

Preached by Steve Greenlaw  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, Virginia  
June 28, 2009 – Men's Sunday

Psalm 130  
2 Samuel 1:17–27  
2 Corinthians 8:7–15  
Mark 5:21–43

## A NEW BUILDING CAMPAIGN

*Loving God, guide my words that they might reflect your will, rather than mine.  
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

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This week, I had the privilege of going to the Massanetta Springs Middle School conference with a group from this church, and I got a lot out of it, even though I'm not a middle schooler!

We've said many times that a church is not the building—but the people, and their ministries and programs. A building *campaign* is not merely or even primarily about the new building, but rather about the church that the new building will support.

The campaign will give us an opportunity to breathe new life into Bush Hill Presbyterian Church. At Massanetta Springs this week, I learned the Bible has an interesting term, *Ruah*, to express the idea of breathing new life into something. In Genesis, this term is used when God creates Adam and Eve. God forms Adam from dust and then brings him to life with *Ruah* (meaning the Spirit). God will do the same for us ... He will breathe new life into Bush Hill Church. But how?

What are we called to do as Christians? We are called to love God and to love our neighbors. We are called to be in relationship with God and to be in relationship with our neighbors.

We don't do this as well as we *should*. We don't do this as well as we *could*.

Look around the sanctuary. Go ahead, look. How many people here today do you not know? How many people are here whom you know, but you do not *really* know? For me, it's quite a few.

There are people in this church who need your Christian love. They need your support—your acknowledgment that they are children of God, worthy of respect. Those same people have something to offer to enhance *your* life.

These people probably seem *different* from you. They may be younger than you, or older. They may be children or adults, single people, couples without children; they may be retired. They are *all* worth knowing and they *all* have the potential to offer you something if you just let them. But to let them in, you have to get to know them. You have to share *agape*—Christian love.

Rebecca Hastings says Christians have a tendency to put on their “church faces” when they come to church. Does anyone remember the movie *Pleasantville*? Pleasantville is a perfect world, set in the 1950s, along the lines of the TV show, *Leave it to Beaver*. The movie is shot in black and white. The main characters (Mom, Dad, Bud, and Mary Sue) are almost perfect in every way. I was reading a review of the movie and the review observed, “Not only has the basketball team never lost a game, no one has ever missed a shot.”

Rebecca says, when we put on our church faces, we behave differently than we really are. We don’t admit to the real world the problems we have. We are too embarrassed or afraid that people will see us the way we really are, and that they will think badly of us.

For a long time, I disagreed with Rebecca, saying: “Church is one of the few places where you can be completely honest about yourself.” We’re all broken people, we recognize that. If you admit to something in church, you won’t be judged by your Christian brothers and sisters. But if you are, they will at least know they’re wrong to do so, and they will work to correct it in themselves. They won’t think badly of *you* for it.

I believe that church *is* where you can completely be yourself, where you don’t have to pretend to be someone you’re not. But at the same time, I’ve come to realize that Rebecca is also right, that in many ways in our church community I *pretend* to be different and perfect, more than I really am.

That behavior, putting on your church face, is exactly wrong. (Like so many things about the Christian faith, this is counterintuitive.) We *are* all broken people, but the purpose of the church is to pick us up, not put us down.

Just as in *Pleasantville*, when the scenes change to color, we see the world more richly, so it is when we show our true faces, our true selves to our Christian brothers and sisters. What we forget is that the church is greater, far greater than the sum of its parts. By revealing our true selves, we humble ourselves, but we allow others to pick us up. As Paul says in Galatians, “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ.” By allowing others to pick us up, we enrich us all.

Church isn’t merely *an opportunity* for help *if we need it*. Rather, God *calls us* to share our burdens. Sharing our true selves is an obligation! This church has many venues for sharing burdens; e.g., deacons, Stephen Ministers, small groups, friends, and (of course) the pastor. All too often, though, we hear “My problems aren’t serious enough to get help, to share with others.” Again, this response is exactly wrong! When we respond this way, we are violating God’s will for us. Let me restate my point: When you say, “my problem isn’t serious enough to warrant your help,” you are also saying “my problem isn’t serious enough to warrant God’s help.”

But doesn’t God care about all our problems, big and small? (This is another thing we heard about at Massanetta Springs.) Doesn’t God wish us to share all our problems with

Him? Isn't that part of being in relationship with God? Isn't that a way to deepen our relationship? The answer to these questions is YES.

There is another perspective we need to look at. The Stewardship & Global Mission Team has been working on a new "Time and Talent" sheet. One theme of this new sheet is to ask: "How can Bush Hill Presbyterian Church help you live more richly?" Participating in church activities (when you are responding to God's call) is richly rewarding. I was invited to go to the Middle School Conference this week to *enable* our middle schoolers to go. The conference, after all, was for them. I was just a chaperone. And yet, I found tremendous joy and insights from attending myself—spending time with and getting to know our youth better.

When you don't participate in church activities, for whatever reason, you're missing that reward. I am not suggesting that you have to do everything Bush Hill has to offer. (If you are feeling overburdened [and I know some of you are], God gives you permission to take a step back.) If you are not overburdened, how about trying something new?

After worship today at the reception, introduce yourself to someone you don't know. However, meeting people is only the first step. To really get to know someone else, you need to spend time together, especially working toward a common goal. The way to do that is by joining one of the church committees, serving as a church officer, or participating in a church group or activity. For in so doing, you will help breathe new life into Bush Hill Presbyterian Church. You will help build our church up. Not the new building—but what is more important, the relationships that define who we really are as Christians.

Amen.