

INTO THE DEEP DARKNESS
February 3, 2013 –Communion –Exodus 20: 1-21
The Church of the Covenant

As you probably know by now next week is our Visioning Day; a day where we will come together as a congregation; speak our hearts about matters important to us; and in the sharing and conversation together we believe that we will collectively hear the Word God speaking to us as a congregation. You might consider that Moses going up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments was the very first visioning day recorded in scripture! He left what was ordinary and regular, went up the mountain, spiritually speaking, in order to receive the Word that God was speaking to the people of God. Our task is not too different from Moses' task –to ascend to the place where God is and to listen together to the Word God speaks. Word of God, speak.

This is not strategic planning as the world does it and understands it. Our task is not to generate a bunch of ideas that we personally like, then fight together and the person with the loudest voice gets their way. That's the world's way of strategic planning --Your idea fights my idea and my idea fights someone else's idea and everybody gets a bloody nose in the bargain –that's the way the world operates. Our task rather is to endeavor to discern spiritually what is God's idea; we have to go where HE is in order to receive His Word. For the record, I don't want "my idea" to win; I want God's idea to win. One of the ways you know it is God's idea is that people will come around it and like it and support it. God is not the author of chaos; He is the author of creation.

So Moses goes up the mountain as we will do next Sunday on visioning day and as the beginning of Exodus 20 states: *"God spoke all these words..." (Exodus 20: 1)* But please note that Moses had to go up into the mountain through a dark place in order to get to the place where God was. It says: *"Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."* (Exodus 20: 21) God wasn't down in the valley; God was up on the mountain. And in order to get to where God was Moses needed to go through the thick darkness in order to find what God wanted the people to do. It is my experience in church visioning and discernment that the first step is feeling like we're in a bit of a fog. I like to say the first step of transformation is confusion. "What does all this mean? Exactly what is God saying?" Being Presbyterians we want clarity immediately; we want an instant fix; a pill that will cure everything and not tomorrow but today. We see issues and immediately we draw conclusions and come up immediately with solutions. Instead we get a journey that begins with clouds and fog and deep darkness. Long before the sun shines there will be clouds; long before the light illumines us there will be some deep darkness; long before there will be perfect clarity there will be the fog of obscurity. God is light and in HIM is no darkness at all. Emerge from the fog of unknowing and enter into HIS presence and there is GLORY all around; there is light; there is illumination; there is knowing. The light indeed was so bright that Moses had to cover his face with a veil. But first we have to be able to live with not knowing everything and not knowing everything perfectly and not knowing fully but knowing only in part. We have to slog our way through the fog in order to get to the top of the mountain where the sun is shining and where the presence of God's glory is. We have to live with that obscurity for a time before we get to clarity. We have to reject quick, easy answers. In order to hear God's plan we have to be willing to trust that the fog we first experience is also part of that plan –the fog requires us to ask more questions, to clarify matters more, to communicate better, to listen more, and to pray more. The fog forces us to rely on God's leading in order to get to the place God wants us to be. In the fog we may make some mis-steps, but we trust that the Lord will always get us back on the path. So real visioning in a Christian context is not just coming up with some ideas; it is journeying through the fog and into the glory of God, the place where God is and the place where God wants us to be...

By the way, lots of times we are slogging through issues in our own personal life and we sometimes in frustration ask the Lord –“God where are you in all of this? Why don’t I have clarity? Resolution? Understanding? If I just understood I could accept, but I don’t understand why this is happening to me?” It is hard sometimes to accept the deep darkness first as part of God’s plan, to accept that first we will not know, but that then we will break through into God’s glory and see the light, and understand even as we are understood...

I was listening last week intently to Pastor Emily’s sermon. When you listen with spiritual ears you hear not only what the person is saying you also hear what God is saying. You read between the lines if you will. There’s what Pastor Emily preached that we heard with our ears and then there’s what God spoke that we heard through our heart. A great sermon is like that. Listening to a sermon is a similar process to visioning in the life of the church. When she read the scripture from Luke 10 I heard something and when she again referenced it I heard it again. The passage begins with Jesus and a lawyer talking about the two tablets of the law; the lawyer begins by inquiring, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus says, what does the law say? And the lawyer responds with Jesus’ perfect summary of the law – *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”* (Luke 10: 27) This summary is the summary of the Ten Commandments, the two tablets of the law that Moses went up on the mountain to receive as the Word from God to the people of God. The first tablet is about God; the first four commandments are about God. The second tablet is about our relationship with others; the second six commandments are about others. The first tablet is spiritual –*“You shall love the Lord your God...”* The second tablet is temporal –*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself...”* One half is our spiritual relationship with the Lord, our entering into the presence of God. The other half is our relationship with those around us, our ministry to our community and world. We love God and we love our neighbor. We love Jesus and we love our world. We cannot say we love God if we do not love our neighbor; we cannot say we love our neighbor without the love of God guiding our heart. Two tablets of the law; two things taken together; two visions received by Moses as he went up to mountain and received what the people of God were to do and to be. My hunch and my hint to you all, that I believe, as we have prayed and asked God to guide us, and is God speaking to us through the Word, is that whatever vision God is laying out for us, it includes a spiritual dimension that is defining to our relationship with God and also a temporal dimension that is defining to our relationship with our neighbor, here in our community and world.

“Love God; love our neighbor.” That’s my spiritual hunch as we enter into visioning day next week.

Jesus so loved God and so loved us that He went to the cross, was crucified, dead and buried, and descended into hell...He went through the deep darkness...in order that we and those in our community and world...might have the light of life. Jesus, like Moses before Him, drew near to the deep darkness, in order that we His people might draw near to God. 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!*