

A BOOK, A BAPTISTRY, AND A BATTLEGROUND.....

"Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God".... Matthew 6:25-34 (key 33)

A sense of history is important. One of the tragedies of the present generation is that it has become uprooted from the past and has been taught to believe that all history is irrelevant except the "contemporary" and the present moment of personal experience. But history is not irrelevant. A sense of the past gives proportion to the present. In any case we cannot isolate ourselves from either the past or from the future, for constantly and inexorably, *"Our present is becoming our past, and our future is becoming the present. We are all in the midst of history, and we are all the makers of history."*

The question facing us today is this, *"What has made us strong in the past that we want to carry forward, and what have we been a part of that we need not carry to the next generation?"*

I read of the ordination decision of Will Campbell, a farm boy from the Deep South a decade ago. His new conviction of his call to preach was matched by his excitement to tell his favorite old maid aunt. She had stayed in their home for as long as he could remember, and had run the household chores, cooking, washing, cleaning, while his parents worked the farm. She had helped raise him to be the young man that he had become. When he came home to the farm, he went immediately to the kitchen knowing she would be there.

Sure enough she was glued to the large sink full of the dinner dishes with sleeves rolled up and arms deep in the old lye soap used for washing everything. As he blurted out his news, she didn't budge an inch, keeping her back to him in feigned inattention. As he waited for what seemed an eternity, the response finally came, as she said, *"If you gonna tote the light, you better tote it right!"*

Today it is good to know that the light is still burning HERE! The many people who have gone ahead of us carried the light of Jesus Christ right. They carried it in this church so that we can say without hesitation that we stand indebted to those faithful forbearers of the faith! These are people who cared enough for us that they held the light well enough for us to see and come to our own experience of faith. Today the light is still burning in Tryon!

A. One official light is reported to still be burning- one in a fire station in Livermore, California. One sign greets visitors saying, *"Don't worry, the light is still burning!"* and it indicates the world's longest burning light-bulb! The oversized, orange-tinted, hand-blown light bulb was first lit in 1901. It was given so that when the fire alarm sounded in the middle of the night, the firemen wouldn't have to stumble around in the dark.

Its longevity could teach us a thing or two about toting the light right. They believe this: not switching it off and on, and that it is perfectly sealed are 2 reasons it is still burning! A steady **commitment**... sealed by God's **Holy Spirit**... will help us be committed to Christ and to each other, be the church God has intended and also say, *"Don't worry, the light's still burning here!"*

Nevertheless, I remember as a teenager how touchy I was about nosey people at church constantly asking me about my life, school work, dates, and my future plans. Later when I had nobody to share those treasured secrets with, I realized what I had, and I missed it infinitely. True, no one to bug you, but also true, no one to ask how things went. No one sitting up worrying about whether you get home safely or not.

Listen to this, there is nothing in this world that can fill that God-sized hole within our hearts meant to be filled up with God's very Presence. And that is the original commissioning of the church of

Jesus Christ. **We are to be the Body of Christ**, His body, the living Presence of The Lord to one another, that we may belong to his family, be nurtured, fed, loved and cared for, encouraged when we are weak, corrected when we need it, taught and led to faith and every sacred vow of life, then laid to rest by this family when it is time to go home to be with God!

The name of the power to make a church is **COMMITMENT!** No half baked, sometimes on-sometimes off, 'let somebody else do that job' kind of Christianity will perpetuate the church that Jesus built. When we don't tote the light right, God has to find somebody else who will.

B. Jesus said He would build his church on what Peter confessed back in Caesarea Philippi, a simple belief that he was the Christ, the appointed Son of God, given the assigned role of building a new humanity, a people who wanted to live for His Kingdom and His Righteousness and would leave all the rest of the matters to God!

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God!" Jesus said.

I want to mention **3 COMMITMENTS** necessary to keep the church alive and well for the next generation.

1. The first is the **BOOK**. The pages of church history are fraught with times when the church became complacent, when it lost sight of its purpose and there was such accommodation with worldly standards that the church was afraid to be doing what it took to transform people's lives.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was based on the vital principle that the scriptures were the "heavenly voice of God whereby God opened to us His will." The reformers said, "We have forsaken the church as it is, not as it has always been from of old!"

They said, "We have neither the Word of God sincerely taught, nor the sacraments rightly administered, nor the name of God duly called upon." They affirmed the church, but renounced it as it had become without a desire to know the will of God as revealed in the Bible. One of the greatest hindrances to the church today is dedicated ignorance. In Isaiah the Lord said, "Because these people proclaim me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, I am ready to do terrible things in their midst. Their wisdom will be like ignorance!" (Isaiah 29:13-14)

Our COMMITMENT to studying and teaching the BIBLE is crucial for ALL our members. There is no substitute. *"We must do the one thing we do best, and do it with excellence!"* This is an essential commitment to be the church. How many of us could quote the first verses we learned in Sunday School! Or the lessons learned in Vacation Bible School. Childhood perspectives need updating and upgrading. Our commitment to Bible teaching must make it available and attractive to all ages. Yet it must be central to each Christian for it to be given a priority in our church life.

2. Another essential Commitment for us is the **BAPTISTRY.**

Certainly we are in the Christian community because we have found the answers we need in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Baptistry represents our common commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord, our way of confessing faith in Him, our acknowledgement of our experience of new life in Jesus.

Surely we would not make the baptistry sacred or baptism essential to salvation. Yet as we as Baptists follow Jesus, so we follow him in His baptism as one form of open acknowledgement that 'Jesus is the Lord,' as a demonstration of what he has done for us, and our commitment to follow Him.

Jesus is Head of the church. When a child at church asked his Mother what a Christian was, she swelled with pride in her opportunity to tell him. *"A Christian is a person who loves, believes and follows Jesus Christ."* The child blinked a moment and then asked, **"Do we know any?"** Without the same commitment to him as Lord over our individual lives, there will be no chance He will be Lord of our church! *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness...."* Jesus is the most righteous thing God ever did, to give up his own Son in atonement for the sins of the world. The BAPTISTRY is a symbol of Confessing Christ to the world, a confession and COMMITMENT we must keep.

3.The last is a tough one for our postmodrn age, the **Battlefield.** Knowing that it is only with COMMITMENT that the church survives and thrives, we must take a stand against what denies OR defies Christ. What pulls the church down diminishes our message and makes small of the biggest part of Christ's claim on our lives. That would be a **lack of Commitment.** Can we teach commitment? No, but we can teach about Christ Jesus and his love that transforms our lives, his love that built our church, his promises that give us the hope that is the light of all of life! That would be to acknowledge the battle against being a Christian without a commitment to HONOR CHRIST and openly FOLLOW him.

Low commitment comes from having other things more important in life than the Lord of Life. Weak commitments come from persuading ourselves that we can do this our own way, on our own terms. Augustine said in the 5th century that Christianity was just foolishness without accepting the changed community that Jesus built, the church. We believe it is essential to living a vital faith.

The Book, The Baptistry, and the Battlefield. A church is built on COMMITMENT, the kind that will seek the Kingdom of God first above all things, and let God be the judge and rewarder of all the rest. We are here today because of others' commitments. That is the HISTORY of The Tryon First Baptist Church!

Are you a person of Commitment to Christ?

Will this church be here on this hillside offering life and hope to the next generation because of your Commitment?

What is first place in your life?

Jesus said, "***Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you!***"