

ONE MORE TIME WITH ENTHUSIASM
Pentecost –May 20, 2018
Series: “Five Strategic Sermons for Today” –Deuteronomy 34: 1-12
The Church of the Covenant

One more time with enthusiasm. A couple of weeks ago I preached a sermon that was an invitation to a younger generation of leaders to step forward in new ways. That Elijah was ready to pass the mantle of spiritual leadership to Elisha, a younger generation of spiritual leaders. But today my sermon is an invitation to long time members to remain invested and participatory and to take on the great and mighty tasks of sustaining the ministry of The Church of the Covenant another time. One more time with enthusiasm.

I remember I had not been here as your pastor very long when I had a profound dream from the scriptures when the patriarch Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream of seven fat cows being followed by seven skinny cows. Joseph advised Pharaoh to store up the excess in the time of plenty in order to be prepared for a time of want and lack. (Genesis 41: 25ff.) Harkening to God’s voice Egypt prospered even in the coming time of drought, because of the strategic wisdom of Joseph in planning for the future. Seven in biblical numerology is a perfect number, not necessarily a literal number. It meant there would be a time of perfect abundant provision followed by a time of perfect famine and lack of provision. The wise and prudent Joseph planned accordingly. When I first came here ten years ago I was shocked to discover that you had spent down every pot of money that wasn’t nailed down. There was no granary of stored wheat for the skinny cows. The financial crisis wasn’t just the problem of current expenses, it was there was no savings, no ways to pay for unanticipated emergencies. That was the crux of the crisis. Over the past decade we’ve worked to establish lots of pots of cash and lots of grain stored away for times of future famine in many ways because of Joseph’s and my dream. Let There Be Light Campaign is a strategic vision to do precisely this.

I served on a non-profit board called Sacred Places several years ago. Its mission was to preserve historical church architecture for future generations. It made a compelling case that a perfect storm was about to hit the mainline Protestant churches in America. From the industrial age of the 1860’s to about 1929 magnificent church buildings were constructed in the United States. The great fortunes of the industrial age raised up mighty cathedrals in every city and town. But when the Great Depression hit in 1929 and with the advent of a Federal Income Tax, the ability to build these great cathedrals ceased. So the coming perfect storm is this –these structures are all ageing and their slate roofs are beginning to leak, and their massive parking lots are beginning to break up, and their second-to-none pipe organs are in need of \$400,000 to \$500,000 in repairs, and their stained glass windows, if not maintained over time, will bow and break into a thousand shards of glass. Smaller congregations will face larger and larger maintenance bills for their magnificent cathedral churches now 100 years or more old. One does not need to be an Old Testament Prophet to see that at some point the ability of shrinking congregations to maintain large beautiful structures will come to a breaking point. Our strategic vision is that this scenario will never happen at The Church of the Covenant. There will never come a day when we have the draconian choice to close down the preschool or fix a leaky roof. Its all interconnected –you can’t have a preschool if the building’s falling down around it; you can’t fund the program necessary to attract new and younger people if you have to use all your money to fix a broken pipe organ.

Our scripture is about Joshua and Moses, the new generation and the long time generation. Moses was described as a person “*whom the Lord knew face to face*” (Genesis 34: 10). This phrase means that

Moses and his generation had an intimate knowledge and relationship with the Lord God Almighty. It says Moses and his generation did *"mighty signs and wonders"* (v. 11), always an indication of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit of the Living God. When God is present it is always with "signs and wonders" following. Moses had harnessed the *"mighty power"* and manifested this in *"great and terrible"* read that AWESOME "deeds". (v. 12)

Our congregation broke ground for the magnificent cathedral sanctuary on the day the Stock Market crashed in October 1929. Inauspicious to be sure. Some mortgaged their homes in the midst of the Great Depression in order to build the church. The foundation was hand dug with shovels to give out-of-work-men a job in the Great Depression. Impossible to build such a sanctuary at the height of the Depression; but with God all things are possible. In 1960 two congregations became one. The church was literally re-founded almost 60 years ago. Second Presbyterian and Third Presbyterian were merged to create a new church under the inspired leadership of gifted leaders led by the Holy Spirit of the Living God. Many congregations are destroyed by mergers, not ours. We thrived and became one of the largest churches in all our denomination. God's power tapped to produce miracles of faith and transformation in the name of Jesus. In 1999 another group of inspired leaders broke ground for the Covenant Center and the Commons Area and at great sacrifice persevered against great odds to create a church facility second to none, with all the beauty of a classic sanctuary knit to the newness of space to attract new generations of members from our community into a Covenant Center specifically constructed for them. These are the generations here at The Church of the Covenant whom the Lord knew "face to face". Its what we can do in the power of God. And now it is our time. It is our calling. It is our moment to make certain the coming perfect storm does not consume and destroy our church and everything it means and everything it stands for and everything we hold dear. Now is our moment. One more time with enthusiasm.

Now why am I an optimist? Why do I know and trust and believe that The Church of the Covenant will weather the coming storms and not only survive but thrive? Certainly, we have great people. But that's not why. Certainly we have a generous congregation, but that's not why. Certainly we are people possessed of a vision from the Lord God, but all the strategic planning in the world isn't why. We have sought to be wise and prudent and put away funds for a rainy day, but that's not why we have confidence in our future. This is Pentecost Sunday. This is when we remember what God can and will do through the power of the Holy Spirit. How we are able to do things far above our own ability and strength because of God's Spirit at work in our heart. *"I can do all things through HIM who gives me strength"*. (Philippians 4: 13) We can do this because God's Spirit will do this through us!

I've said, "One More Time with Enthusiasm". "Enthusiasm" is an interesting word. It is comprised of two Greek words "En Theos", meaning "in God". We have power to do what God is calling us to do when we are "En Theos", when we are the ones "whom the Lord knew face to face". The Church of the Covenant accomplished much because it was "En Theos" in the power of God. And we today can accomplish much on this Pentecost Sunday and for the very same reasons. This is our time. This is our moment. This is what God is calling us to do. May it be said of us—"This is our finest hour". Amen 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!*