

THE GREAT EMERGENCE
Lenten Sermon Series: From Old to New
First Sunday of Lent –February 17, 2013 – Hebrews 1: 1-4
The Church of the Covenant

Phyllis Tickle, a Church historian, has written an important book, entitled *The Great Emergence*. In it, she argues from an historical perspective that God does a very new thing every 500 years. She traces this back to 2,000 B.C. and the calling of Abraham, through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to the fall of Rome and the onset of the Dark Ages in 500 A.D., to the schism between the Eastern and Western churches in 1,000 A.D. to the Protestant Reformation in 1500 A.D. Each of these are times when as she notes, “The institutionalized religion is shattered and a new more vital expression emerges.” The old ideas and ways of being lose their power to compel people to faith and action. The old ways of being cease to have an impact on their society and world. And in the midst of this God does a new thing –places a new song within the heart of His people. –the One, Jesus Christ, who notes, “Behold, I make all things NEW” enters into the world again in power and the church and society itself is revived and revived and enlivened. Just like the way the Protestant Reformation revived the church 500 years ago another Great Emergence can revive the church again. 500 years from the Protestant Reformation is TODAY. The point of this is, of course, that we are due, we are long OVERDUE for another GREAT EMERGENCE.

In order to understand what might emerge I think we need to consider just how tired and worn out are some of the presumptions of the 500 year old Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation melded the Enlightenment with faith, suggested that everyone could read the Bible and everyone would draw the same conclusion where scripture was concerned. The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, was applied to the Bible. You could reform society by using reason and the scientific method; you could apply reason to faith and everyone would understand and understand exactly the same thing. This is why we are referred to as being in a Post Enlightenment age. If you haven’t noticed everyone doesn’t read scripture the same and conclude the same things anymore. The secular world places no authority in God’s Word; the church itself cannot agree on exactly what it means; fewer and fewer people study it to discern what God would have them do. The Reformed Faith of which we are a part says that you can only have a saving knowledge of God through the scriptures. How many people here read the Bible this past week in order to have a saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ revealed only in scripture? We may say we believe in the Bible but functionally speaking we do not believe that it is the only way to understand God anymore...I always think of the picture of the 1,600 men gathered to study the Bible on a weekly basis at the Tuesday Noon Men’s Group at First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh; today if there are 20 it’s a good day. The Enlightenment as a force to empower our society has run its course. Much of Christianity and Protestantism today is just a rearguard action trying to reinforce the Enlightenment.

Our society has become, as it is referred to, as Post-Modern. It has become broadly skeptical in relation to all things. There is a subjectivism present, which is to say that we can pick and choose what we believe and since it only applies to ourselves anyway we can pick and choose whatever we want. It entails relativism, which is to say, what applies to you doesn’t apply to me; nothing is authoritative; what you believe doesn’t hold any sway over me; what is true is only true in this moment, not to any time following. And Post Modernism holds a very deep suspicion of reason. A Christianity that is tied only to the Enlightenment, to The Age of Reason, to that which propelled the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago, will not be able to connect with a Post Modern world.

In Phyllis Tickle's book she quotes this statement: *"About every 500 years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale."* It casts off things that don't work anymore; it reappropriates things that do. It can look at something like the Enlightenment as it truly is—a purely secular viewpoint that worked for a time but can now be put out on the discount table at the church rummage sale. Reason is not Faith and the Enlightenment is not Christianity. And as we become more and more desperate to hold onto it, we become less and less able to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. And just like a rummage sale, those things which still have great value remain; the previous things of value are "reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self."

The Book of Hebrews is a book in the Bible that details going from the Old to the New. It is trying to explain to people who are Jewish what is the significance of Jesus Christ. There are the Old Covenants and now there is the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. There is the Old Testament and now there is the New Testament. There was Temple worship and high priests, but now there is but one high Priest and this is Jesus. There were the many sacrifices made of animals in the Temple but now there has been the one, all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Our scripture for today refers to that GREAT EMERGENCE through Jesus Christ and puts it this way—*"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son..."* (Hebrews 1: 1) In the Old Testament times God spoke through the written law and through the prophets, but now God is speaking through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I think that what is emerging in a Post Enlightenment, Post Modern Church is an experiential faith, one in which we experience the actual living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That Jesus Himself leads and guides and directs the Church, that HE speaks into the hearts of His people, we as His sheep hear His voice, and come to a saving knowledge of Him through His presence, power and love made manifest through the Holy Spirit alive within. God speaks through the SON. As it goes on to say, He, Jesus, upholds the universe by *"his word of power"*. (v. 3) The word of God, Jesus Christ, speaks to His people, confirmed by the Word written, and the Word made flesh. It is a new mysticism, it is experiential and it opens us up to the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct leading of Jesus Christ in the church. We know Jesus through what He speaks into our heart; we wait upon Him and as His Church seek to hear and discern God's voice, "spoken to us by (His) Son".

I think you will want to come to church throughout Lent as Pastor Emily and I share a sermon series on the Book of Hebrews and as we contemplate together the new thing that God is doing...for which we are long overdue...let us wait upon the Lord and seek the voice of His Son...that we might experience for ourselves the next GREAT EMERGENCE in our lifetime...

Word of God, speak. Word of God, speak. In many and various ways God spoke of old...but in these last days He has spoke to us by a Son...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!*