

**ITS NOT ABOUT ME**  
**November 17, 2013 –John 3: 16-23 –Dedication of OCC**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

Anyone been reading about the new rage –“the selfie” –a mania for taking pictures of oneself? We have so many compact cameras and practically every cell phone has a camera in it now. We simply hold the camera out ourselves and take a picture of our most favorite subject. Here I am in front of the Taj Mahal –you can almost see the white dome given as a love gift for Mem Taz Mahal emerging out from behind my left ear. Here is a picture of me at the Washington Monument; you can slightly observe the top of the monument protruding out the top of my pointed little head. Here I am with the President; of course you cannot see him because all you can see is my own big, fat face! We seem to be taking pictures of our own most favorite subject –ME!. In our society and culture today we focus on that which we think is most important; we focus the lens of our life on the very thing we love most –ME! To push the metaphor to the extreme –we create graven images of the thing we worship, serve and adore most in life –ME! And then, of course, post them on Facebook for all the world to see. Just in case they haven’t yet figured out how self-centered I am, post it on Facebook and remove any doubt. Selfies –the watchword of today’s culture; selfies –Idolatry, most foul.

But I think it is a fair expression of the sin of our world today –I am focusing the lens of my life on ME; I am not focusing the lens of my life on others; I am not focusing the lens of my life on my world; I am not focusing the lens of my life on God. By the way, how you know whether you are focusing your lens on God is precisely whether your lens is focused outward or inward –whether your life is the focus of your life or whether the need in the world is the focus of your life.

I have shared with you before how when I was in the largest most prestigious church I have served, inside the Beltway, just outside Washington, D.C, that I had a rude spiritual reawakening and woke up one morning to discover that all of my life and ministry was indeed just about ME. I worked endless hours and if you had asked me I would have given the proper Calvinist response that I did it all for the glory of God. But I sat in my beautiful office overlooking a rose garden, thinking deep thoughts, doing this and that, but producing absolutely no fruit for the Kingdom of God. I was surrounded by a beautiful sanctuary and supported by a 90 voice choir and 600 people a Sunday would show up to hear what ME had to say. I began to believe my own press releases. My messages rang strangely hollow; they lacked spiritual power. And one morning I got up and was praying and the line from Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, kept echoing throughout my heart –“Its not about me.” But it was; it was all about me. It is the cautionary tale of someone trying to do good that nevertheless had turned everything inside out and had made it about me. And I came up with a little shibboleth, a little phrase, which I repeat to God often. I say to the Lord: “It isn’t about me, Lord.” “Its about you, Lord.” That one insight led me to resign from that church, to go on a wild spiritual journey, and that has led me here to you and to The Church of the Covenant. By the way, no one is really happy when their whole life is just one big SELFIE; we are only truly happy in life when indeed, Its not about ME –Its about YOU, Lord.

I remember back in college they asked for a picture to post in the Freshmen Directory, referred to as the “Face Book”. I didn’t have the right size picture, so I ignored the directions and sent in a slightly larger picture. Unbeknowst to me, if someone didn’t send a picture they put a random baby picture in for them. But for me the editors of the Face Book did something extra special; they cropped the photo with scissors to fit. So my picture was of a giant FACE in a small space. I looked like I was peering out from a porthole. And my entire freshman year people would say, “Oh, you’re FRESHMAN FACE!” When we don’t read *God’s* instruction book, we wind up with a giant, fat-faced SELFIE!

