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Series: *Vision*

Title: *What is the ROC and Why Did We Build It?*

Text: Jeremiah 29:11

Preacher: Mark Adams

A thousand years ago, a group of Vikings led by Erik the Red set sail from Norway for the vast Arctic landmass that Eric had named: Greenland. At the time it was pretty much an uninhabitable island. But Erik and his colonists settled there, and their descendants formed law-abiding, economically viable communities with a population of 5,000 at their peak. Here's a few pics of the ruins of their settlements.

We tend to think of Vikings as sea-faring raiders---but they thought of themselves a farmers and ranchers. Their colony in Greenland lasted 450 years and then it vanished.

Why?

Their colony failed because as farmers and ranchers these Vikings preferred to eat meat---as in hamburgers, steaks, ribs, etc. To provide timber for their homes and pastureland for their hamburger-producing cattle the Vikings pretty much deforested Greenland. Then as the cattle grazed the fertile but thin topsoil into oblivion Greenland's wind and water washed and blew the rest away. When that happened, their cows began to starve and so did the Norse settlers.

Of course, fishing would have been a simple and effective way to feed themselves. But all the archaeological evidence suggests that the Norse would rather starve than eat a fish.

Isn't that foolish!

I mean, why would a society that was sitting on top of the richest food source the ocean has to offer starve to death? Well, in his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond comments on this by saying that when societies fail, it is usually NOT due to some cataclysmic event, but to something much simpler. Most of the time societies fail because they refuse to adapt and change. And that's exactly what happened to the Vikings in Greenland. When archeologists looked through the ruins of their settlements, they found animal bones left in the debris including the toe bones from cows equal to the number of cow spaces in the barn, meaning that the Norse ate their cattle down to the hoofs. They found the bones of baby calves which means they had given up on the future. They found the bones of dogs covered with knife marks, meaning that, in the end, they had to eat their pets. But they found ZERO fish bones, because as I said, the Vikings in Greenland would rather starve than change their diet.

I share this because Churches can face a similar end. You see when a church refuses to change---when it refuses to adapt in ways that will enable it to reach the people in their community---that church becomes ineffective and eventually dies. Thankfully, years ago, Redland made a conscious decision to avoid that fate. We realized that to do the work God had called us to do here in the heart of Montgomery County, we had to change---not our message---but our tactics in sharing that message, the GOSPEL. That is what led to our building what we refer to as the ROC.

Who knows what it stands for? Right! "*R.ecreation and O.utreach C.enter.*"

As a church we realized that to be effective in outreach---effective in sharing The CURE---we needed to do something different than we had been doing.

Today I want us to look back at our history and see why and how our church made that decision. I've set aside the time to do this because most of you weren't here when all this happened. To show that, let's take a poll.

- How many of you were here in the late '90's when we first started talking about building a gymnasium?
- How many of you were here in 2006 when we broke ground?
- How many of you were here when we dedicated the ROC in May of 2010?

The number of hands raised are the minority because as we all know, we live in a highly transitional area. Our church is always changing as people are transferred in and out. I've been pastor here at Redland for 24 years, but in that time I've actually pastored six or seven different congregations. Of course, the current "Redland" is my favorite, but as wonderful as it is to work with all these different churches, this constant coming and going can be very detrimental to our church's memory. With all this change, the church as a whole begins to forget why we did what we did in the past. Another contributor to this problem is core members who begin to leave us for Heaven. All this transition contributes to a deterioration of vision so to speak.

So this morning I want us to look back and remember together. My text is one verse: Jeremiah 29:11, where it says: ***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD---plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*** Today I want us to look at the plans God gave this church in the past---plans to prosper us---so we can recommit ourselves to the future He has for us. So, here goes.

I became your pastor in September of 1997 and almost as soon as I was installed, people started asking, *"Mark, in your opinion as pastor, what is next---BUILDING wise?"* I remember thinking, *"I've only been a pastor a few days---could I get back to you on that?"* And I don't mean to put down the people who asked me that question. Those Redlanders remembered the excitement of following God in past building endeavors and longed to join God in that kind of task in the future. So as a staff and Church Council we began to explore answers to that question by studying our church's HISTORY and uniqueness up until that point. Our study yielded several important "Redland facts."

