

**PILE OF COMMEMORATION STONES**  
**Sermon Series: “Five Strategic Sermons for Today”**  
**April 29, 2018 1 Samuel 7: 5-12**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

What is an “Ebenezer”? In the hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” there is the line, “Here I raise my Ebenezer”. So what’s an Ebenezer? It is a “Pile of Commemoration Stones” meant to commemorate some mighty act of God in the midst of the people of God. In our Bible story for today God intervenes and saves Israel at Mizpah and then the prophet Samuel tells the people to raise up a stone in the place to remind people what God had done. Call it “Ebenezer” because it means in the Hebrew –*“Hitherto the Lord has helped us.” (1 Samuel 7: 12)* A church building, a clinic, an orphanage raised up to the glory of God, because people have vision from the Lord, and because the Lord has helped them, then becomes an Ebenezer, a pile of stones, a commemoration to the Lord. Every church building is an Ebenezer, as it is testimony to the faithful people who have gone before and the faithfulness of the Lord God Almighty who helped them do it.

I remember a team from the church I was then serving going to Kenya to be part of the dedication of a new church that we had helped to fund and also to build. There are few things that are more rewarding than that in my experience. The original church had been burned down in the tribal clashes between Kikuyu, who were mostly Presbyterian, Kalogen, and Masai tribesmen. The politicians had cynically stirred up tribal strife in order to remain in power. So an angry mob of Kalogen tribesmen burned down the church and the manse and were about to murder the pastor of the Presbyterian Church when one Kalogen man intervened and saved the pastor. So now they are dedicating the church that had been burned to the ground. And the Kalogen man who saved the pastor had committed his life to Christ. And he had brought fellow Kalogens to the church. And then they also reached out to the Masai. And so in this rebuilt church were now Kikuyu, Kalogen and Masai –people who had formerly been enemies, now were all Christians and friends together in the same church. What rejoicing there was that day! How cool was it for me to preach the initial sermon in that new church! Each tribe danced in the presence of the Lord. I even danced and I don’t dance. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people. We witnessed a miracle of God’s love, power and reconciliation. Piles of commemoration stones reminding people of God’s ability to bring people together who once were enemies. I got to see it with my own eyes! Ebenezer!!! Here is a pile of commemoration stones, a new church, testifying to what the Lord can and will do in your life!!!

I remember a team from a former church of mine going to N’Joro Kenya in order to help build a new clinic there. There was no real medical clinic in N’Joro. 300,000 people within walking distance but no doctors and no medicine. The Presbyterians in N’Joro had a vision to build a clinic and we had come to help. They were having a Harumbi that Sunday. A Harumbi is sort of a combination of a camp meeting and a fund raising Sunday. Close to 30,000 Presbyterians showed up that day out of a total population of 45,000 Presbyterians in that Presbytery. All of the pastors were there. Our mission team was there. And I just knew I was going to be preaching. I asked the pastor –“Kaugi, now I’m not preaching tomorrow at the Harumbi, right? And he reassured me three times that I was not. But I knew I was anyway; it was like God said to me, “You better be prepared to preach”. So Sunday came, and we all gathered in a small room in the church. All the people were singing outside and the service had already started. And Pastor Kaugi stood up and intoned that the guest preacher, a certain Rev. Solomon Kamau, had car trouble and couldn’t preach. So I preached. And I told the people to envision the new clinic the site of which was sitting to the one side of the Harumbi. And I preached and I preached, “Who am I that THOU hast brought me this far?” What David said in humility. Who was I that God had brought me to Kenya to preach to all these people? I’m just the quiet little fat boy who sat in the back of the classroom that other kids made fun of. “Who am I, Lord, that you have brought me this far?” You have to preach for at least 45 minutes in most of the rest of the world or they think they haven’t had a sermon (Don’t worry; its 25 and done today!) But when the proceeds were counted the people (they make 50 cents a day in central Kenya if they can find a job) had given \$25,000 to build the clinic; the exact amount needed to build it. And all the elders in the Presbytery danced in front of the place where the clinic was to be built. They had hoped for perhaps \$5,000. But God had raised \$25,000 from the neediest of the poor. And how the elders danced and danced and danced. I even danced and I don’t dance. My hope, by the way, is that through this campaign God is SO GENEROUS that even **our** elders will DANCE!!!! (Not holding my breath, but that is my prayer!) But there is a clinic in N’Joro today because of the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of God’s people. A pile of commemoration stones testifying to faithfulness. Ebenezer!!! “Hitherto the Lord has helped us!”

I remember being in Kenya and the church I was then serving had given money to build a small orphanage in Moies Bridge, Kenya. In the central Rift Valley in Kenya the greatest cause of death is the spread of AIDS and it was wiping out an entire generation of young people. So more and more orphanages had to be built to care for the children who had become orphaned due to the spread of AIDS. The Presbyterian Church instituted the “I am the husband of one wife” campaign in order to lift up the idea of celibacy and the importance of marriage. So a team from my church went to dedicate the orphanage we had helped to build. Twenty little children were housed there in a loving Christ-centered environment. And during the dedication ceremony they took

the fabric covering down from in front of the carved stone plaque and it said: "This orphanage built to the glory of God and in thanks to (the) Presbyterian Church and its Pastor, Rev. Stu Broberg". I didn't know that it was going to be dedicated in that way. Just a pile of stones in a remote part of the struggling, developing world, attempting to give some hope to little orphaned children in Jesus' name. Still blows me away even just to think about it. Ebenezer! "Hitherto the Lord has helped us."

The Church of the Covenant has a project we are hoping to fund through the Let There be Light Campaign. Generous donors have pledged \$30,000 and are asking our congregation to match it. It would help to build a new church building for the New Testament Mission in Lacroix Haiti. Lacroix is a place where a lot of people live in mud brick huts with dirt floors, no running water, no electricity, huts about the size of most people's closets here in America. The Gross Domestic Product per person in rural Haiti is \$100 per year. A lot of the young people have to leave, not because they want to, but because the only place they can get work is Chile, or Brazil or the Dominican Republic. The Mission Committee just voted to give our gift, "To the Glory of God and in honor of Pastor and Madame Pierre, the founders of the New Testament Mission." Pastor Pierre began the mission in 1984. There is a picture I have seen of that. He felt called by God to come to the dustiest, dirt poor, most rural undesirable part of the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. He left the comfort of Florida in order to respond to the call and claim of God on his life. The picture shows the first day of the New Testament Mission –Pastor and Madame Pierre sitting out in the middle of a very dry and dusty field with about 15 students. Today there are 3,800 students and clinics and churches and wells in seven villages. It is nothing short of miraculous, the hand of God at work through His faithful servants. And Lacroix needs a new and bigger church; the old one is deteriorating. But a new pile of commemoration stones needs to be raised up –to the faithfulness of Pastor and Madame Pierre, and the miracle of provision and hope that is the New Testament Mission for the people in that area. How cool would that be to be part of the building and dedication of that new church???? Ebenezer! Hitherto the Lord has helped us!

There are Ebenezer stones all around us –this church building, these stained glass windows, the Covenant Center, and piles of stones all across the world commemorating what God has done and what God can do. Care to raise our Ebenezers today in Jesus' name??? 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!**