

THE TIPPING POINT
September 16, 2012 –I Corinthians 15: 51-58
The Church of the Covenant

In the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to push an impossibly heavy stone to the top of a hill every day. Every day he would almost get it to the top of the hill. Through struggling and suffering and herculean effort the great boulder would inch by inch make its way up the rocky face of the side of the mountain. He'd almost get it to the top, but the day would end, he would fall asleep exhausted. And Sisyphus would awaken the next morning to discover the great stone had rolled itself down the hill and he would have to start all over again. Ever feel like you're Sisyphus? Ever feel like the tasks in life never get to the top of the hill? Ever feel like it's the same thing, day in and day out? Albert Camus, the great existential philosopher, adapted the Myth of Sisyphus and wrote an essay on it noting the absurdity of human life. So is that all there is? We roll a stone up the side of a mountain only to discover it back in the valley the next day and then we die. Or is there more than that to the efforts of our life?

I remember the one church I served and how every day it was hard and difficult, never an easy day, work like a dog and still feel far behind by the end of the day. No one appreciated anything. The only thing that church did well was criticism. Whatever you did wasn't enough and wasn't good enough and some previous preacher would have done it better. Every morning I'd get up to discover the "stone" at the bottom of the hill. By the end of the day, it never had gone over the top. Day in and day out, it never changed. And it wore me down. You know how optimistic I am. I mean I really believe the Pirates are going to win the pennant! I really believe politicians are going to stop using attack ads! I really do believe that people are going to stop voting for politicians who use attack ads! I am sort of Pollyanna skipping down the garden path, after all. But it even discouraged me. And I gave up hope. And then I gave up trying. It's a sad thing when you never think there's ever going to be a real breakthrough, when the stone is never going to tip over to the other side of the mountain, and begin to move with a momentum and speed all its own.

I think in a way the church of Jesus Christ is in a "myth of Sisyphus" moment. It's not the 1950's and 1960's anymore; you cannot just open the doors of the church and expect people to flood in. In the 1950's if you had a fair to middlin' preacher and a pretty good choir, and some fine Christian Ed programs, people would beat a path to your door. Not so today. Today it is much more like trying to roll a huge rock up hill, only to discover that the two steps forward you took yesterday, became three steps backward tomorrow.

If so for the church, how much more so for our lives. We may have a whole host of labor saving devices but life is just plain hard today. Nothing seems to be easy. Nothing seems to go as planned. And you wake up the next morning, tired and a little discouraged, only to discover the rock at the foot of the mountain once again. Life is hard. Life is discouraging. Life is draining. Is that all there is?????

I read a book entitled "The Tipping Point" by Malcolm Gladwell, a few years back. It explains to me in more secular terms what I have also experienced in spiritual and religious terms. There are indeed times of breakthrough, spiritually and otherwise in life and in church and in our community. There are times of transformation. There are times when the boulders of life seem to fly up and over the mountain with an energy all their own. There are times when a person, and a people, and a church and a community "catch fire", become amazingly effective at doing everything, have a spirit of optimism and hope that is catching and unstoppable. Gladwell refers to this as an "epidemic"; it increases

geometrically and without stopping; it infects everyone, but not with a disease, but with an infectious enthusiasm. All that seemed impossible now becomes possible. The stone becomes light, not heavy. The tasks become joy not burdensome. We look forward to awakening in the morning just to see what God is going to do in, around and through us today. It's the opposite of the absurdity of life. It's the opposite of discouragement and disempowerment. It is the opposite of telling ourselves what we CANNOT DO. It is exciting. It is renewing. As a Christian, I believe it is the working of the Holy Spirit through a people to make transformational, lasting changes and in ways that make significant differences in people's lives. It is the opposite of being CONFORMED to this world; it is being "TRANSFORMED by the renewing of our minds", as the Bible says (Romans 12: 2).

That breakthrough moment is THE TIPPING POINT. It is the moment where the stone rolls over the crest of the hill and picks up speed and becomes unstoppable. It is a fully alive moment. It is a deeply spiritual moment. It is a phenomenally powerful moment –it is all about what WE CAN DO. Who wants to be fully and completely alive today? Who wants their discouragement to be replaced with JOY and with HOPE? Who wants to be used by God to do something truly significant with their lives? Who wants to make a difference for Jesus' sake?

Or do you just want to keep pushing the stone up the hill –endlessly, without point or meaning?

Our scripture speaks of being "*steadfast and immovable*". (1 Corinthians 15: 58) It means we are not to give up hope; we are not to be discouraged in our life. How often, beloved, we stop trying right at the very moment when we are about to have our greatest breakthrough. We turn and walk away right when we are about to push that stone over the hill. When other people are going to see things as we see them. Other people are going to possess the "contagion" we possess –the ideas and the faith and the Spirit and Jesus our Savior who gives us life. Someone here may be being tempted to give up trying on something they are facing in their life. They may be saying to themselves: "I've done enough; I've believed when no one else has believed; I'm down, I'm discouraged; I've done more than anyone else could ever expect of me." Don't give up. Have faith. Believe. The stone is about to fly over the hill and when it does you're going to see what God is capable of doing in your life. Never give up. Never, ever, no never ever, give up. The moment of breakthrough is just ahead; the TIPPING POINT is just over the next hill.

And our scripture urges us to "*always be abounding in the work of the Lord.*" (v. 58) "Abounding" is such a wonderful word in the Greek. It is *periseuonthes*. Abounding means transformation that is contagious, infectious, unstoppable. Abounding means spiritual change that is done in the heart of the believer, that breaks out into the heart of the church, that breaks out into the heart of the community. Abounding means its force is geometrical –two people, to four people, to eight people, to 16 people, to 31 people, to 62 people, and so on and so on an so on, until more and more people believe that transformation is indeed not just possible but indeed is actually happening. This "abounding moment" spiritually speaking is the same moment as the TIPPING POINT. The very meaning of the word abounding in the Greek means going up and up and up and up and up, endlessly upward, abounding with such love and joy and power, and in such a way that propels the weighty stone of life we face inextricably upward, and over the other side of the mountain. The TIPPING POINT –we can be steadfast and immovable and never give up, because we are abounding in the work of the Lord.

And it doesn't take everybody in the congregation to get it, to understand and to agree. It doesn't take everybody in a community to be on board and to support it for it to happen. Gladwell is right: it perhaps takes only 15% of an entity, a congregation, a family, a community to have this breakthrough,

to move from discouragement to hope, to move from doubting to faith, to move from depression and inaction to wild excitement and fully living life as God intended it to be. You just have to keep pushing the stone up the mountain until just maybe 15% of the people “get it”, and once they “get it” it becomes unstoppable; it becomes a new reality; it becomes the new story replacing all the old stories of hopelessness and decline and death and malaise we have so often come to believe is real. I want to be part of that kind of church. I want to be part of that kind of a community. Don't you?

Don't buy into hopelessness and despair. Don't accept the cynicism and absurdity of life. Don't become part of the problem and buy into spiritual malaise and depression. Don't buy what the world is selling. Buy the hope that we always have in the Lord God Almighty, a hope that never disappoints, a hope that is held for us eternally and in the heavens.

Hold onto the TIPPING POINT, the moment when our lives and our church and our community are abounding with all the good things the Lord wants to bless us with. Abounding spiritually in Christ Jesus our Lord –its right there before us, just over the hill. I can see it. I can hear it. I almost feel I could reach out and touch it. Can you??????

He has come that we might have LIFE and have it ABUNDANTLY! 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!**