

**THE DANGER IN BEING A CHURCH JUST FOR OURSELVES**  
**January 29, 2017 --Congregational Meeting Sunday --Matthew 3: 4-11**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

The danger in being a church just for ourselves was illustrated many years ago for me in another church where a dear, faithful man by the name of Mr. Rasch passed away. Mr. Rasch was a saint and a great person of prayer; he had been bedfast the entire time I was pastor of that church; whenever I needed prayer I would go visit Mr. Rasch and come away blessed. After he passed away we received a letter from his lawyer estimating that his gift from his estate to the church would be about \$400,000. There was much rejoicing in the camp. After a time we received another letter from Mr. Rasch's lawyer saying in effect, "Oops! Actually, there was another codicil to the will and most of that money we thought was going to you is actually going to a radio ministry program in Western Maryland." So Mr. Rasch's funeral service was shared with this radio preacher and me and I discovered the radio preacher, about to receive close to \$350,000 from Mr. Rasch's estate, had never actually met him. So the radio preacher arrived for the day of Mr. Rasch's funeral and he was everything a bad stereotype of a radio preacher could be—large pompadour wig glued in place on his obviously bald head, giant tie detailing the entire life of Jesus on it, anyway, it was Mr. Rasch's choice and I honored that choice. Have you ever been driving in Western Maryland and you look up and see a large sign saying, "Noah's Ark Being Built Here" and there are some big iron girders? That was this radio preacher's ministry. Let's just say he received the money from Mr. Rasch's estate 15 years ago and every time I drive by I look for some progress on building Noah's Ark, but, Lord have mercy, I never see any. Building Noah's Ark was the stated mission, and they received a boatload of money, but they didn't build the ark. That's the danger in being a church just for ourselves. By the way, the mission of every Christian Church is building the Kingdom of God for the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ. Its not building the Ark; its building the Kingdom.

So where is the Kingdom of God? Jesus says: "*Where I am, there shall my servant be also.*" (John 12: 26) Figure out where I am and what I'm doing and report in for duty, says Jesus. Because there is where I (Jesus) am building my Father's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is building what Jesus wants, not necessarily what we want. The Kingdom of God is as likely outside the walls of the church as within them. "My sheep know my voice" says the Good Shepherd, so in prayer we seek to hear from the Lord and then go and do what the Lord wants. That's the Kingdom. Building the Kingdom of God is the mission of the church. The sad fact in the story of Jesus' ministry in Jesus' day was that the leaders and the people largely missed their Messiah. As Jesus says on that first Palm Sunday, "You did not know the time of your visitation." The people of God were busy with their Temple worship and busy and focused on collecting their temple tax and tithe and busy and distracted with the tables of the money changers, doubtlessly providing much needed money to maintain the Temple. The sacrifices were being made, the worship was occurring, what seemed to be what they were to be about was happening. But the Messiah rode into their midst in order to establish the Kingdom of God and they missed it. They missed their Kingdom-building opportunity because they missed their King. Where HE is there the Kingdom will be. And so John the Baptist responded to people when they said, "We have Abraham as our Father." (Matthew 3: 9) , we're the good guys, we're the ones trying to do everything right. But John then prophecies, "God is able to raise up children of Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3: 9) And the prophecy was then fulfilled—because Israel, the original people of God, missed the Messiah, God raised up children of Abraham "from these stones" and out of the non-Jewish Gentiles, God raised US up, God raised up His people, seeking to do His will, seeking to be where His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is, seeking to be about His Father's business, the Kingdom of God. If some church ever gets off being about the Kingdom, God will raise up others to do His will and to build His Kingdom. That's the danger of being a church just for ourselves. If we're not on God's Kingdom agenda, He may pick someone else who is.

Mission-mindedness is also Kingdom-mindedness. Jesus always begins his parables on the Kingdom of God by stating, "The Kingdom of God is like..." So let me try that a little bit. The Kingdom of God is like the young person in their 20's who came into my office wanting to start an AA meeting in our building that was focused on younger people, you know, all the young people in our county struggling from addiction and over-dosing. The Kingdom of God is like the young person who spoke on Mission Emphasis Weekend, without a note, blooming and flourishing in their faith, and who spoke so compellingly about Mission: Washington that even the Ambassador from Sierra Leone sat up and took notice. The Kingdom of God is like when we restarted the Ministerial Association and wild things like African American Churches and old stodgy white mainline churches started to get together in Jesus' name. The Kingdom of God is like going to Haiti and attending the chapel service on Friday and hearing little children who have nothing and will not eat the next day because there is no school, singing and praising God to the rooftops. The Kingdom of God is like the elder, who never thought they could ever pray out loud, coming on fire for the Lord and desiring to pray all the time now. The Kingdom of God is praying with someone before surgery and in that moment they know that Jesus is in the room, the Kingdom has shown up, and they're going to be OK. The Kingdom of God is like not being sure where the money to fix the pipe organ is going to come from and not only does it arrive but comes in with more than we need. The Kingdom of God is like the young woman from Turning Point now a drug addiction counselor remembering that the moment that was her "turning point" was the Christmas she and her child had nothing but received a gift anyway from some kind church (and I knew it was our church). The Kingdom of God is like the Preschool Christmas program when a little girl playing the part of an angel, with the biggest smile on her face, pointed to Jesus in the manger and said incredulously – "Its the baby Jesus!" Yes, little one, Jesus did show up and so did His Kingdom. Its about this sanctuary packed for the funeral of our friend Officer Scott Bashoum, and so many people volunteering to help we had to turn some away, and our church served as comfort and strength for the family, for police officers and their families and for our community. The Kingdom of God is like that...

Now please note, we need a building to do all this kingdom-mindedness. Some parable stories I have shared with you are set in the building and some outside the building. But we still need to maintain the building. We need a staff. We need a budget. We need these things in order to be about our Father's business also. But see, its not *about* these things. Its *about* the Kingdom of God. Its about Kingdom-mindedness and about Mission-mindedness. Our mission as a church says we want to "KNOW CHRIST" We want to be where He is and do what He wants us to do and we want to listen to His voice and bring in His Kingdom. We want to KNOW Christ and make Him known to the next generation. We want to pass along this Kingdom mindedness and this Mission mindedness to those who follow us. Because when BUILDING THE KINGDOM IS OUR PRIORITY then there is a great promise to us from Jesus. Jesus declares in The Sermon on the Mount –"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6: 33) Jesus says, you gotta be about building the Kingdom of God first, that's got to be your first priority, and when it is then I promise you I'll add everything else you need also. When the Kingdom is first in your priority then I will add the maintenance of the building and the provision for the staff salaries, and the budget you need. I'll add everything else you need when you seek to know me and my Kingdom first. Let's not be about building Noah's Ark on a faraway hill in Western Maryland. Let's be about building the Kingdom of God. Then we will always be raised up as Children of Abraham, and everything else we need will be added unto us as well. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*