

Early in the year 1991, a very unique presentation was made at the United States Air Force Academy. A special honor was given to 83 year old Mary Beth McBrown. This achievement award was given for a valuable contribution that Mary Beth had made to the World War 2 military effort over 60 years ago.

It was just before the war, as the United States sensing the foreboding conflict that seemed to be ahead, was trying to prepare herself, that a Swiss immigrant named Karl Norton invented a new bomb sight that promised great accuracy. Now these were before the days of our laser technology that has made the Norton bomb sight obsolete. But in these days, Norton's invention was hailed as a great breakthrough. There was one problem. Norton's bomb sight required cross hairs that were no larger than 1/1000th of a millimeter. Where could the air force find such a delicate substance?

The great search was on. Finally, someone produced the web of a Black Widow spider. It met the criteria - 1/1000th of a millimeter in diameter, and there was great enthusiasm among the technicians. But as tests were run, it was found that the web of the Black Widow was too fragile to be used. You see, at the altitude of 20,000 feet, the colder temperatures would cause the cross hairs to contract, and the spider's web couldn't take that kind of pressure. It would snap. It was back to square one once again in this search for a substance that would have a major contribution to the war effort.

That was when Mary Beth McBrown was found. Mary had very long and very fine blond hair that met the diameter requirements. Her human hair would be much stronger than the spider web, able to withstand the expansion and contractions of the extreme temperatures. So secret was Mary's hair that once cut it was shipped pack in explosives so that it would be destroyed if it fell into the wrong hands. Pilots were ordered to destroy the bombsights if they had to abandon their planes for any reason so that the enemy would never find the secret. And Mary McBrown's fine, long hair became standard equipment in our B-24 Liberators and in our B-17 Flying Fortresses.

Why did the Air Force Academy present Mary with this honor in Colorado Springs? Because Mary symbolized the real strength of the war effort. Yes, the major contributions were necessary - the bombsight invented by Karl Norton aided in the accuracy of the bombing missions. But the major contributions could never have been made without the smaller sacrifices - a lady being willing to give her head of hair so that a war could be won.

We come this morning to the conclusion of a very special weekend in the life of the Rockford Baptist Church. On March 9, 1857 - one hundred and fifty years ago from this weekend – a charter was signed that official began the Baptist Church and Society of Laphamville. Later the name of the church would be changed to the Rockford Baptist Church. Yes, there have been some major spiritual battles that have been fought during these past 150 years so that this church could come become what it is today. But those battles never could have been won without the innumerable, smaller sacrifices of God's people throughout the decades. The Rockford Baptist Church is what it is today because of the Faithful hand of a Sovereign God and because of the dedication of committed Christians who were willing to sacrifice so that God's work might go forward. We want to worship God for his faithful watch-care this morning. And we also want to honor those who have made the sacrifices necessary for the sustenance of His church.

The text that I have chosen for this morning's celebration might at first appear to be an unusual one. It is found in Proverbs 22:28. Let me read it for you. "Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers." (Repeat)

This text might at first appear to be unusual because it speaks to a practice that is far removed from us today. Back in the

O.T. times, in the days of an agricultural economy, the land was the heart of everything. It was the produce of the land that gave life and hope to everyone. So that land was cherished and passed down from generation to generation within the family structure. In a day before the modern surveying equipment that we now have, these ancient boundary stones were most important to the stability and well-being of society. These were the landmarks that delineated the boundaries of the fields. They separated one family's land from another's. And you can be sure that everyone knew what these ancient boundary landmarks were and where they were located. One of the most heinous crimes in the O.T. days that required severe punishment under the law was the attempt to move one of these ancient landmarks. In effect, this was an attempt to steal land which was the foundation of the whole economy. So the author of Proverbs writes, "Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers."

As we come to this time of sesquicentennial celebration this morning, we must recognize that there have been spiritual boundary stones that have been set up by our spiritual forefathers. These boundary stones have set the philosophy and ministry of the Rockford Baptist Church. This church is what it is today because of the wisdom of the placement of these ancient boundary stones and the commitment of our forefathers in keeping them in place. Now if the Rockford Baptist Church is to continue as a lighthouse for God in this community, these ancient boundary stones must not be moved. I would invite you to consider 4 such spiritual boundary stones which have been set up by our forefathers, 4 boundary stones that give to us a summary of the 150 year history of our church.

