picking it up. You help little old ladies – whether they want it or not. You know 100 uses for a bandana. Your favorite cologne is “Deep Woods Off!”

Today is Scout Sunday, a day we recognize the values and character that these programs build in our young people. We recognize our Boy Scout Troop 107 and Cub Pack 107. We recognize their leaders Mike Rechel and Jason Dennison and all the parents and adults that lend their time and effort to make these programs as successful as they are. And we also recognize the work and ministry of scouting for ALL of our youth, for former Scouts who were in this troop or others. This morning we think about the importance of the promises, oaths, and covenants. We recognize the ways that God continues to work in and through our lives in the promises we make to God and to each other. So my question is, what promise do all Scouts make? That'd be the Scout Oath right? Okay, now, I'm going to put a Scout on the spot. Who's the most recent Eagle Scout? \_\_\_\_\_? Okay Mr. Eagle Scout person, what is the Scout Oath?

*On my honor I will do my best,*

*To do my duty, to God and my country, and to obey the Scout Law;*

*To help people at all times;*

*To keep myself physically strong, Mentally awake, and morally straight.*

*Can we all say it together?*

Ok, guys, looks like you've just promised to keep your eyes open during my sermon! Mentally awake, right? Thanks!

On a more serious note, and one of the things I'd like the young people here to listen to for a moment is that with these oaths, what both Scouts and Cubs are doing is making promises. These promises are really no different than when God makes promises to us. But let me ask the Cubs and Scouts here this morning, when we take these oaths when we make these promises and Oaths before God and before each other do we mean it? Do we strive to keep them? We should – but sometimes we don't. When we don't it's important to remember that God always gives second chances. That even as we try to do our best to do our duty to help people at ALL times it's not always possible. It isn't even the first thoughts in our heads but we're given many opportunities, over and over, to make a difference in our communities and in our world.

And that's because in our promise to God we strive to be good people; to be young men and women of character. This morning we recognize how Scouting continues to build on that; the foundation of our promises and covenants not just to make us better Scouts but to make us better people! Still with me? Good! Because this is about you! But it isn't about merit badges or awards or even about rank. These are important, yes but they can get in the way of us understanding what is truly important. It's about being true to who you are. It's about being the best person you can be!

As Scout Laws integrate the traits of Trustworthiness, Loyalty, Helpfulness, Friendliness, Courtesy, Kindness, Obedience, Cheerfulness, Thriftiness, Bravery, Cleanliness, Reverence as well as being Honest, Fair, Strong, Responsible (in both words and actions), Respectful (of yourself, others, and authority) and resourceful. It's about making the people around you better. It's about making the world a better place!

And as God's people, especially those of us who call ourselves Christians, are our "laws", our morals, our values, and our virtues that much different? Aren't they too about making us better people and the world a better place? As Scouts, as Children of God, it's in living out our promises, oaths and covenants to each other that we're living them out to God. That's the cool thing about Scouting that it gives our young people, boys and girls, the opportunity to build their lives on timeless principles. And as they grow older it will serve as a guide on important issues.

I'd say most of you know who John Wayne is, yes? Did anyone know that John Wayne was a Boy Scout in his younger days? Later in life he was honored by President Gerald Ford, himself an Eagle Scout, at a black tie benefit dinner. When it came time for him to speak "The Duke" recited the Boy Scout Law. Mr. Wayne spoke about the final point, about being "reverent." He said, "Keep God at the top of what you believe in. With Him, life can be a beautiful experience. Without Him, you're just biding your time."

First Baron Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, Lord Baden Powell founder and first Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts and co-founder with his sister Agnes of the Girl Scouts believed that duty to God should be at the heart of all scouting. He said, "Religion means recognizing who and what God is. Second it is making the best of the life He has given us, and third it is doing what He wants of us...that is, mainly doing something for others." Baden-Powell, grew up as a minister's son. And he recognized that when a young man or lady includes God and service to others in his or her life it is a life well lived.

I find it hard to disagree with either Lord Baden-Powell or John Wayne. As a boy, as most of you know I was involved with the scouts and I have some great memories. Jamborees. Camporees. Order of the Arrow. Trips to three high adventure bases including Philmont. Most summers we to summer camp at a place called Tionesta which sadly no longer exists. In the midst of all the wonderful activities we attended the chapel services overlooking the lake. In fact, if we were together as a troop on a Sunday you can bet that we were in church that morning. I earned two religious awards, the Pope Pius VI and the Ad Altare Dei (which is Latin for "At the Altar of God"). Yes, they were Catholic. Our troop was sponsored by a Catholic church and we too met in the church basement. As I look back on it the oaths, the promises and the ideals of scouting all nurtured me in my faith. At one point I was the troop chaplain. Talk about foreshadowing.

Most of all as I think back, the one thing above all else that I was blessed with was a Scoutmaster, Jim Picard who cared about the type of men we would grow up to be. He listened to us and treated us as the men he knew we were capable of becoming. And here's where I have a word for all of the Troop and Pack leaders here today and, for that matter anyone who works with or for young people. It's no surprise that we sometimes do not value the voices of young people. We all have experiences of being told we're too young or of not being listened to. And as kids and young adults we hate it. We say we'll never do it to others when we grow up. And yet, generation after generation it happens. We teach them to walk and talk then tell them to "sit down and shut up." "Wait your turn, the adults are talking now." Well, maybe God's trying to tell us something. Maybe God is saying, "You know, I have some big plans for these young people." Maybe kind of like the plans God had for Jeremiah, and maybe God is telling us that we should listen to them. Maybe we should treat them like real people, try to understand them. The young people who're here today are going to be responsible for the world that we're creating now and it'll happen sooner than we think. They'll inherit the world we leave to them. All the more reason to recognize that we adults have a job to do. Not only do we have to help create the best possible world for them to inherit but we also have to prepare them for their place in it.

The Cub Pack and Scout Troop that Westwood First sponsors have an awful lot of fun but they learn a lot too; things that'll prepare them for when it's their time. They've been learning about what it means to be a good citizen. They've been learning how to treat others with respect. They've been learning at a very young age what leadership means and how to be leaders. And they know that you can lead in different ways; In good and bad ways. In large and small ways. In loud and in quiet ways. In both word and deed. And as a church we support them in this work because we believe it matters. My hope is that the boys and girls who are in our Cub Scout pack now will go on to be Boy Scouts. We hope that the Boy Scouts now are working to become Eagle Scouts. But, more importantly, my hope is that they go on to be young people confident in their own abilities and people of good moral character whatever their faith background. My hope is that later in life they get some sort of a calling, some sort of a nudge in a particular direction and that they'll feel ready to accept it. That they'll draw upon what they are learning here to go out and change the world for the better. That's my hope for all our young people, boys and girls, Scouts, Cubs, or not that are here today.

What I say to the pack leaders, the troop leaders, all adults, anyone who has kids or works with them is that we'd be mindful of our promise to these young people. Our promise – our oath is to find ways to empower them, to answer their calling with confidence. To teach them what matters. The skills that they need for a lifetime. Our promise that we remember and understand that when we hand them something like a pinewood derby car, or an axe or a box of matches, we're not just teaching them how to sand wood or put wheels on a car or cut firewood or build a fire. We remember that we're teaching them that God created them to do the things they never knew they could do. We're telling them that we'll help them to grow. We'll provide the resources they need within our ability. And, most of all, when God calls them to do something new we'll listen to them and we will support them. Woe to anyone who does not! Not just because they're our Scouts but, perhaps more importantly because they're children of God, and God calls even the youngest amongst us to do great things!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.