

THE CLOUD MOVED
June 24, 2012 --Exodus 13: 10-22 and 14: 13-14
The Church of the Covenant

The cloud moved. I always remember the Session meeting in another church of mine where the elders were fairly evenly split on some issue; they had debated it into the ground; been forceful and compelling in their arguments; but the more they talked the more hardened they became in their positions; emotions and a little bit of anger even was evidenced. Both sides believed they were right and both sides believed they knew what God wanted us to do. We took a vote and the vote was tied –9 in favor and 9 against. Then everyone looked at me as the tie-breaker –yeah sure, that makes sense, the preacher casts the deciding ballot and in the process manages to infuriate half the session! My mama didn't raise no fool! But if you take a minute and think about it you know that they were both wrong – *obviously God's position on the matter was not yet known because if it were they would all be in agreement.* As a matter of fact my viewpoint is that if the session is divided on some matter it clearly has not yet discerned God's will. So I said, "Let's pray about it." And everyone went around and prayed and then it got to me and I must have laid it on pretty thick if you know what I mean because when we took the vote again the vote was still 9 to 9 but most of the session had switched their votes! Those who had voted "yes" now voted "no" and those who voted "no" now voted "yes"! We all laughed. As Moderator I postponed the vote until the next session meeting, where by the grace of God we were now all in agreement and the matter sailed through with no problem.

Most conflict comes about in this way. This is my opinion and that is your opinion and as long as we wrangle together on the subject trying to convince the other of the rightness of our own opinion we will never come to agreement. The task, beloved, rather is to figure out God's opinion, which is never the one or the other, but it is likely different than either. Not my opinion, not your opinion; GOD's opinion.

By contrast, the way the world does decision-making is like this. The immovable force hits into the impenetrable object, there is much debate, if it gets nasty, breaking out into name-calling and questioning the other person's Christianity. There is much behind the scenes politicking, people talking and arm-twisting and seeking to persuade outside a setting where everyone is present which is never fair, until a vote is finally taken, and the vote is 9 to 7 or 7 to 9, but one side loses and the other side wins. And somebody's feelings get hurt and they become just that little bit less active in the church, or maybe even stop coming, or maybe even start attending another church. *When its GOD's opinion, by contrast, EVERYONE wins, and that's part of how you know it is God's opinion.*

The way the world operates is THESIS (this is my opinion) countered by ANTITHESIS (this is your contrary opinion) leading first to struggle and conflict and then to a new SYNTHESIS. That, by the way, is classic MARXISM not Christianity. Unfortunately, that's the way a lot of people make their decisions.

"Well I prayed about it and I know that my opinion is what God wants us to do." Except, you didn't pray about it with me...And you didn't wait upon the Lord to answer...And you rushed the process of discernment...And you wouldn't wait for everyone to be in agreement...

The way God operates is "this is my opinion" and "that is your opinion", now let's pray about it *together* until *together* we find God's opinion. Until we get to that spiritual agreement then we know the time is not right even to make a decision, let alone what the decision should be. *God's TIMING is always perfect, and that's part of how you know it is God's opinion.*

I heard a sermon several years ago on the people of Israel following the Lord God in the wilderness. They packed their bags every morning. They were ready to move when God moved. Spiritual discernment is active not passive. *"Here I am, Lord, send me; Here I am, Lord, use me; Here I am, Lord, I set aside my own personal agendas and my own personal opinions in order to find out YOUR will for my life."* They arose the next morning and if the cloud in the sky remained in the same place, they stayed where they were. They went to bed the next night, all packed and ready to move, and if when they got up the next morning the cloud had moved, they moved with it. When God moves, you move. When God doesn't move you don't move. As Exodus notes *"The Lord went before them by day, in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way..." (Exodus 13: 21)* The Lord guided their steps; step by step; day by day. Don't move until the cloud moves; don't take matters into your own hands; wait upon the Lord and your steps will be in line with the will of God. So Pharaoh's army now is pursuing the people of God and is backing them up to the Red Sea; Pharaoh's army in front of them and the Red Sea behind them. They are trapped and doomed, or so it seems. And an opinion emerges from the people, they want to go back to Egypt, they want to surrender and go back into slavery. They say: *"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* (Exodus 14: 12) There's your one opinion. (By the way, there are people, when things get a little dicey in the church who would abandon their church and abandon their faith and go back into spiritual bondage of the world rather than to trust the Lord Jesus Christ implicitly to lead them and guide them to new life and victory! It would be easier just to be done with all this church stuff and disagreement and to sit and read my newspaper like the rest of the world does on Sunday morning!) Don't be fooled –the church and all its imperfections are far, far better than slavery and bondage to this world.

By the way, the cloud that the Israelites followed was the glory of the Lord; the shekina glory shrouded in a cloud; the Living presence of the Living Lord God Almighty was present in that cloud. *God's presence always leads God's people.* To Experience God is to experience God's leading in our life. Step by step and day by day –does the cloud move? Then move. Does the cloud remain still? Then be still and don't move and know that God is God.

So the glory of the Lord moves directly between the people of God and the evil that Pharaoh is intending upon those people. The cloud stands between the people of God and any harm coming to them when they follow the Lord. And the Red sea parts and the people of God are saved. Moses said: *"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord today...The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still."* (Exodus 14: 13-14) Be still and know the will of God. Be still and know the opinion of God. Be still and know the presence of God. Be still and experience God. *"Be still and know that I am God"*, says the Lord God Almighty!

I took that sermon to heart –when the cloud moves you move; when the cloud doesn't move, don't move. And I was praying about my next call into ministry. I was beginning to despair that the Lord would call me to be a permanent pastor ever again. It was not on my heart to serve as an interim pastor over and over again. So I prayed and I prayed. And a couple of very enticing churches came looking at me and extended calls to me. Big church and big salary. I should have given my eye teeth to go to them. But the cloud didn't move. So I didn't move. That one spring in the church I was serving as interim we hosted a gigantic event filled with spiritual power and significance. 600 people came every day. I thought to myself, "Lord, maybe you want me to stay here and be the permanent pastor. Maybe you are calling me here, right where I am." And I got up bright and early that Monday morning, all excited about praying and just so sure that the Lord was going to call me to that church. But to my shock, I got up that morning and the cloud had moved. The Holy Spirit had left. The presence of God had moved on. I was stunned. And would it shock you then that in short order, the pulpit committee of

that church focused in on someone who they were then to call? And would it shock you to know that within less than two months later the pulpit committee here at The Church of the Covenant called me on the phone and began the discussion of bringing me here to The Church of the Covenant? And when they called me on the phone that very first time, something in my spirit leapt up for joy within me. I knew in my heart that the cloud had moved and that the cloud had moved to Washington, PA

Five years of waiting upon the Lord. Five years of praying. Five years of turning down other churches. Five years of being far more patient than I ever cared to be. Five years of waiting and then the cloud moved...and brought me here to be your pastor. Praise God. The cloud moved.

Two opinions. Christian decision-making. Moses said by the Red Sea –“*You have only to be still...*” Be still and know, not only the will of God, but the person of God, present in His Son, Jesus Christ, and present through the Living Presence of the Holy Spirit. And then and only then will you know what to do. 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!*