- 1.) **First, we saw that unlike many congregations in our area we were blessed with a lot of PROPERTY---nearly 14 acres---and at the time we were almost debt free.**

In fact, we burned the mortgage on the Fraley property shortly after our church history study. To be clear, the Fraley property is the big plot of land to the right as you come down the driveway, the land where the Youth Barn and Youth House and Furlough House all sit. Buying that acreage pretty much doubled our land.

- 2.) **The second thing we realized is that we saw that we had a long history of welcoming transitional families to our area---families who were only here for a few years, mostly military, but governmental contract employees as well.**

Our study showed that over the years God had enabled us to learn how to deal with our high turnover rate. He helped those of us who formed the unchanging core of RBC to learn how to minister under these transitional circumstances. We learned how to welcome people and get them involved. We learned how to quickly "read" people and discern their giftedness. We've also learned how to say good-bye and pray for them as they go on to their next assignment.

As I've said in the past, every Christmas Sue takes the pictures you send us of your families and makes them into a montage that I hang in my office. To help you SEE how many people have moved on over the years I want to share pictures of just SOME of those former Redlanders. If you remember them, raise your hands.

The Fergises, the Uys, the Penlands, the Maxwells, the Naninnis, the Goodlows, the Shuperts, the Bahoos, the Penas, the Aunes, the Prices, the Esteps, the Brewers.

And this doesn't include: the Holtons, Jim and Angie Smith, Dale and Margaret Smith, the Geissings, the Livingstons, the Edwards, the Corbetts, the Werts, the Ebbings, the Pursells, the Lechaks, the Kates, the Runzels, the Coles, the Bucks, the Hales, the Murrays, the Burdettes, and two Knox families.

I mean, I could continue for quite some time, but you get the idea. Think of it. All those families combined would be larger than MOST churches! Well, years ago, as we discussed this unique aspect of RBC, our dear friend, Bill Wehunt, who moved on to Heaven in 2008, rightly dubbed us a "*way station church*" and that's not a bad thing. This is part of what God has called us to do and it's an IMPORTANT part because in a transient area, these people that come and go need a church like ours.

In fact, over the years, military families who have served here and then been transferred away have shared about their experience of welcome at Redland with other military families. And that has led THEM to come here. Word got around that we were a good "waystation church."

Let me just stop here and say that it is VITAL that we keep striving to get this part of our calling right especially in these "pandemic days." We need to be intentional about keeping people---especially new people---from falling through the cracks. We need to welcome people---get to know them---invite them into Grace Groups---find ways for them to plug in. We have to KEEP doing the things that have made us a great WAY STATION CHURCH!

But I digress a bit.

As I said, we realized we were called to be a way station but we also felt God saying we should not be JUST a way station. We felt Him calling us to do more to reach the unchurched people around us---those more permanent residents of Montgomery County who don't know Jesus---not to mention the non-Christians who come and go from our area.

As you know, if you've lived here any length of time, this is a county that desperately NEEDS to hear about Jesus. The vast majority of people in our community don't follow Him. I heard this week that Montgomery County Maryland has the highest Covid Vaccination Rate in the country; and that's great, but we also have one of the lowest salvation rates. In fact, of all the counties in Maryland, ours has the lowest percentage of Christ followers. Ours is a county that desperately needs THE CURE. It is so important that, as C.C. Day put it, we connect the heart of Montgomery County with the heart of Christ.

Well knowing that, we realized we had our work cut out for us. It became clear WHY God wouldn't let us be satisfied with being a way station! And that's where we got the idea to build a gymnasium. God helped us to see that, since this is a very high cost of living area, both moms and dads have to work. So, the residents of our county are hunger for anything that will give them an opportunity to slow down and be together. This is why our county rec program is so huge. We also saw that our county rec department couldn't meet this need because there was just not enough gym space to go around.

Shortly before we broke ground on the ROC Karl Gruel brought me a copy of *The Gazette*. Remember *The Gazette*?

The front page article of the issue Karl shared with me told of the Olney Boys and Girls Club's plans to build a gym—but of their inability to do so because of permitting problems. Listen to this quote from OBGC Chairman, Daniel Dionisio:

“The severe lack of gym space is not only a problem in the Olney area, but in most of the county. The lack of gym space is reaching epidemic levels---when 8-year-olds are forced to play games until 9 at night during the week and young teams cannot even find gym times to practice before games.”

Information like this reaffirmed our conviction that God was leading Redland to build a gym.

