

Silver and Gold

May 4, 2014

I Peter 1: 17-23

17 And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. 21 Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Every once in a while I do not mind getting personal , sharing small moments in my own life in light of our scripture lesson. It is not always good to do and I try to avoid it all the time but sometimes it is very important to each of us to be able to relate the scriptures to our personal lives in all ways. Well, this week is personal. As most are aware my wonderful husband Rev. Chad Penhorwood has been serving as the associate minister of youth and family at First Christian Church, Washington. This past Sunday was their senior's last Sunday before leaving the congregation. This Monday was Chad's first day as what most easily is understood as acting senior until the church found an interim to serve the congregation.

I had an eye dr. appointment and was picking up our daughters to go home to Washington and Chad was supposed to meet me at the house to essentially switch off. With two ministers in one family we have some hectic times but most families today do. I was in the daycare getting the girls and came back to the car to multiple missed calls from the short time I was inside. The church was on fire. You know that moment of incredulity when the information you are hearing does not register it seems so ridiculous? Well that was my initial reaction. But as we know it burned and burned for a long time leaving essentially a shell in a good portion of the building and particularly the sanctuary.

The next day I was so thankful for the response from HMCC. The many prayers of support and the time given so that I could just be a wife. I know I have said it before but I say it again, just simply thank you. In the face of something completely unexpected and something we just can not prepare for the unwavering support and love of the church is what sustains us. We recognize this support network inherently in times of grief particularly with death and again in times of unforeseen tragedy.

The irony is that I had already picked today's scripture from I Peter. I tend to work about six weeks to two months ahead of time as I can so that I can truly study, work with, and engage the text. But my friends today's text just hit me between the eyes in light of what happened this past week in our sister congregation.

The church has historically had a problem with a disease best known as "brass plaque syndrome". It can be a start up congregation with donated goods but we will surely know who those goods came from by those little identifying items that say they are given in the glory of God by so and so or in honor of or in memory of. Now do not mistake me when I say that gifts to the church are important and knowing who has given is also important. There is absolutely no problem with brass plaques they are an important part of our history.

There is nothing wrong with brass plaques until they inhibit the church from making changes and growing and moving forward. The syndrome is only present when we get too caught up in not offending who gave it instead of remembering that the purpose of the gift is to do ministry in the life of the church.

But what do we do when we have little to nothing left, what do we do when it has been ripped from us? A fellow minister posted this on his facebook in response to what happened "This past weekend at the Regional Meeting of the NC Disciples of Christ in Raleigh, I heard a story about another Disciples Church that had burned. This is how I remember the story: The following Sunday morning after the fire, the minister and members of the congregation gathered outside

to set up chairs for a worship service outside. Someone brought a table for communion. Someone else brought a chalice. A news reporter came and asked the minister when he thought the church was going to be back in business. The minister pointed to the table that they had set up outside for communion. Then he lifted the chalice in one hand and his Bible in the other. He said, "We have a table, a cup and the Book. Our church building can be burned to the ground indefinitely, but as long as we have a table, a cup, and the Book, we will always be in business."

We will always be in business because we are the church, the people who make up the church are the best gifts of ministry to any congregation possible. Everything else may fade away, the buildings may burn or be torn down by tornadoes, damaged by termites, awash with floods, the roof may leak, the plumbing may be crazy and we not always know whether to call a plumber or an electrician. But we, the church remain and we were not bought, my friends, with perishable things like money, silver and gold. But as is says in our scripture today we were bought and paid for with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.