1. The first boundary stone is **faith**, a vision of what God is able to do. It was in 1857 that a relatively small group of people saw the need for a Baptist church in this community and they had the faith and vision to start one. They didn't have a building. They had just been meeting in a home. But they had a vision of a church that could be constructed to be a lighthouse in this community. Francis Prescott demonstrates the faith of these few people in just a brief statement summarizing the decision of March 9, 1857 in his journal. "Attended the society meeting at Laphamville, held to appoint Trustees, and form a corporate body in connection with the Baptist church with a view to build a house of worship. Went home with deacon Hutchins, and staid overnight." In their courage, they exemplified a great heritage of faith to those who would follow as members of the Rockford Baptist Church.

It takes courage to step out in faith for a new venture, for there are many fears that must be overcome. There is the fear of failing - what if this new church just collapsed under its own weight. There is the fear of what others in the community would think - who do these people think they are starting a new church. There is the fear of not doing things right - what if they didn't organize the church properly. Many fears that could cause one to hesitate, to not go forward. But the simple fact of the matter is this. Without their faith and vision and courage, this church wouldn't be here today.

Did they visualize all that would become the Rockford Baptist Church? Probably not. I'm sure that they didn't foresee this beautiful building dedicated in 1964 with electric lights and indoor plumbing. I'm sure that they never imagined the size of this church as they were struggling with just a few people. They probably had no idea of the complexity of the organization and programs that would occur. In fact, what they did visualize in faith was likely not what is here now. But that is how God usually works. He wants us to step out in faith, trusting him. And then as we exercise the courage to step forward, He then begins to show us the way, a step at a time. Just as God lead Abraham down unknown roads to bring him to a promised land, so God has lead our forefathers to bring this church to the place where it is today. And just as Abraham had to believe God and step out in faith if there ever were to be a nation of Israel, so our forefathers had to believe God and step out in faith if there ever were to be a Rockford Baptist Church.

If this church is to continue to have the vital ministry that it has had in this community for the past 150 years, this ancient

boundary stone of faith must

not be moved. We must have a continued vision of what God desires to do in the future, and we must be willing to step out, trusting Him, if we are to reach the next generation for Christ in this community.

It was just over 350 years ago, that a shipload of travelers landed on the Northeast coast of our country. In the first year, they established a small community there. In the next year, they organized a town government. Things were moving along well. The town government made plans to build a road 5 miles westward into the wilderness during the next year. When a majority of the people of the community heard of the plan, they called a special town meeting and impeached the entire town government that they had organized. Why build a road 5 miles west into the wilderness? Who needs to go there anyway?

Here was a group of people who had the vision to come 3,000 miles across the ocean and overcome great hardships to get to this new land. But in just a couple of years here, they now were not even able to see 5 miles farther to the west. They had lost their vision. And subsequently, the whole great country that we have was no longer available to them. Not because it had gone anywhere, but because of the limitations that they had put on themselves by their lack of faith, their lack of vision.

It would be a tragedy for a group of Christians with great vision to bring this great church to this point in history, and for this church to fail to go forward because of a lack of faith, a lack of vision. We must never move the ancient boundary stone of faith set up by our forefathers.

2. A second ancient boundary stone is sound doctrine. One of the great blessings that has been passed down to us is a strong commitment to the Bible as the word of God and the foundational truths of God that are contained in it.

We don't have time this morning to go into the details of the great doctrinal battles that we fought in our nation during the past century and a half, but let me just summarize the core of the debate. For today, we have reaped the rewards of the theological battles fought, and most have even forgotten the issues that were so critical to the very life of Christianity.

\*The logical progression of the evolutionary philosophy to the field of theology that we commonly call Liberalism or Modernism came to our country from Europe where it was developed during the last half of the 19th century, when our church was just beginning - specifically from the German theologians Kant, Ritschl and Schleiermacher. It hit our borders with full force just around the turn of the 20th century and influenced every major denominational group. While we don't have time this morning to go into details, basically this theology called Modernism made theology a progressive, evolutionary process and stripped it of any supernatural elements.

\*For instance, the Bible became a good book but not the inspired Word of God. It was merely a book of human origin containing legends like any other history book.

\*All supernatural accounts in the Bible were simply chalked up to pre-scientific, legendary beliefs. God did not literally create the universe - this was simply a pre-scientific belief - the universe actually evolved on its own by chance over time. Moses did not part the Red Sea, the Israelites lost the Egyptian army in a sea of reeds. Jonah was not swallowed by a great fish. Jesus did not feed the 5,000 - he had food hidden in a cave. In fact, none of the miracles in the Bible actually occurred. They just reflected human legends.

