

I KNOW NOW WHY THE WOMAN CRIED

August 26, 2012 –Hebrews 13: 7-16

The Church of the Covenant

More than 30 years ago as part of the ordination process in the Presbyterian Church, I stood up before Washington Presbytery to share with them why I felt called to be a Presbyterian minister. Right before my slot in the docket for the meeting there was a church, the Green Valley Presbyterian Church from Greene County, that was seeking to leave the denomination. It was acrimonious, negative with much bluster and not a lot of Jesus. I remember half wondering to myself if I really wanted to be ordained to such a church. It actually was helpful to me because as I sat there I went, “Yes, Lord, I feel You want me to be here and to be a minister, pastor, teacher and preacher for these people who have given my faith birth and nurture from when I was young.” Warts and all. So I stood up right after all this brew-ha-ha and shared my heart with the Presbytery –why I loved the Lord –why I felt he had called me to be a minister –why I loved the church –why I felt called to be a minister in the Presbyterian Church –what this all meant to me –how growing up in the PC (USA) I had found Jesus and faith within its ministry and now I felt called to give back some small part of what I received. I noticed that in the front row there were two older women and both of them were dabbing their eyes with a Kleenex. They were crying! In my relative youth I had no idea why. Had I said something to hurt them? Why were they crying?

Over the years I have watched much of the church I knew and love be torn asunder by controversy. I’ve watched people I know and love get mad and leave over many sides of many issues. I watched my own home church, where I first professed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in 1968, get mad and split in two. I watched as a loving, caring congregation became divided and angry. There are now two churches where once there was one –and both of them are but shadows of the spiritual strength of their former selves. The first church I served as pastor was here in Washington Presbytery, (and wise and long time ministers like Dr. Mac of this congregation always say that there is something very special about the first church you serve as pastor and they are right). I remember everything; all the people, all the stories, all the lessons on becoming a good pastor that the Lord taught me there. I held all those folks so close to my heart over all the years. Just recently they got angry and blustery and finger-pointing and they voted to leave the denomination. I’m starting to think I’m bad luck or something. You know, I might develop a complex. But I’ve watched the unrest also upset the Presbytery in which we reside. I came “home” here to Washington Presbytery after more than 15 years of serving other parts of the country and was truly enjoying being part of a very special presbytery that is Washington Presbytery and then several churches within it started to talk about leaving also. Was the way I remembered Washington Presbytery about to “leave” as well? In other words, after almost 30 years of ordained ministry was my home church gone? Was the first church I served as pastor gone? Was almost everything I remembered and valued, were all of my anchors ripped up, was the church I remembered in my youth, was it all about to be destroyed by controversy and disagreement? I’m a sentimental person. I get attached to people and churches and sessions and, yes, even presbyteries. Frankly, I’m grieving those losses. I’ve come to wonder --By the time I retire from ministry, will my church all be gone or not??????

So just a couple of months ago at a presbytery meeting, the first church I served as a pastor is requesting the Presbytery vote to dismiss it to another denomination. And they’re all there sort of “loaded for bear” if you know what I mean. Touchy, thin-skinned, Bible thumping, hair-triggered, reading quotes from letters from the lawyer; implying that they’ll sue if they don’t get their way! I kept remembering the line of that great “theologian” Rodney King –“Can’t we just get along?” Or maybe a better notion is how Christ has given us a “*ministry of reconciliation*” as 2 Corinthians 5: 18 says. We are to be reconciled to one another because Jesus has come and reconciled us first to God. Do we really believe

in the cross, are we really reconciled through His blood, if we cannot be reconciled? Only two of the 20 present spoke to me, their former pastor. Of course, the presbytery approved their departure request unanimously so all their bluster was for naught. But I was just sort of sitting there all sad and downcast. There is a break in the meeting. Punch and cookies always make us feel better. So the next item on the docket was a report from the Committee on Preparation. Two young men got up to share with the presbytery why they felt called by God to be Presbyterian ministers. They shared their faith and their love for Jesus. They shared how they wanted to be part of the Presbyterian Church. It was beautiful and poignant and touching in a genuinely spiritual sort of way. And I got all choked up. My colleagues were not about to see me cry on the floor of presbytery. But I'll admit I needed a handkerchief in order to dab my eyes.

As the young men were speaking, it dawned on me that this was the exact same sequence of 30 years before –angry church leaves the denomination followed by earnest young people stepping up to serve the Lord as a Presbyterian minister. **And now I know why those two older women cried so long ago.** I don't think they cried because the church they had known in their youth was changing. But I really think they cried because they saw that in spite of everything the Lord is still in charge of His church, that Jesus is still calling young people to preach the gospel, and that their church, the one they love with a deep and abiding passion, will still be here when all else has faded away. We may relax. Jesus is still in charge. God is still on the throne. Times and seasons may change...but Jesus Christ is still the same, as our scripture from Hebrews says, *"yesterday and today and forever."* (Hebrews 13: 8)

One of my favorite authors is Andrew Murray and he writes in his book, *The Holiest of All*, the following: "There may be loss and change of (people) who are beloved and of great worth as teachers. Jesus we can never lose –in HIM there is no change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to day, yea and for ever!" (p. 525) "All that HE was yesterday HE is today." All that He was yesterday, all the joy and comfort and strength, all the faithfulness, all the answered prayer, all the grace and mercy received, all the bearer of the Father's love and mercy, He WAS yesterday, but O, HE IS today. All that HE has been, all the sending of His Spirit from His mighty throne, all the hope when there seemed to be no hope, all the joy in the midst of pain, all the promise in the midst of loss, all that HE has been HE IS STILL today! And if we are worrying somehow about our future, will the church even be here in 25 years, will it be just a husk of its former faithfulness and power and effectiveness, O Christian, everything it was it shall be, and everything it is today it shall be, because the church of Jesus Christ is all about the Lord Jesus Christ, AND HE, JESUS, REMAINS THE SAME, YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER! So as long as Jesus remains the same there will ALWAYS BE young people standing up at presbytery meetings sharing their faith in the Lord Jesus and telling of the great story of unending and unbroken faith in a Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who in the midst of all the changes in life, remains the same, always and forever, yesterday and today and forever. Weep not for yesterday, it is gone; but weep tears of joy for what Jesus Christ will do TODAY in our hearts and lives and what HE surely shall do --FOREVER!!!! And 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!*