Bill Wehunt was a vital part of making the ROC a reality. In fact, when he left us and moved to Heaven, we dedicated the ROC to his memory. I'm sure you've seen this plaque near the water fountains. It says, *“Bill's desire was that this R.O.C. serve as a place of recreation and outreach, a facility we can use, 'to give people what they want in order to give them what they need: JESUS.'”* With Bill's leadership we saw that building the ROC would also make our church plant itself more visible. Since our parking lot is in back, the thousands of people who drove by couldn't see that something was going on here. The exciting times I mentioned last week would not be visible from all those passersby.

How many of you love CRACKER BARRELL? Me too and one thing that makes people stop and come in and eat is the fact that their parking lot is always full. That full lot tells people that something exciting is being cooked in there! And it's no accident that Cracker Barrell puts their parking lot in the front, they want passersby to see that.

Well, we realized we don't have a Cracker Barrel parking lot. Plus our church looks small from the road. Wouldn't you agree that this room is a lot bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside. In any case, we saw that Redland wasn't clearly SEEN. We needed a way to get people to pull into our driveway so they could get a more accurate picture of our campus and see that a lot goes on here. Of course, a gym with big windows full of people would do that.

I remember when the ROC was being built I was talking to a stranger in downtown Derwood and he asked me if we were building a Cathedral. You see, to him that big building with the cross on the front LOOKED like a Cathedral and the contractor's company was called, *“Cathedral Design.”*

My point is, that building made people want to come and see what was going on. Well, with all this in mind---our feeling that God was leading us to be MORE than a waystation church and that He was telling us the way to do that was to build a gym---with all that in mind, we did several things.

1.) **First, we hired a Rec Ministry expert.**

We wanted to learn how to use Rec Ministry as an outreach tool before we built an expensive building. So, we put this Rec Ministry expert on contract for a year or so to teach us---show us the way. His guidance really helped. In fact, it led to Sports Camps. I believe we've been doing them for more than 15 years now.

2.) **Then in 2004, we heard about an amazing Rec Outreach Ministry called UPWARD.**

We sent a good-sized group of Redlanders to an Upward Basketball Conference down in North Carolina to gather info. And we all came back excited to start an Upward ministry at RBC.

3.) **We also decided that we should send someone to attend a special conference in Nashville for churches who were thinking of building a gym.**

So, Sue and I flew down there. The conference was VERY helpful. It included tours of several churches that had buildings like our ROC. We explored those gyms and grilled the staff members in charge of those facilities. Sue and I came back full of excitement and ideas. We shared our report with Bill and the rest of the leadership at the time and they got excited too---but we didn't rush into anything.

4.) **We decided to not just figure out how to build a gym but how to build everything we'd need to build on our campus---and after going through three architects, we came up with a master building plan.**

Phase 1 would be a gym—the ROC. Phase two would be more children's space; phase three youth space; and phase 4 a new sanctuary. When it was all done it would look something like this.

5.) **Then, we decided it was time to build so we went through a Capital Campaign to raise funds for phase 1.**

We called it *The Crossing* and it was completed in 2006. We raised about 2 million dollars, a little over half of the 4-million-dollar price-tag. The original loan was for **\$1,776,267.17**. Since then, we have paid **\$863,537.75** in regular monthly payments and an additional **\$618,906.71** in donations toward paying off the loan. As I speak, we owe about \$267,000.

Anyway then, we broke ground at our 40th anniversary in 2006. Construction began in the summer of 2007 and at first things went fairly quickly. Here's some pics from those exciting days. But then work began to slow down and Hugh Faulconer and Jack Murray began to notice some inconsistencies in the work of our contractor when it came to the way he used our funds. They learned that he had gone bankrupt and in the process stolen about \$130,000.00 from God's coffers at Redland. He had also taken other shortcuts that have cost us both time and money.

Thankfully, Hugh took over the construction process with a LONG punch-list of things we had to do to finish the building and get our occupancy permit---things as significant as redoing the steel supports for the entire building. But with his help, eventually the ROC was opened. I still remember the day we dedicated it. Since the campaign was called "*The Crossing*," we started the Sunday Service here in this room and then as a congregation we walked over to the ROC---we **CROSSED OVER** the patio into the completed gym. We've been using it for about 11 years now.

