

CIRCLED IN RED
September 18, 2011 –John 15: 12-18
The Church of the Covenant

The first house I owned sold the first day it was on the market. The second house sold on the second day it was on the market. So with my current house, my third house, I thought, “Well, maybe it might sell on the *third day* it was on the market.” No such luck. On November 1st of this year it will be the third YEAR it is on the market, so my hope now is that it will sell in the THIRD YEAR (not the third day) it is on the market. Remember the old adage not to pray for patience...because the Good Lord might just give you the opportunity to learn patience by the time the prayer is actually answered.

One of the things I have learned over the past three years is that I am not a very patient person. I have repainted most of the interior of my house (neutral “builder’s beige” of course!), fixed everything that needed to be fixed, poured a new driveway, bought new appliances for the kitchen, have discovered HGTV, the home and garden cable TV network, and watch shows on staging your house for sale and have learned terms like “de-cluttering” that I never knew before. I have painted the interior of my home, have buried a St. Joseph statue in my front yard, I have had professional stagers walk through my home to give advice, I have reduced the price more than six times and it is listed for less than what I bought it for almost 9 years ago. I am about to exchange the St Joseph statue (the patron saint of Real Estate agents) for a statue of St. Jude (the patron saint of hopeless causes!). I am about to call the HGTV show entitled “The Un-sellables” and offer my house as their most challenging show!

I have prayed and prayed and prayed about the sale of my house. By now I am sure the Good Lord has heard every variation on my praying –bargaining in prayer, making promises in prayer, crying out to God in desperation in prayer, “O Lord, show me what I must do!” “O Lord, Great Real Estate Agent in the sky, please sell my house!” “O Lord, why are you delaying me from moving to where my heart already is?” God has heard it all over the past three years. I have given it completely to the Lord on many times. And then, because I am very human, I have taken it back many more. I have prayed so much I am tired of it. I have prayed so much perhaps even God is tired of it.

So this sermon today is a sermon on answered prayer. And this sermon today is a sermon on unanswered prayer. And maybe, just maybe, the two are one in the same...

I have a little prayer journal where I write down all my prayers. I write down the date I pray the prayer. Then, when the prayer is answered, I circle it in red. Sometimes I write the date down next to the prayer when it is answered. Over time a rather amazing insight occurs. My whole little book becomes CIRCLED IN RED. I look it over. I see prayer after prayer after prayer CIRCLED IN RED. It is amazing how many prayers and often how rapidly the prayers are answered. Sometimes it is overwhelming to think of how faithfully God answers prayer. I think if people wrote down their prayer requests and dated them and then circled them in red when answered, I think, people would pray more and worry less.

Circle our Bible verse for today in red, also. It is Jesus teaching us about prayer. Our scripture for today is the great promise in prayer –“*Whatever you ask the Father in my name*”, says Jesus, “*HE may give it to you.*” (John 15: 16) Well, but we should read right before it where Jesus says –that we are chosen by HIM and we are chosen to bear fruit and our fruit will abide. (v. 16) The things we are to ask for are Kingdom things; fruit bearing is about SPIRITUAL FRUIT, not cars and jobs and (yes, Stu) houses. It is spiritual fruit that abides and lives forever. Those are the things to be asking for. Right before this passage is another where Jesus Christ Himself, Lord of Lord and Savior of the world, declares, “*I have*