And then I'd love to say that now I have it all figured out and I completely live my life for God. But I have to admit, rather, that self-centeredness is insidious, that idolatry just morphs and changes in our life, that it is a constant struggle to move from self to God, to die to self and to live for God, to truly make our life more and more about others and less and less about ourselves. Case in point –when I first came to The Church of the Covenant I went on the Fellowship of Concern, the prayer ministry of the church, where one received an Email about a prayer need submitted through the church. Immediately, I became bombarded with prayer needs; every day my inbox felt flooded with prayer requests and from a boatload of people, some of whom I knew and some of whom I did not know. And a lot of prayer requests were about people a long way away and about matters that didn't directly concern me. I became resentful that my inbox was jammed with need. Who are these people and why should I care about them? I only want the prayer needs of my own congregation; I want to know when MY people are hurting and need prayer; I don't even need to know that great Aunt Margaret in Paducah has lumbago. I was resentful because I had made my prayer life about ME, and my family, and my church family. My prayers were a SELFIE directed at me. Case in point –the pastoral prayer during worship; I would make it about these great interior spiritual castles of the soul, the struggles within, the prayers for our own people, what I thought were the pastoral concerns of a pastoral prayer. But why isn't the city of Washington our pastoral field? Why don't we say with the great Methodist John Wesley, "the world is my parish."? Why didn't we pray for mission needs? Because even my prayer life was so self-centered; it was about my needs and what I wanted to happen; it was about my family and their needs; it was about my church family and their illnesses, sadnesses, loss and pain. But it wasn't about the world; it was about ME. Case in point –for years I always made the church budget about ME –we need to make certain OUR building is maintained; we need great programs for OUR kids; we need soaring worship for OUR people...and then there is that part of the budget that is given away, is completely for someone else, benefits us not one whit, that which is given to mission. This whole fall has been about Mission, Mission, Mission and I am sure by now you all have become most tired of me harping on that. I have noticed there has even been an edge to my preaching and the way I have been with others, especially where this issue of Mission is concerned. I have learned, spiritually speaking, that when I am frustrated, or resentful, or have some sort of edge about something that more is going on than what I know, internally in me. I know somehow I am making this about ME and not about GOD. And I was praying and realized that this heart for mission was in the heart of my friend and brother, Pastor Randy. When he passed away I was grieved not only by his loss but the loss of what was in his heart to do – mission. How I picked up the baton of my fallen colleague and of his love for mission for our community and world. How I desperately, too desperately, wanted all that is in his heart to become reality. It was about my grief and my sadness in relation to my dear friend –that's where the edge came from. It was about ME processing MY emotions. I had even managed to make mission about ME. Its not about ME, Lord. Its about YOU, Lord. I shared this with a dear friend in the congregation a couple of weeks ago and she said: "Oh, I knew that." Congregations are always much smarter than their ministers, I have come to believe over time. So let's make mission not about ourselves but about people and a world in need.

John 3: 16 is our familiar text for today. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* How easy it is to make this Bible text about ME; how easy it is to point the lens of that text toward ourselves. In effect we say --How wonderful it is that God sent Jesus just to die on a cross just for ME. How perfect it is that Jesus shed His blood just to forgive MY sin. How lovely it is that God sent Jesus to create this lovely little personal relationship between ME and Jesus. Christ sacrificed so I don't have to. I have even heard preachers wax eloquently about how, "For God so loved ME and YOU that he sent His Son." Do you hear how we

can twist the Bible and make it fit our own image we can print a photo of God that has us front and center and Jesus somewhere in the background? No, the scripture does not say, "For God so loved ME"; the scripture says, "For God so loved THE WORLD". God's heart is for the broken and the hurting and the fallen and the frail out there in the WORLD. Jesus' focus is on the brokenness of the world. His burden is for the souls of His creation. He humbled Himself, He went to a cross, He paid the price, He emptied Himself, because God so loved the world that HE sent His Son to bleed and to die for it. Its not about ME. Its about YOU, Lord.

Have you noticed that when a young couple has a child they never take a picture of themselves any more? Every picture they take is of their child. No more "selfies". Its all about this new little life who is a miracle sent by the hand of a loving God. That's the way it is when God births a new heart and a new spirit within us; HE turns us from SELF to HIMSELF; He makes the FOCUS of our life about others; His love then becomes the lens through which we see our world.

Christmas is coming in a few weeks. We can buy many gifts for our family. We can GIVE to people from whom we will also RECEIVE. Give to Get. But we are actually celebrating the moment when God so loved the world that HE sent His only Son. It is sad but we can actually make Christmas all about ourselves. My gifts and my traditions and what I want my holiday to be. Operation Christmas Child is about wrapping gifts for children across the globe whom we do not know and likely will never meet. Our gift giving can be SELFIES –given to those we know and love; or they can be SELF-LESS –given to a world in need. Some people, I bet, even resent Operation Christmas Child; find reasons to dislike it somehow. But I simply ask this –which gifts do you think are more reflective of the love of Jesus that God sent into the world that first Christmas, because GOD so LOVED THE WORLD? That's the picture to take away with you today. That's the picture on your Christmas Card this year.

Christmas, Mission, Operation Christmas Child –its not about me...Its about YOU, Lord. 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!*