

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY!
Consecration Sunday – November 13, 2011 – Psalm 66: 16
The Church of the Covenant

We have been singing the old hymn, *“I Love to Tell the Story”*, now for over a month. It is right on point with everything about our theme for this year, everything we might say and do in relation to ministry and our personal faith. So now we have a test. I will say the first line of the chorus and you the congregation will respond. Then I will say the second line of the chorus and you the congregation will respond. Let’s try it. *I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY! (‘Twill be my theme in glory) TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY (Of Jesus and His Love).*

Well, I love to tell the story...our Bible verse from the Psalms is about loving to tell the story. It says: *“Come and hear...and I will tell you what HE has done for me.” (Psalm 66: 16)* Come and hear; let me tell you what God is doing. Elsewhere in the Psalms it says, *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...”* God does things in people’s lives. God touches people with His Spirit. God answers prayer. God intervenes in our lives. And when God does then it is our job to tell it; to say it; to share it; to say so. Almost every time in scripture when Jesus enters powerfully into someone’s life He cautions them not to tell about it; they’ve just been healed (don’t tell about it); they’ve just met a man who told them everything about their life (don’t say so, says Jesus). This is called “The Messianic Secret”; Jesus doesn’t want to be revealed as Messiah and as Lord until the time is right; but it is no secret what God can do; it is no secret what the Lord may do in our lives. Jesus says be quiet about what happened. But, no, they run from their encounter with the Lord shouting it from the mountaintops. But they always do; they immediately run out and tell everyone they know what Jesus has done for them *I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY (‘twill be my theme in glory) TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY (of Jesus and His love).* Exactly.

Let me tell you a story. And I have the permission of the family to share this story with you; I never use a story without permission. But they wanted me to tell you their story today. Last year in December The Church of the Covenant hosted the first Interfaith Hospitality Network (now called FAMILY PROMISE) for a week. Family Promise hosts families who are temporarily homeless; there’s some good reason like a fire that destroyed their home; or the loss of a job; or other reasonable problem; these are working people and fine families who have just hit a hard stretch in their life; see, there but by the grace of God go I. That’s a story in and of itself; right before Christmas when Jesus Himself was a sojourner in Bethlehem and had no place to lay His little head, we hosted families with babies right here in our church. People stepped forward to give of their time. Pastor Randy and the Mission Committee helped plan it; the Session approved it without objection and with enthusiasm (That was a miracle in and of itself --I’ve served in churches before where the debate would have raged for months and where the outcome of the vote might have been in doubt –not here, beloved, not here). The staff was accommodating; they didn’t come up with 52,000 reasons why it couldn’t happen; they helped and gave of their time and gave up Sunday School Rooms in order to make it happen. (By the way I love to tell the story about the amazing church staff we have here –that’s a sermon in and of itself!). It all came together perfectly, just like it was an unfolding plan of God, which is exactly what it was.

One of the families who were hosted in that first week had a boatload of kids. I mean like their own personal youth group boatload of kids. And someone, some church member volunteer, I do not know who, someone had the wisdom to invite this family to come to church that week. And they did. People come to church, by the way, because someone they know and trust invites them to come. Churches grow when people reach out in love to others; I love to tell that story also. Churches grow when they become more missional and reach out into their community with missions like Family Promise; I love to

tell that story also. So when this family came to worship with their boatload of kids they weren't treated as being different; they were warmly welcomed; they were truly invited in. They were treated as God's gift to The Church of the Covenant, which they are. People loved them and reached out to them with the love of Jesus, so they came and when they came they discovered the love of Jesus. I love to tell that story also; I love to tell how when people come to this church they don't find people grousing about how someone is sitting in their pew, instead, they discover the warm, welcoming love of a Living Savior. I love to tell that story about you, my beloved church.

So this family and all their kids came to church that Sunday. And it came time for the offering and the whole family came forward, Mother and Father, and each and every one of their boatload of kids, came forward with an offering. At first, I was touched and moved by this beautiful scene of thankfulness and gratitude –God had done something beautiful for them in their lives and they responded by giving of what they had. Then I was shocked a little bit –I thought to myself, “No, no, no; you shouldn't be giving something to the church. We need to give to you. You need everything you have.” And then I reflected more and thought: “No, I am wrong. They have been touched and moved by what the Lord has done for them. There is great power and dignity in giving back to the Lord for all His benefits to me.” And if they can do this why cannot I do this? If they can give out of the little they have why can I not give out of the abundance I have received? That moment for me was the best stewardship sermon ever. We don't give out of what we have; we give out of a grateful heart for what God has done for us in our life.

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY! ('twill be my theme in glory) TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY (of Jesus and His love!!!!!!!!!!)

- And would it shock you that as they came to church more and more that their lives started to come together more and more? I love to tell that story...
- And would it shock you to tell you that this family now volunteers to help with Family Promise (IHN) and comes to volunteer at the church when we host other families here? That they give back to others for what they themselves have received in their lives? I love to tell that story...
- And would it shock you to learn that through the love and mercy they have received a whole family has come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? I love to tell that story...

As I look out over the congregation today I see people who have their own stories to tell. As your pastor by now I know you; I know people don't just come to church week after week and volunteer for missions like Family Promise and serve the church and give to the Lord because you're supporting some institution, some religious program. No, you give from your heart because you have received in your heart. God has moved in your life; He has answered prayer; He has opened a way where there seemed to be no way forward; He has blessed our lives, not always with everything we have asked for, but with everything we truly need. And then I think of a Man long ago, who went to His death on a cross. He endured excruciating pain and ridicule, endured abandonment and even God-forsakenness, just for me, just for you, just for one family with a boatload of kids, just to give us life and hope and eternity, just because He loves us. *Come and hear...and I will tell you what He has done for me.* He died for me and He died for you. And that's my story. And that's our story. And that's my sermon. And that's our message. And that's the **person** we give to today. We don't give to the church –we give to JESUS!

I LOVE to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory; to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love! 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!*