called you friends..." (John 15: 15) Evidently, Jesus is seeking a very close personal relationship with us, so close that the best analogy is human friendship; Jesus wants to be our friend and wants us to be His friend. He wants to talk to us in prayer; we want to answer Him. Prayer evidently then is asking about spiritual fruit but it is all about connection and relationship and friendship with Jesus. Then we move up a little more in the passage and discover Jesus telling us His commandment, *"That you love one another as I have loved you."* (John 15: 12) Oh, evidently prayer is about receiving love from Jesus and then loving one another in Jesus' name. Oh, and then this entire passage has as its prelude Jesus' great teaching on the Vine and the Branches, where He is noting that we have to be so closely attached to Him and He to us that it is like a branch being attached to a vine. Jesus says: *"Abide in me, and I in you."* (John 15: 4) Oh, you mean Jesus is to live in me and I am to live for Him? Oh, you mean that I am to be so closely connected spiritually to the Savior that it feels as if He lives in me? So let's recap—in order for there to be more and more answered prayer in our life we need to Abide in HIM and HE in us////Prayer is to demonstrate our love for Him and His love for us and it leads us to show our love for one another////Prayer is more about spiritual asking than material asking; prayer is asking that spiritual fruit is born in, around and through our lives; it is to result in spiritual fruit, not so much material blessing////Prayer is more about two friends, Jesus and us, talking together than us whining about what we don't have and what we want God to do for us///And those prayers which have this abiding relationship within them, those prayers are the ones that are answered. If there are all these other things present, ahhhhhh, THEN "whatever we ask, He may give....."

"Abide in me and I in you", says Jesus, and when you do then *"whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you"*. Circle those two Bible verses in red, please, because they both go together.

So, not too long ago, I went back to my prayer journal and I noted that while there was a lot circled in red, that there were an awful lot of prayers on the selling of my house that weren't circled in red. Why, Lord, would you not answer that prayer, of all prayers? And then I started to think about it more—maybe God is waiting for the right moment to answer that prayer; maybe, who knows, the right house for me that will really be a blessing to me and won't be too big and won't be too small and that everyone in church would say "That's a good house for the preacher" isn't for sale yet. Or maybe, just maybe, God has been waiting for me to exhaust all my own strategies and ideas and plans in order to wait upon Him and His divine will for my life. Sometimes God waits till the very last minute to answer a prayer, just to point out that it is He, and not us, who is the agent of causality in our world. Or maybe, just maybe, God liked the fact that by not answering my prayer He has had my rapt attention over these past three years. I mean hours and hours of time talking to the Savior; there cannot be a downside to that. Or maybe, just maybe, God is getting me so excited and so psyched to move to Washington that when I do I won't need a moving van; I've so anticipated being here, I'll just levitate all the way to Washington I will be so excited to be here. Or maybe just maybe, it is because a house is a pretty temporal thing, it is material, it is of the world; people need houses to be sure but *"the Son of Man (Jesus) had nowhere to lay his head"* Maybe, I'm supposed to be happy with what I have instead of wanting something I don't have. I mean, if I had to choose between a lot of people getting excited about having an abiding relationship with Jesus, of Him living in them, and they living for Him, and a house, which would I choose? (That's a no-brainer) If I had to choose between blessedness for the members of my congregation and a house in Washington, what would I pick? (I'd pick you every time).

My plan was to move to Washington on the third day my house was for sale three years ago. But God's plan, and it is always a far, far better plan, is to make me so grateful and so excited and so over-ready to move and so humbled and so yielded and so reliant on Him that I will never be able to refer to a house in Washington as "MY HOUSE"; I can only ever think of it as "HIS HOUSE". So when I was writing this

sermon this past week I went back through my prayer journal and circled in red every reference to asking God to sell my house....Because the Lord has answered my prayers...and in better ways than I could ever hope or dream...and in a way that truly gives glory to Him. Maybe we think the prayer isn't answered because it isn't answered the way we think it should be...but it is answered the way God thinks it should be...

In this passage in the gospel of John there is that famous Bible quote where Jesus declares: *"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends..." (John 15: 13)* Jesus laid down His life for us on the cross. He has circled all His promises in scripture that are there for us; everyone we need for a day when we are down or thinking there is no way forward. But Jesus has circled all those promises in red; He has circled His words in the red, red blood of His cross, reminding us that we have these promises of answered prayer given by a surety promised through the red, precious red blood of Jesus.

He died to make certain we know how committed He is to hearing our prayer and answering our prayer; that every prayer we ever pray may be CIRCLED IN RED... Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*