But before I tell you HOW it's been used to help us grow from being MORE than a "waystation church" --- grow to begin reaching more local people with the Gospel---before I do that let me remind you how having that building has changed other things. For 34 years, until we moved into the ROC, our Sanctuary here was a multi-purpose room. The floor was an ugly tile and the seats were ugly tan plastic chairs, but light and easy to move. And move them we did. We used to move all those chairs out every week and set up tables so we could have our midweek meal in here. The warming kitchen was THE kitchen and there used to be a sliding door there and a serving window that opened into the kitchen. In my youth ministry days, we would turn this into a gymnasium. We played half-court basketball here. We played volleyball here and believe it or not we never broke a light! But with the ROC---all that changed.

We renovated the Sanctuary---including this beautiful oak stage and choir loft. The choir used to sit on chairs on rickety folding risers. And, with the help of generous RBC family we purchased these beautiful chairs. We added stained glass windows. We put a steeple on the Sanctuary to add height from the street and make it clear to passersby that this is indeed a church. We got a new marquee---the one we have now. And we moved our meals into the ROC foyer using its full commercial kitchen. The Sanctuary became a Sanctuary.

But back to the ROC.

We decided to hire a half-time Rec Ministry Director. Joed Carbonell was the first to serve in that position. Joed did a great job---in fact, God used him to do a miracle. Joed formulated our Rec Ministry Policies and Procedures Manual; a multi-page document that the church miraculously approved in only two business meetings! Kyle Kilgore succeeded Joed and also did an amazing job. Kyle was followed by some guy named Rich Carter, Rich is our current Rec Ministry Director and he continues the legacy of doing awesome ministry in and through our ROC.

The truly exciting thing is the ROC has done what we thought it would. For example, with the ROC we've been able to do things to just get people to come in our driveway. For example:

- The famous Coach Harwood uses our gym for his popular basketball camps in the summer. For several years now, Jim Main and his son-in-law, John Crocker, have faithfully welcomed the children and teens every day they entered the ROC. All those families drove in our driveway because of that building.
- The ROC foyer has been used for our annual *Amani ya Juu* Fair Trade Craft Sale---and that has also brought tons of new people onto our campus.
- The ROC has helped us to build relationships with our lost neighbors through which we have been able to SHARE THE CURE. The best example of that is UPWARD BASKETBALL and CHEERLEADING. I have been an Upward basketball assistant coach for let's see---ten shirts now---I mean, ten years. And I love it because it not only because it increases my golf shirt wardrobe, but because it gives me a chance to get down from behind the pulpit and get back on the front lines of Cure-sharing. Every week I get to tell my kids and their parents about God's great love. I've had tons of unchurched kids on my teams---even kids from families who are a part of false faith systems like the Moonies.

I would encourage YOU to consider volunteering this year. Our enrollment is already 257! We need coaches, assistant coaches, refs, score-keepers, people to work at the snack stand. But we also need people to just come and talk to people. Every weekend about 1,500 people enter the ROC---think of all the faith conversations that could be had! In fact, I am going to challenge us to make sure we have at least one RBC family at every game. We'll have a sign-up for that soon. If you sign up---and I hope ALL OF YOU WILL---all you have to do is COME introduce yourself to the person sitting next to you in the stands or eating a snack at one of the tables. There are almost limitless opportunities during UPWARD season to get to know LOST people---unchurched people.

But that's not the only way our ROC has been used to share the CURE. Awana uses it on Sundays. Our Tang Soo Do martial arts ministry uses it. We have an exercise group of Redlanders who come Monday, Wednesday and Friday to walk or use our workout equipment. 8.2 times around the court is a mile. Volleyball is played here every Tuesday.

And the ROC has given us lots of other wonderful opportunities to get to know people who may not know Jesus. One is RUMPUS AT THE ROC. We haven't done it since COVID hit but it was a great way for us to get to know young parents. We just opened the gym for preschool kids to run around for two hours on Thursday mornings and TONS of young moms and dads took advantage of that opportunity. We had at least two families join our church after being introduced to it through RUMPUS.

I have to say, one of the most exciting things of my ministry is the ways I have seen God's vision for this church come true thanks to that building. Redland has become known as "the place to be" when it comes to family

recreation. We've had tons of outsiders comment on our commitment to children and their parents. And this is just the beginning. There are SO many other ways the ROC could be used and will be used in the future.

