

**COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS; COUNTING THE COST**  
**Congregational Meeting –January 29, 2012 –Luke 14: 25-33**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

I love this set of Bible verses in relation to “counting the cost”. It is tucked away in a larger set of verses where Jesus is talking about sacrifices to be made in following Him. Jesus tells a short little parable of someone seeking to build a tower. He begins: *“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14: 28)* Jesus refers to cross-carrying as emblematic to being His disciple. He says: *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14: 27)* If there is a cross for Jesus then there is also a cross for his disciples. A cross-less disciple is no disciple of our Lord. A cross-less Christianity that thinks that only Jesus must bear the cross alone does not understand its Master.

So on this Congregational Meeting Sunday it is good to reflect back over the past year. It is good to count our blessings; it is also good to count the cost.

To be sure we have many, many multiple blessings. There are some 50 more people in worship on an average Sunday today than 4 years ago. We are turning the corner on taking in more new members than we lose. Financially, we are running basically balanced budgets, we are meeting our mission obligations, we are taking on new and interesting programs. Adult Ed and Children’s Ministry are in resurgence. Music gets better and better. Mission keeps getting better and better –hosting Family Promise, the backpack ministry, our efforts with Habitat for Humanity. **I am pleased to announce the Light the Fire Campaign has paid off the entire outstanding mortgage of the church;** (How about that for a BLESSING!) I had the pleasure of being in the Finance Committee Meeting when they voted to pay off the entire mortgage earlier this month. In less than one year the session conceived of the idea, raised the money, and paid off the mortgage as well as doing numerous other projects. The staff is working together with extraordinary effectiveness; the session and the deacons are stepping forward in leadership in new ways; more and more and more they are truly the spiritual leaders of The Church of the Covenant. I could go on and on and on, but suffice it to say that the Lord is blessing us as a church, abundantly and amazingly. There is a positive spirit in the air; people love to come to church; people are being drawn closer to the Lord; the church is making a difference in people’s lives. When we stand up to greet one another there is a powerful, positive energy filling the church –we are glad to be here and we are glad to be here because we know the Lord is here as well.

And those blessings were not won without sacrifice. There was a lot of cross-carrying and hard work; a lot of blood, sweat and tears by a lot of people; a lot of prayer and a lot of hoping and a lot of trusting. We have completed the tower in a way; we have finished paying off the Covenant Center and the Commons area that was begun more than ten years ago. The tower has been raised to the sky and to the glory of God and the mortgage has been paid off. The cost was counted and the cost has been paid and the cost has been the cross. Anything worth doing for God has a cost.

But I have also noticed another cost over the years. Often times when a great breakthrough has occurred then there is spiritual push back. I find it is not really ever from the people of the church itself; it always comes from forces outside the church. Some issue arises; something happens to dissuade us from our blessings; I call it “the counterpunch”. Christians are great at shooting themselves in the foot. There is first a great breakthrough for the Lord but then a counterpunch comes out of left field to seek to divide and destroy every good thing that has happened. The counterpunch is also part of the cost; the counterpunch has the power if we let it to take away the blessings the Lord has given us. Personally,

all these external issues regarding ordination and the Presbyterian Church possibly dividing and all the tumult and division all this may produce feels exactly like that kind of counterpunch to me. Poised as we are for more breakthroughs as a church we now must decide whether or not we want to invite those dividing issues into the life of our church or not. Are we going to focus on the issues which divide us? Or are we going to focus on the Lord who unites us? Are we going to permit those negative and divisive forces into our church to run amuck and destroy the blessings of the Lord or not? Part of the cost of spiritual breakthroughs is the counterpunch. But we can choose to give that counterpunch power or ignore it and continue to focus on the Lord from whom all blessings flow. I know what I choose.

But let's say we choose to ignore our pastor and we decide to focus in on those issues, pro and con. Or let's say we choose to get really "Hoovered Up" over matters and say even suggest that we should build a tower like choosing to leave the denomination and try to go somewhere else. Well, Jesus says before you build that tower you better count the cost. So let me count the cost for you.

My home church, the Peters Creek United Presbyterian Church, decided to leave the denomination here a couple of years ago. They went into court, twice, in order to do so. They refused to work with Washington Presbytery which has a very gracious separation policy. They chose to plant seeds of division in their congregation. A formerly beautiful, loving and caring congregation became overnight a place where people wouldn't talk to one another in the Giant Eagle, a place that tried to remove people from the rolls of the church just because they might be in opposition to leaving. They sowed seeds of discord and division into a church that had been united and loving and strong. As ye sow, so shall ye reap. Sow division, reap division. Sow conflict, reap conflict. My former Sunday School teacher who I always liked and gave credit to as one of the reasons I went into ministry called me a "Stooge". He wiped out in one word all those years of teaching Sunday School, at least to me. They somehow thought my parents who are more than 50 year members of that church, ordained elders and deacons were somehow dangerous to their plans, but they weren't, but they sent them anyway a letter on Holy Week to remove them from the rolls of their church. They hurt people they shouldn't hurt. They said words they shouldn't have said. The people who pressed the issue of leaving got tired of the lawsuits and controversy so they all left for the Bible Chapel. The lawsuits bankrupted the church. People don't join controversies, they join churches. People don't come to church to fight they come to church for sanctuary from the fighting out in the world. So finally, the session tired of their pastor and they fired him. What goes around comes around. What one reaps, one has first sown into the life of the congregation. The formerly 650 member Peters Creek UP Church is perhaps at most a 200 member church today. Count the cost. Before one builds that tower I would urge that the cost be counted first.

On this congregational meeting Sunday I am counting our blessings today—a loving, caring, faithful congregation experiencing wonderful spiritual breakthroughs from the Lord. And I am also counting the cost, what might be reaped from sowing issues and division into the soil of The Church of the Covenant. Beloved, our blessings way outweigh the costs. I don't want to forfeit even one blessing, even one person, who would get "Hoovered Up" pro or con and leave. I want us all to stay together. I want to sow the unity of the Spirit here at The Church of the Covenant. Let's not blow it. Because I believe there are even more blessings with which the Lord will seek to bless us...so long as we don't focus on the counterpunch.. so long as we focus on the Lord.

If we had sowed seeds of division here we could have never paid off the mortgage for the Covenant Center; we could have never built the tower-Right? Count the cost and then decide for yourself. 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!*