

**November 2017**

**BLESSINGS UPON OUR MINISTRY**

“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”

Mark 4: 16 & 17 (NIV)

The church in America is going through a winnowing process, separating, in my opinion, the apathetic from the committed, leaving in worship only those who truly love the church. Church attendance and biblical literacy are down, and fewer Americans identify as Christian. In many parts of the country and across the digital landscape, Christians encounter the increased pressures of secularization and marginalization, skepticism and downright hostility. As it becomes less socially advantageous to self-identify in public as a Christian, fewer people are doing so. As in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, quoted in part above, those with shallow roots are falling away as troubles increase.

Bryn Mawr Park Presbyterian Church resembles these remarks. How are we as a faith community to cope in this post-Christian context? First, there is no reason to panic. Though fewer people are showing up to our Sunday services, those who do tend to be more committed to living out their faith. Yet, before we start strategizing about what our church might look like in the days ahead, we need to answer this question: “Are we motivated by fear or courage?” Initially, fear is fine as it is normal. But it’s what we do with fear that matters. We can allow it to dominate and therefore destroy our church, or we can look to the strength and power of Jesus Christ and allow our faith in him to transcend our fear. That is where we will begin as a faith community to live faithfully and boldly and effectively in this age when the church is losing its credibility and influence.

Our courage only comes from confidence in God and what he had done and is doing in Jesus, the Christ. Its immersing ourselves in Scripture, what an appropriate way to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, and seeing that we worship a God who is infinitely greater than anything evil at work in our world, whether it be sin, injustice, corruption and collusion. So let’s come back to the question: “Are we motivated by fear or courage?” If

we're full of courage, emboldened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we've got the hardest part figured out.

And since we can't assume our Bryn Mawr Park neighbors were raised in the church or have a working knowledge of Scripture, we can with our new found courage focus our outreach and discipleship energies in their direction. Praising God for this mission field, let us return to the core of our calling, those basic principles laid out in Scripture for those whom God chooses to elect. . We who remain at BMPPC are the Body of Christ. We live a life in Christ endowed with the Holy Spirit under obligation. We are obligated to live an evangelistic life committed to social justice, united in a cross-bearing community, and justified by grace through faith.

Peace,

*Win*