In fact, as we remember the vision God gave us to build that building generations of people will use that it long after you and I are gone. I believe hundreds of people will come to Jesus in that place because of the kinds of things it will make possible. Children and adults will hear the gospel there---people who wouldn't hear it otherwise. With that in mind, this morning I want to challenge you to help us pay off the mortgage on that building. We are almost done. We've gone from \$1.7 million to just \$266,867.62. I am challenging us to pay it off by December 2022.

That will save us \$30K in interest and we will be out from under that \$14K per month payment. I hope you've been praying about this as a family. And I want you to continue to do that. This morning we've passed out pledge cards. For you watching online, there is an online form to submit: <https://redlandbaptist.org/giving>. This is an anonymous pledge---it's just between you and God. On October 17 we want you to bring these cards back or submit online by then---we are also challenging you to bring your first fruit gifts toward your pledge on that Sunday. It could be a one-time gift or an amount you pledge to give over and above your tithes for the next 14 months. I also encourage you to find ways to personally be involved in the ministry of the ROC. Help us continue to turn our God-given vision into reality. Come to the exercise group that meets and invite a neighbor to join you. Come to Volleyball and bring a co-worker. Sign up to serve in Upward. Offer to help restart Rumpus. Giving to get rid of this mortgage; serving in the ROC ministry, these are ways for each of us to OUTLIVE our lives.

That brings to mind a story written by Max Lucado: *"Unfavorable winds once blew a ship off course, and when they did, the sailors spotted uncharted islands. They saw half a dozen mounds rising out of the blue South Seas waters. The captain orders the men to drop anchor and goes ashore. He is a robust man with a barrel chest, full beard, and curious soul. On the first island he sees nothing but sadness. Underfed children. Tribes in conflict. No farming or food development, no treatment for the sick, and no schools. Just simple, needy people. The second and following islands reveal more of the same. The captain sighs at what he sees. 'This is no life for these people.' But what can he do? Then he steps onto the last and largest island. The people are healthy and well fed. Irrigation systems nourish their fields, and roads connect the villages.*

The children have bright eyes and strong bodies. The captain asks the chief for an explanation. How has this island moved so far ahead of the others? The chief, who is smaller than the captain but every bit his equal in confidence, gives a quick response: 'Father Benjamin. He educated us in everything from agriculture to health. He built schools and clinics and dug wells.' The captain asks, 'Can you take me to see him?' The chief nods and signals for two tribesmen to join him. They guide the captain over a jungle ridge to a simple, expansive medical clinic. It is equipped with clean beds and staffed with trained caretakers. They show the captain the shelves of medicine and introduce him to the staff. The captain, though impressed, sees nothing of Father Benjamin. He repeats his request. 'I would like to see Father Benjamin. Can you take me to where he LIVES?' The three natives look puzzled. They confer among themselves. After several minutes the chief invites, 'Follow us to the other side of the island.' They walk along the shoreline until they reach a series of fishponds. Canals connect the ponds to the ocean. As the tide rises, fish pass from the ocean into the ponds. The islanders then lower canal gates and trap the fish for harvest. Again, the captain is amazed. He meets fishermen and workers, gatekeepers and net casters. But he sees nothing of Father Benjamin. He wonders if he is making himself clear. 'I don't see Father Benjamin. Please take me to where he LIVES.' The trio talks alone again. After some discussion the chief offers, 'Let's go up the mountain.' They lead the captain up a steep, narrow path. After many twists and turns, the path deposits them in front of a grass-roofed chapel. The voice of the chief is soft and earnest. 'He has taught us about God.' He escorts the captain inside and shows him the altar, a large wooden cross, several rows of benches, and a Bible. 'Is this where Father Benjamin lives?' the captain asks. The

men nod and smile. 'May I talk to him?' Their faces grow suddenly serious. They say, 'Oh, that would be impossible.' 'Why?' the captain asks. The chief responds, 'He died many years ago.' The bewildered captain stares at the men. 'I asked to see him, and you showed me a clinic, some fish farms, and this chapel. You said nothing of his death.' 'You didn't ask about his DEATH,' the chief explains. 'You asked to see where he LIVES. We showed you.'"

Okay, with this story in mind let me ask, *"If you were to stop living today where would people say you LIVED? I mean, what do you do that has eternal significance? What will live on after you die?"* Those of us who knew Bill Wehunt miss him---we miss Charlie Brinkman too---and others like Buddy Young who were a vital part of this building. But, the cool thing about these people is they have outlived their lives. I have a passion for this building—because as I said, I believe the things we will do in it—will have eternal repercussions.

Let's pray.