

**THE MISSIONAL CHURCH**  
**January 6, 2013 –Communion –Hebrews 13: 7-16**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

Where did Jesus do most of His ministry when He walked the dusty roads of the Holy Land 2,000 years ago? Where was He crucified? For whom did He teach, live, die and was raised from the dead? Very little of His ministry was conducted inside the temple or synagogue. Very little of His ministry was conducted to religious insiders. And almost every bit of His ministry was conducted outside the gates. By contrast, I think of my own ministry over the past 30 years –almost all of it conducted to church people, to our own children, involved in our own programs. I have lived a life in a very rarified atmosphere of church people, within the context of the church, within the walls of the church. If Jesus spent 95% of His time ministering to people outside the gate, then I have spent 95% of my time ministering to people inside the gate.

To be a “missional church” is to spend more time ministering to those outside in the community who are not yet insiders to the love of God as we are and less time ministering to those inside the walls of the church. How are we more engaged with our community out there and less engaged with the preservation of the institution of the church, more missionally minded and less committee attending, more of our selves extended to those in our city who need the love of Jesus Christ?

Our scripture from the New Testament book of Hebrews speaks of “outside the camp” and “outside the gate” (Hebrews 13: 11, 12, 13). The first reference is to the Hebrew people; as they traversed through the wilderness those “inside the camp” were the Israelites and those “outside the camp” were not; they were of the nations. Israel was holy to God; the nations were not. Then there is the phrase “outside the gate”. This means outside the Holy city of Jerusalem. Those who dwell within the gate are HOLY to the Lord; those outside not. So we have references to two sets of people –one to “insiders” and one to “outsiders”. Jesus’ ministry was to bring outsiders inside; to move people who were outside the camp of God to be inside the camp of God; outside the Holy city to inside the Holy city.

The basic model of being church that the mainline church has adopted and continues to hold onto with great desperation is this –We have a great building and wonderful worship and great music and a fair to middling preacher and some great programs, and we open the door of the church on Sunday mornings and expect the world to roll in and fill up the pews. Darrel Guder, Princeton Seminary professor and author of the book, “The Missional Church”, makes the point that this model isn’t working, people are not flocking to sit in church pews anymore, the world is becoming more and more secular and the church is getting more and more out of touch with its world. The rapid decline of the Protestant church over the past 30 years is in direct proportion to its unwillingness to adopt a new model of being church and holding onto an old model that quite clearly isn’t working any more. Where are the 20 year olds and where are the 30 year olds? They are not at all into preserving the institution of the church; they are into making a difference with their lives in doing good in their community. Not only do we need to get outside ourselves in order to be connected with our community but we need to become more missional in order to connect with generations of younger potential Christians who want to spend their time doing good rather than sitting in church meetings.

We are about to enter into a time of spiritual discernment leading to new strategic initiatives for us as a congregation. We can generate a lot of ideas that make being inside the church better; that make “my experience in my church better”. Or we can generate ideas that connect us to ministry in our community; we can become more inward looking or we can become more outward in our focus. It is my

opinion that those churches who do not make important decisions to become more missional TODAY will not be around in 20 or 30 years. I would like to be clear about some things. I am not saying we shouldn't do those internal ministry things, nor deemphasize them; I am just saying there should be a balance between inside ministry and outside ministry. And I am not being critical of The Church of the Covenant. Indeed, I believe that not only is being missional already in the DNA of this congregation, but I believe this is a church, unlike so many others, that can be and become a more missional church.

So what does the Book of Hebrews say about all this? It says, *"Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."* (Hebrews 13: 12) In a very profound prophetic event Jesus was killed, not within the gate, not within the camp, but OUTSIDE the gate and OUTSIDE the camp. HE died for the people OUTSIDE the gate and OUTSIDE the camp in order that sins might be forgiven and those outside the gate and outside the camp might be reconciled to God through the power in His blood. Jesus sacrificed in order that those outside might be brought inside into the very heart of God's love. Then, it goes on to say, *"Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him."* (v. 13) We are to go outside the walls of our church and out into our community, we are to connect with other churches not just Presbyterian ones, we are to engage our community and people who do not yet believe in a Holy mission and we are to be willing to sacrifice ourselves, just as Jesus has done, in order to do it. What else does it say? It says, *"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come."* (v. 14) We are not here to play church; we are here to seek a lasting city that comes from God. We are not just here to make a difference in people's lives within the four walls of this church; we are here to make a lasting difference in the city of Washington, not the way it is, but the way it can become. Because of Jesus' sacrificial death upon the cross, we are to go out into the world and sacrifice as well, and we are to make a difference in our city. For we are seeking the city which is to come. When we seek the city which is to come we become the missional church.

So I invite you today as we receive communion together to ask God questions –"Lord, what does it mean that Jesus died, not just for those within the gate, but also for those outside the gate of our church?" "Lord, what does it mean that we, like Jesus, are to go outside the camp in order to do ministry in Jesus' name?" "Lord, how can we seek a city which is to come, a Washington that is a reflection of the fact that Your Son Jesus Christ lived and preached and ministered and died and was resurrected outside the gate...in order to bring those outsiders INSIDE, not only the gate, but INSIDE the place of Your love and mercy and grace?"

*"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."* 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!*