

**“The Exodus Revisited”  
by Dr. Robert D. Young**

**Westminster’s 10 Anniversary**

I’m delighted to be invited back to preach on this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I can hardly believe that much time has passed. It seems like it was a week ago or maybe two weeks that we came here, in my thinking. In fact, I’ve been retired 51/2 years and that too seems like a blink. Time has treated us well except for the usual problems with aging: faulty memory and lack of energy.

I don’t know why it was that I was trying to remember a childhood illness. I knew it related to the liver, I knew it wasn’t Hepatitis B. Then, suddenly, as I was trying to think, the word, “LASAGNA” came into my mind. It had no relation to the word I was after – jaundice. No matter. That’s often the way the mind works.

And as to energy, an experience described it well. We were at the Kimmel Center listening to the Philadelphia Orchestra perform Kurt Weil’s ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’ - sloth, gluttony lust, avarice, and so forth. Afterwards, my neighbor who’s a little older than I am, leaned over and said, “You know, the only deadly sin I have energy for any more is sloth.”

I was looking over sermons preached before we moved. A great many related to the Exodus. I realized we have been an Exodus church. In 1892 we moved to our borough location, Church and Barnard Sts., from First Presbyterian. Then, in the 1990’s we planned to move here. It was understandable that Exodus, the march to the Promised Land, should be in mind. Here is one scripture that deals with a segment of that march:

**Read Exodus 3:9-12**

This describes only one aspect of the Exodus. The Exodus involved risk. Let me explain: Moses murdered someone in Egypt and had to flee for his life. He went to the Sinai Peninsula for several years. There, he married and became a shepherd. One day he saw a bush that burned on the side of the mountain. It was on Mt. Sinai. Moses went near to investigate and heard that voice, that deep Charlton Heston-like voice, “Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land, tell ole’ Pharaoh, let my people go!” Moses responded, “Is this really you? Maybe it’s Darth Vader, or maybe it’s the sun affecting me. I’d very much appreciate your giving me some sign. God said, “Point well taken. Here is your sign: You will bring the people of Israel back to this spot where the bush is glowing, and you will worship on this mountain. That will be the sign for you.” Moses looked up, squinted, and responded, “God, Almighty, let me see if I have this right. I’m to go back to Egypt, risk arrest, face Pharaoh, risk death, get the Israelites together, a job a little like herding cats, lead them across the Red Sea, through miles of the desert, feed a cast of thousands, and come back to this place and worship. And THAT will be the sign?! God replied, “Right, Moses; couldn’t have put it better myself.

Then, God continued, “You see Moses, many people want a sign and then they will act. In my work, you act first and then you get the sign. It’s a reversal. Risk taking precedes knowledge.

On Dec 4, 1989 the Session of this church voted 12-4 to recommend to the congregation that they move. One month later, after intense organization on the part of the opposition, the congregation met for its annual congregational meeting and voted, 2/3 to 1/3 to stay in the borough and renovate. That vote began our exodus story, and the truth we learned about risk taking.

**Read Matthew 16:13-18.**

The church, any church - is it built on Peter? The Roman Catholics would say so. Or is it built on Peter's Confession? Protestants say that. But put the stress on the opening of the sentence. Jesus begins, "I will build my church." If the church is to be built, it is God's doing and not the cleverness or the resources of the people. That Westminster moved was God's doing - providence. Looking back, and providence is best seen in hindsight, 1990 was the turnaround year, the same year the congregation first said, "We will not move." Consider the sequence:

In February 1990, a small group of Westminster people decided to start a new church because they believed firmly in it. We blessed their efforts.

In March of 1990, that group's leader found Mr. Robinson amenable to a gift of land. It's the land we're on today.

In April, I asked that small group, "If Westminster reconsidered their January vote, could we do this together?" They said "yes".

In May 1990 the Session sent a pastoral letter to all members, "We think we made a mistake in January. Should we reconsider?" In two weeks, over 700 returns were in the office, over 500 said, "Yes, let's hold another meeting."

On September 27, 1990, the congregation met again and voted 2/3 to 1/3, that we should move.

That type of a change within 6 months is almost unbelievable. Churches are like ocean liners; you don't turn them on a dime. (Some never turn or else run into the wharf!) In 6 months, this congregation turned 180 degrees. And, after that happened it was though the bung was pulled out of the barrel of Providence. Things flowed and flowed together. God was at work, as Jesus promised.

People volunteered, "I can do this. We can do that." People with vision; people with planning skill; people with resources; people with heart; people who knew how to address city officials, people who knew how to talk to bankers; one even knew how to talk to the SEC since we wanted to raise bonds; all stepped forward. So did a fundraiser, the best anywhere, and an architect who knew excellent architects to solicit. Our choice, Crothers & Daley, had an eye for designing in relation to the Chester County landscape and our program needs. Even a small incident at the end of the year was providential.

