

**THE OFFENSE OF PREACHING**  
**April 14, 2013 –Galatians 1: 6-12**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

Periodically, I reflect about the nature and meaning of preaching. It really is an absurd act in a way. I honestly believe that faith comes from preaching and that events 2,000 years ago are brought to the present through the act of preaching and people's lives are actually touched and transformed by it.

I always remember the one church where a totally stone deaf woman operated the sound system and one of her tasks was to record the message on tapes that would be sent to the homebound. I had noticed that the tape requests had fallen off markedly so when I was visiting one of the homebound she said, "Rather than try to tell you why people aren't requesting tapes let me show you." And she played a tape on her tape recorder. Well, the frugal Presbyterians had recorded over myriads and myriads of former sermons and what was produced was something like this –(demonic gibberish) Jesus –(more demonic gibberish) God. And because the woman who taped it was deaf, of course, she was unable to hear it. I think preaching is a lot like a Far Side cartoon I saw once where there were two frames in the cartoon, the first being, what you say to your dog, "Good girl, Ginger, Good girl, Ginger..." And the second frame is, what your dog hears, "Bla-bla-bla, Ginger. Bla-bla-bla, Ginger." Most of the times preaching feels like the second frame, not the first. One of the reasons we know there is a God is because out of the utter foolishness of preaching somehow God still speaks to human hearts and people have faith. The way I Corinthians puts it: *"It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."* (I Corinthians 1: 21)

Of course there are always fun disruptions during the sermon over the years. I remember the bird who flew into the sanctuary and was dive bombing the choir in the balcony in the back. They were sort of doing the wave –"Wo-Wo-Wo!" I felt like Gladys Knight and the Pips were the choir (no comment needed here). But the bird wound up in the flowers directly in front of the pulpit. Trust me, no one was listening to my sermon and everyone was waiting in eager anticipation for the moment when the bird would take flight to become a troubler of Israel again. I was taught in seminary that you draw attention to something and then people can refocus. So it was then I uttered the immortal line –"A bird in the flowers is worth two in the choir." We hope, of course, that the bird that descends during a sermon is the heavenly dove of the Holy Spirit. I remember the Dauschund, the little weiner dog, that entered through an open door, walked up the center aisle of the church during the sermon and stood there, cocking its head from side to side, like it was trying to understand the message but couldn't. To much amusement in Presbyterian-ville it exited without converting to Christ. I noted that it being German it obviously was a LUTHERAN dog! And then I remember here not too long ago when I was asked by the Executive Presbyter in Washington Presbytery to preach at a presbytery meeting, the first time in 30 years. I had an assigned topic, "The Maintenance of Divine Worship", one of the great ends of the church. And as I was preaching my cell phone went off in my left pocket...the side closest to the Executive Presbyter...while I was preaching about the maintenance of divine worship. Maybe I should have taken the call because maybe it was from God! As I Corinthians states: *"The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (I Corinthians 1: 25)

Of course then there are the major bloopers within the sermon itself. I like to say "not, not" too often in my sentence construction, so the Sunday I said, "If we were not, not raised with Christ, then we would not, not be with the Lord forever." A man came up after church and asked, "Preacher, did you just suggest that we are not, not, not going to heaven?" Or there was the sermon where I had the great phrase "the condescension of Christ" in it, meaning that Jesus condescended to come down from His

lofty position in heaven to die on a cross for us, and I couldn't get the word Condensation out of my mind. The more I tried to say "condescension" the more I said "condensation". The more I tried to say Christ came down from heaven, the more I said He was covered with dew. Or then there was the time in the middle of the sermon I got confused and in the story of Cain and Able in the Old Testament I reversed Cain for Able and Able for Cain. I guess, Cain slew whoever he wanted to...because he was "able". As I Corinthians states: *"God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."* (I Corinthians 1: 27)

Of course, then there are the great comments in the line after church. There was a man, a lawyer, who evidently didn't like my sermon illustration using Forrest Gump. He said to me: "Forrest Gump is a movie FOR idiots about idiots." Well, how do you really feel about that? So just like a box of chocolates you never quite know what comment you'll get in line after the sermon. I remember the man who said that I had preached a political sermon when quite literally I hadn't mentioned it at all and even when I showed him the text of my sermon all he said was, "I know what you were REALLY saying." I have learned after church when you make a comment to say either just "thank you" or "Praise the Lord". I remember the man who kept notebooks filled with sermon notes and he came up to me after church one Sunday and said, "You used the same Bible text on March 2<sup>nd</sup> two years ago and by the way it was a better sermon the first time." Why "thank you"; "Praise the Lord!". I Corinthians states: *"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ...in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom."* (I Corinthians 1: 20, 21)

And then there was a man in a former church who made an appointment with me to complain about the children's message. He came into my office loaded for bear. He was angry and irate. The Director of Children's Ministry had made, what I thought, was an entirely age-appropriate message on Jesus and the cross and the blood of Jesus. And the man almost shouted at me: "My wife and I try to shield our children from graphic images of violence. We thought we were safe at church. How dare she share that with our children?" I was stunned to silence. Another man made an appointment with me to tell me that "We don't want to hear about the love of Jesus anymore." I was stunned to silence. A woman made an appointment with me to complain and said: "All you preach about is God and Jesus and prayer and the Bible. I want something relevant for my life!". I kept thinking: How sad that Jesus isn't relevant for your life. But all she got was more stunned silence.

Preaching the Word of God has at its core folly and a lack of wisdom. I don't preach the New York Times. I don't preach psychology or some book I read. **We preach Christ crucified.** This is a stumbling block to those who are perishing. Preaching is not a lecture and it is not oratory. The cross and the blood are offensive to us all who realize that it is our sin that nailed a guiltless Savior there. It is a graphic image of violence and why it is particularly offensive is because it is one we caused. I'm not the preacher; God is the preacher. And God takes any preacher's foolish, inadequate words, and through the Holy Spirit, preaches them to the heart of those who are being saved.

No offense, please, but I'm not here to please you; I'm here to please God. Each Sunday I have an audience of One. As our scripture text from Galatians states: *"If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ."* (Galatians 1: 10) Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim! 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!*