\*With the supernatural elements gone, the path was then cleared for the Modernist to openly attack the deity of Jesus Christ. He was not born of a virgin - this would take a miracle. He was not both God and man. He was killed as a martyr for his beliefs. And he certainly did not rise from the dead - the apostles just believed that he did. Either his body was stolen from the tomb or he swooned near death, but then naturally came back to consciousness in the coolness of the tomb.

\*Because Jesus Christ was not the God/Man, his death upon the cross could not be an atoning one, paying for sins. In fact,

man is not a sinner. He is born basically good, and the purpose of religion should not be to "save him" but to fan that flame of goodness within him.

\*As you can see, this Modernistic thought that infiltrated all major denominational groups produced great unrest for it attacked the very heart of Christianity itself. If Modernism were true, traditional Christianity was false. But if the Bible were true, Modernism must be a vicious lie of the enemy.

\*Many churches completely abandoned their doctrinal roots in favor of this new, purely natural way of looking at the Bible and religious belief. The church that gave us our first communion set and that instrumental in starting many other churches in the Grand Rapids area completely abandoned orthodox Christian faith. When one of my sons had to go to a service of this church last year to fulfill the requirement of a class he was taking at school, he came back and informed me that they had performed a baptismal service for pets at the service he attended. A total desecration of one of the ordinances that Christ had given to his body, the church. It would have been so easy for this church to follow the lead of its spiritual mentor and go the way of supposed "modern" thought as so many other churches were doing. I'm sure that the leaders of this church wrestled with this modernistic controversy. But they chose the path that honored the ancient boundary stone of doctrinal orthodoxy that had been set up by their forefathers.

\*In 1957, the church voted to join with an organization that had just been started a decade before called the Conservative Baptist Association, an association that had been formed to speak out against the de-supernaturalizing of the Christian faith and to uphold the basic doctrines of Christian orthodoxy that were almost 2000 years old. This took great courage on their part. But there was a commitment to God's truth no matter what the cost. And in doing so, a great boundary stone was passed on to future generations, one that must never be removed.

3. It was after these first 2 boundary stones were established that two others were added that we must talk briefly about. The third boundary stone is a commitment to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth through missions.

In September of 1928, the first missionary committee was formed at Rockford Baptist Church. Back in those days, giving for missionary purposes was separate from giving for the general fund. Today we have a unified budget that is easier to manage and budget. The church receipts for 1928 were \$1,625 for the general fund and \$370 for missions. I have counted 31 different members who have gone out from RBC to serve the Lord in missions. This year, \$51,699 will be given by members of RBC for missions. 18 different missionary family units or agencies are given money for support from our church every month. They are scattered over 5 continents. We have a former member who was raised in our church serving in a 6<sup>th</sup> continent of Australia. The only continent that our church is not represented on is Antarctica. Down through the years there has been a commitment to spread the saving gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. This is an ancient boundary stone that must not be moved.

4. And along with our missions program, A final boundary stone is a commitment to share the love of Jesus Christ in this community for the glory of God.

\*Who can begin to fathom the impact that Rockford Baptist Church has had on this community down through the past 150 years.

\*This is seen in many practical ways such as the very name of this community and the basic utility of electricity. It was through members of Rockford Baptist Church that this community got the identity that it now has, got a railroad line to it to connect it with Grand Rapids and other cities, and had electricity introduced to it. Just think of how important basic communication and utilities are to us in life.

\*This is seen in the many other churches that have been helped and supported by Rockford Baptist Church in their getting their feet on the ground. RBC has always maintained an attitude of cooperation and support with other churches in the community.

The ministerial association here in Rockford is one of the strongest that I have experienced in my years of ministry. Our church is one of the major reasons for this. Rockford Baptist has helped to give this community its cohesive nature as it has shared the love of Christ to it down through the years.

\*Rockford Baptist has often been on the cutting edge of innovation in its attempt to share the gospel with others. From hosting the first drive-in church in the nation to developing a library and media center to make educational materials available to people free of charge, there has continually been a willingness to be innovative in trying to meet the needs of others.

\*Now the methods have changed down through the years - and they will have to continue to change if we are to be effective. There was a day when tent evangelistic meetings and bus programs were the mainstays. But these days have passed. Today, we are serving hundreds of families each month through our Angel Food Program, sharing the love of Christ with them by providing physical nutrition necessary to sustain life. But the goal remains the same. The ancient boundary stone of outreach into the community must not be removed if this church is to continue to be the lighthouse that God desires for it to be.

\*4 ancient boundary stones. Faith, Sound Doctrine, Missions, Outreach. Each laid at great sacrifice; each providing a rich, spiritual heritage; each bringing untold blessing to us; each contributing to what this church is today. And the message of Proverbs remains as true today as always. Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.