

THE ROAD MAPS ARE GONE

**Exodus 13: 1 ff to Exodus 14: 1 ff –January 20, 2013 –Ordination/Installation/ Congregational Meeting
The Church of the Covenant**

The ancient Israelites almost had the precursor to a Global Positioning System or GPS. When they fled Egypt as slaves and Moses cried out, "Let my people go!", God led them through the wilderness by cloud and fire. I have a Garmin that I use to find people's homes when I visit. You don't think you rely on something too much until it breaks. It broke about two months ago. Now I seem incapable of following even the simplest written directions. I mean, you've seen it; some people walk around the streets with their mobile application of a GPS in their smart phone (and why is my phone smarter than I am?) telling them where to walk. Mark my words, the day will come when people will not be able to find their own way on the street if their GPS is broken. Here in the last year I decided I would like a printed map of the Pittsburgh area. Have you ever tried to find a regular map for sale today? I think we may have lived through the ultimate demise of regular printed paper maps; GPS systems have replaced them. The Road Maps are gone.

Pittsburgh Presbytery had hired a consultant to help the church adjust to its new environment. His name was Alan Roxborough and he made the same point over and over again. He would say, "The Road Maps Are Gone." And what he meant by this was that everything that we knew about what it meant to "BE Church" doesn't work anymore. In the 1950's to BE Church a church would have a beautiful building, a great choir, a wonderful Christian Ed program, good fellowship dinners, a nice parking lot, etc., etc., etc. and all these things taken together were the roadmap of being a successful church. A plus B plus C equals a successful church. You'd open the doors on Sunday morning and when you did all these things the world would show up for church. His point was that today we could do all these things and the world would not show up on our doorstep. A plus B plus C does not equal successful church anymore. The roadmaps are gone. In seminary I was basically taught how to be the manager of a successful non-profit corporation; how to manage the programs of a church successfully. Except today you can do everything right, you can follow all the old roadmaps, you can work tirelessly, but, beloved they just won't lead you to the Promised Land anymore. The church is stuck in the wilderness of decline and the old roadmaps don't work anymore.

I've read all those church self-help books. You know, "The Purpose Driven Church", the Willow Creek Model, etc., etc., etc. I've taken many courses on strategic planning and how to do secular planning in the context of church. They sort of suggest if you just do things like a big, successful church does them in California or Chicago then everything will be alright. Except that doesn't work either. Just bigger church with bigger programs and more people is no solution; because a mega church largely just takes people out of other churches; and the community has LESS Christians and LESS churches in it ultimately as a result; and by the way they seem incapable of reversing 30 years of moral decline in the nation. Can a church be big and impressive looking but have little or no impact on its community and world? Yep. Those self help books are not roadmaps; and by the way what works in Southern California doesn't work in Washington, PA. The things that purport to be new roadmaps aren't. And may I say, that the only Self Help Book we need is the BIBLE; Jesus is the Roadmap and the Truth and the Life. HE is the WAY. The only Global Positioning System we need is a GOD positioning system. Because when man's roadmaps don't work anymore then we have to pray and seek God's will and the leading of the Holy Spirit. When the roadmaps are gone it is then the church must reject every easy solution, pray fervently and cry out to God. No rehashing of what worked 30 years ago will be the new roadmap. That's where we are, beloved. That's the state of the church in our nation today. Because when the roadmaps are gone then it is we must have God HIMSELF lead us.

Our scripture for today is from Exodus and may I say that the church today is like the people of God then –scrambling out in the wilderness and holding on for dear life and in search of a new Promised Land that only God can provide. So God led Moses to lead the people out of bondage in Egypt; Pharaoh is the spiritual metaphor for prideful humanity unbowed to the will of God; Egypt is secular America today seeking to keep the church in bondage; the wilderness is where we presently are as the church; the Promised Land is the spiritual metaphor for the revived, restored and renewed church, a church flowing with the milk and honey of the Holy Spirit. The people are led by God quite literally, God sends a cloud and fire to lead the people of God. And God positions them right on the shore of the Red Sea, with their backs to water; with no place to run. And Pharaoh decides he has had quite enough of the people of God so he sends his troops to kill them in the wilderness. Willful, prideful, heart far at a distance from God, secular humanity is always offended by the people of God. And a large dust cloud must have arisen from all of Pharaoh's chariots, the thundering of his armies among the mightiest in the world at that time, could be heard by Israel in the distance. Their back was to the sea and Pharaoh's murderous armies to their front; there was no escape. Its where the church is today. And the people cry out, Moses why have you led us to this place of death? –wouldn't it be better to go back to Egypt as slaves? *"For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* (Exodus 14: 13) No going back will get us to the Promised Land; only going forward. And I will never be a slave to the secular world; I will only ever be a bondservant of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For when Jesus sets us free then we are FREE INDEED!

O Church, when our back is up against the sea and before us is a murderous secular army and there is nowhere else to go. We must trust GOD to deliver us. We must humble ourselves; we must give up all of our old roadmaps, suppositions and easy answers. We must let go and we must let God. When you get to the end of your rope you've got to tie a knot in it, trust God, and hold on. And we must humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face and seek God's leading. We want a plan; we need a Savior. We want a visioning day; we need God's vision. We want a clear roadmap; we need to pray and the Holy Spirit will give us just the next step. Please note, that in this story of the parting of the Red Sea that it is God who has positioned the people of God exactly where they are, right between a rock and a hard place, and that He has positioned them exactly where they are in order that they absolutely, positively know that they must rely upon HIM and HIM alone for their salvation. For it is always God's leading that gets the people of God to the Promised Land. We don't just want to be a better church, or a bigger church, or a church like some other church. We want to be the church that God uses to get the people to the Promised Land.

Today, men and women are being called to leadership in the church as elders and deacons. So hear the words spoken by Moses to the people, right before God's great power parted the sea, saved the people, and led them toward the Promised Land. This is God's charge to you today. Moses said to them: *"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today..."* (Exodus 14: 13) And then Moses goes on to say: *"The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still."* (Exodus 14: 14) *Be still and know that God is God...Pray and seek His face and we will find Him...*

The chaos of the Red Sea is behind us and the murderous Egyptians are in front of us. But the Lord will find a way where there seems to be no way. The roadmaps are gone. GOOD. That means we have to be led, not by roadmaps of the past, but by GOD. Because the power of the sea behind us and the power of the Egyptians before us, is nothing by comparison to the power at work within us. 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!*