It was November of 1990, when a lady came to the Session who said, "We think we can start a Thrift Shop that will help you." I was skeptical. I told Session, "It's 2 months until Christmas. They're enthusiastic now. Let's humor them, give our OK, and then see if they're still in business after February."

That Thrift Shop is still going strong. At the end of December of 2003, they had raised over \$219,000.00! Only half of it went to our new building. The other half went to missions beyond Westminster. But, looking back to the events of 1990, we say, "This is the Lord's doing", and it is marvelous in our eyes!" (Psalm 118:23)

**Read Hebrews Chapter 12: 1-3.**

Here is the background of Hebrews 12. The writer had in mind an amphitheater of an ancient city. It would have circular stone seats that went up, up, up, tier after tier, up to the clouds. There would be the royal box for the governor. Down on the field the games were played: the javelin and discus throws, the vaulting, the relay races, or wrestling. The writer of Hebrews in the previous chapter had listed heroes and heroines of faith, which he now pictures as up in the stands, observing the games – cheering the plays. There are Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Jacob, Miriam, Deborah, and all the other people of faith. They lived, they ran well, they died, and now they are up in the stands. To them, we add all Westminster people who died and who were in the Christian contest before us. They are members of the church triumphant, and they are all around us.

Let me point to parts of the building.

That bank of windows on the west side came from the old church. Each window is identified with a name. That bank of windows on the other side was purchased after we moved. Those, too, are each identified with a name. Out there in the garden are ashes of people who died at the old church, and now mingle with the ashes of those who have died in the new church. Do you see that lovely statue in this Memorial Garden? It portrays a little girl observing a butterfly. A family named Parks gave it. They are related to Charles Parks, the internationally known sculptor. (When you visit the Brandywine River Museum, you will see a tall bronze statue of a boy holding a dove. Charles Parks also sculpted that.) And I'm always touched when I see a flower in the little girl's hand. A family that lost a 42-year-old mother puts it there regularly to remember her.

And then there's a very unique feature about these walls. If you had x-ray eyes, you would see names behind the plaster written on the cinder blocks. This happened one Sunday before we moved, when we invited the church down to claim some turf by writing names on the walls. Names are all up and down the halls and around.

**Behind our choir loft, if you pulled those louvers away, you'd see the name of a tenor. You may even hear his voice, "burn pile", because that was his favorite expression when the choir director selected something he didn't want to sing. From another name on another wall, you might hear a line of the hymn, "How great Thou art" - that hymn was this man's signature song. What I'm trying to describe is the church Militant - all of us cheered on by all of them. They surround us and cheer us on as they see the Christian 'games' played well.**

"Therefore, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us..."

### **Read Philippians 3:10-15.**

Philippians 3 is a chapter where Paul does some boasting. He has reason to boast. But then with a sweep of the hand he says, "But anything that was gain to me I consider as refuse. I don't count it." And then in a sentence that gives his philosophy, he says, "forgetting those things which lie behind and reaching forth for those things which are ahead, I press on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." I want to know the fellowship of suffering with Christ, and the power of Christ's resurrection; but I'm not there yet. I must forget and I must press on.

And that would be the final word I want to say today on this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. So much has been done, so wonderfully done by so many faithful people. (Please note I hardly used a name here because I'm afraid anytime I would, I would forget and come out with some name like 'Lasagna'.) What we have done together is indeed wonderful.

However, it's not the Promised Land. Therefore, to acknowledge the past, then to forget it, and then to press on is the posture.

When I came to Westminster in 1966, I was happy that the congregation of that time could function in a building that was debt free. We received the building as a gift. It had stone walls and a slate roof and cost all of \$22, 413. That was in 1900, when bread was 5 cents a loaf and you could have a soda at DeHavens – 2 cents plain. The first phase of this new church cost four million. We followed immediately with the two-story Christian Education building, which cost another four million. And we're (rather, you're) working now to hand this new building on to the next generation, also as a gift. It will happen some day soon. And you know, somewhere in the future, I can almost hear it now, somebody will say to somebody else, "you know, I think it may be time to expand – to bless a contingent going out to start a new church, to dream of an expanded ministry here or elsewhere, to set out in the manner of Abraham or Moses." And if I hear about this, I'll smile - from somewhere - and I'll say to myself, there it goes. The exodus is beginning once again.

Let us pray

Be near us oh Lord and direct our thoughts that we may honor you and serve you all the days of our life and always with thanksgiving for the past and anticipation for the future. So lead your people in joy and for Jesus sake, Amen.