Reimagining the Church -- as a lighthouse and search and rescue community

Intro: One of my favorite hymns is a very old fashioned one, one that has nearly been forgotten. "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning" was sung here one time, just a few months after OSHC started. To remind you, let's talk about lighthouses.

In many places in the world, there are tall lighthouses but in smaller, island communities such as Scotland, the Faeroe Islands, etc. there are two sets of lights. A low fog often rolls in, almost daily in places such as the Western Isles of Scotland. That low fog, the haar, is thick and obscures the coast. Those ships and boats trapped under the haar can't see the lights in a traditional lighthouse.

The higher light was constant but, when storms and low clouds rolled in, those along the shore would be called out to set bonfires on the beach, to light their lanterns and expend their precious, limited fuel to shine lights and save those in danger. (fog in WV on our mountain)

While we build Our Safe Harbor Church, we are also called to build community where we live which the people who come within our reach. That is what "kindness" means – and that is our job.

We love and respect search and rescue team members, firefighters, police, military, and others who put their lives on the line for the rest of us. We see them place themselves in harm's way – sometimes knowing they will be hurt or killed – for other people they don't know and who will never know their names. We are stunned by this, and we honor them. (special license plates, holidays, privileges)

I think we look up to them because, at some level, we want to BE them…until we forget and go do other things. Churches do the same. They start off well, but something happens. They forget who they are supposed to be. They forget that they are called to be heroes. (read the lifesaving station fable at the end of these notes)

I. God's Rescue Team

A. Ever since the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, God has sent in rescue teams. They were not born heroes nor would we have picked them…or expected them. We got

Noah, Melchisedek, the prophets, kings and judges. Finally, in the fullness of time, He sent His Son. (John 3:16 – read, then have them say it with you)

B. Jesus had some famous rescue missions.

1. The woman at the well. (John 4)
2. Zaccheus. (Luke 19)
3. Matthew. (Matthew 9)
4. Paul. (Acts 9)
5. The widow at the gates. (Luke 7:12)
6. The woman with an issue of blood. (Mark 5)

C. And, of course, his mission culminated with salvation offered to all… but only after he sacrificed himself. Hebrews 7:24-27 and 10:10. (metaphysically running into a building that was coming apart).

D. While we certainly honor him for his teachings and for his pure life, what makes us bow down before him is that selfless, loving, giving act – the cross. He went from rabbi to rescuer.

II. A Few Good Men

A. Muslims were harassing those who wanted merely to cross the Atlantic and see their families or make a new home for themselves in America. If the Muslims found you, your life could be forfeit.

B. The year? 1775. America was helpless before this threat. They routinely paid large sums of money to the Barbary pirates to keep them from taking American citizens as wives or slaves. The amount was staggering… and the bribes usually didn't work. Somehow, the Muslim pirates of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula had to be stopped.

C. Tun's Tavern in Pennsylvania. In walks a man with a letter from the President. "We are looking for a few good men," and the United States Marine Corps was born. Years later they launched their attack on the Barbary pirates. Eight Marines led 200 mercenaries they had trained across the desert and captured the fortress city of Dema. In a sign of respect at the toughness and tenacity of these "few good men" a Turkish sultan gave them a Mameluke sword. To this day, Marines stand tall in their dress blues, the Mameluke sword by their side.

D. The pirates' backs were broken. Slaves were freed. Not by superheroes, but by men who stood up and said, "Here I am, send me."

E. Isaiah said the same thing – "here am I, send me." This is fundamentally different from the bulk of humankind who say "Here I am, cater to me. Serve me." (church members are very often guilty of this)

F. <u>God has always looked for volunteers and, if He doesn't find them, He has been known to tap some on the shoulder and say "C'mon. Let's go."</u>

G. God is still watching us as we go to work, the shops, events, or even as we just walk around the neighborhood. He is watching **to see if we will set out the lower lights**, if we will volunteer to build community with kindness and, by so doing, <u>become part of a search and rescue team for Christ</u>.

III. Our Mission Still Stands. The Warrant is Still Valid.

A. Dream with me. What would it be like to hear this commission (Matthew 28:18-20). I think OSHC is uniquely set to thrive and live out this commission – but it will require each of you to create community, one person at a time. (not door to door evangelism, but love and service)

1. Prayer teams
2. Men's and women's classes.
3. Dying churches.
4. House churches or clusters.

B. Let's move away from self-centered Christianity and truly blossom into a mission-oriented church that follows the selfless, giving, loving steps of Jesus, the Messiah, our Savior?

C. We stand here today, looking at our Messiah. He is looking at us and asking for volunteers. He will keep the higher light burning for He IS light. We are being called to man the lower lights. This won't be easy. It will require laying aside our fears, renouncing our comfort, and risking ourselves on something larger, something more important, than our lives. Matthew 16:24-27.

D. Who will cross the line and join Him? Who will enter the burning building and bring out the lost? For the Lord is going into that building…who will follow him?

On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occured, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and gave of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decorations, and there was a liturgical life-boat in the room where the club's initiations were held. About this time a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house build outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split among the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked

in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station. So they did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.