

A CHARGE TO KEEP: GO PREACH CHRIST
Rev. Dr. Wesley S. K. Daniel
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II Corinthians 4:3-6
Ephesians 2:8-10

Most of you maybe familiar with a story of a young man who was convinced that he was called to preach. But he was totally unsuited for the ministry of his particular denomination, and he realized it. One day, while in Seminary, he went to see his faculty advisor with many doubts. “I was so sure that God had called me to preach,” he said. “One day, I was out in the corn field working and I looked up and the clouds seemed to be spelling out GPC. Immediately, I knew what that meant. “Go preach Christ.” The faculty advisor thought for a moment and said, “Son, are you sure those clouds were not telling you to, “Go plant corn?”

“A charge to keep: Go Preach Christ.” Those of us who are pastors, we have the wonderful privilege and honor to stand before God’s people and declare the unsearchable riches in Christ Jesus. By using the phrase, “Preach Christ,” I simply mean, we are ALL (whether we are clergy or laity), we are ALL called to share, proclaim and preach about the life, death of Christ and the new life in Christ offers all... Preaching Christ means we share about the unconditional love of Christ and the abundant grace which has been offered to us all through Christ. So, the task of proclaiming and preaching the unsearchable mercies of God’s grace and love, and helping persons to deepen their faith and commitment to Christ, is NOT simply the pastor’s job alone. It is the responsibility of the whole

church. St. Paul tells us, "... we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has also made God's light shine in our hearts..." We have all experienced the light of God's unmerited grace, mercy and love shining into our hearts, and now it is our responsibility to share our light, grace and love with others. So how do we proclaim, share or preach Christ? How do we share the message of God's unconditional love and abundant grace?

First of all, I believe as leaders of the church, lay or clergy (retired, commissioned, ordained and consecrated) we begin by acknowledging the fact that, proclaiming, sharing or preaching Christ, IS INDEED OUR TASK. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." We are called to preach the Word. We are called to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. We are called to preach Jesus Christ the crucified, dead, buried, risen again and lives forever. We are called to make and mature Christian disciples. The Church has no other choice but to relentlessly proclaim, share, and preach about the unsearchable riches of God's love and unmerited grace. Our mandate is crystal clear. So, we begin by acknowledging that this is our task.

Here is the second principle: **WE CANNOT SHARE WHAT WE DO NOT HAVE**. How is it that the old evangelist put it? "You can't give away what

you don't have anymore than you can come back from where you've never been." Friends, before we go to the world and share about God's love, we must come to grips with our own faith in Jesus Christ. Is the light of God shining in our hearts? Is the light of God shining on our faces? Have you experienced God grace and unconditional love in your life? When we understand we are the recipients of the grace of God, it leads us to humility and compassion, but it also leads us to engage in radical acts of justice, service of love and acts of radical hospitality. When you and I truly understand that none of us is really deserving of the grace of God, none of us deserves to stand before the throne of God in the white robes that have been prepared for us, we are in a posture of humility which moves us then to radical acts of justice and compassion in the name of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The church is called not simply to bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to passionately drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

Unfortunately, in many of our churches in North America today, and it pains for me to say this, we have no passionate commitment to showing and sharing God's grace and engaging in bold acts of radical hospitality, acts of mission and justice because our own relationship with Christ is such a low priority that we have nothing to give to the world. Alexander MacLaren may have been right when he said, "Christianity has fallen into the hands of a church that does not half believe its own gospel." Tragic is it not? That maybe the biggest obstacle to our ministry to the world. The

light Jesus and God's grace must be first experienced in our hearts before we can reflect and share that light to others.

I thank God for the churches and communities of faith and ministries right here in our Annual Conference that are already proclaiming Christ and showing acts of grace, unconditional love and acts of compassion, justice and radical hospitality. I thank God for your obedience and faithfulness to Christ's mandate. But, our work is not done. Our work is never done.

Friends, the world we live in today desperately needs to experience and hear about Jesus Christ, God's grace and God's unconditional love!

- To those who are hurting and who are bruised, they need to hear Jesus is someone they can lean on...**
- To those who are battered by the storms of life, they need to hear Jesus is someone they can hold on to...**
- To those who are confused and simply tired of running this life, they need to hear Jesus' words, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."**
- To those who have been mistreated, abused and in the margins of life, they need to hear Jesus invites and makes room for all at his table...**
- To those who have been pushed aside as strangers and nobodies, they need to hear Jesus is waiting to welcome and embrace them with open arms...**
- To those who are seeking lasting happiness, comfort and peace that passes all understanding, friends, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is their only answer.**

There are persons who are waiting, watching, wanting to know in very real terms that God loves them; God forgives them; God wants a reconciling relationship with them, and God is more than ready to show God's bountiful mercy, extravagant love and grace. It is time for you and I the

Church of Jesus Christ to also boldly engage showing acts of grace, justice and mercy, extravagant love and radical hospitality. Paul says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Therefore, I say to you, we’ve got a charge to keep: Go, go proclaim and preach Christ, crucified, dead, buried, risen again, lives forever more and is coming back to receive His church!

Here is the final principle. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WILL RESPOND TO OUR MESSAGE. If we can do our part, there are persons who will respond because God is already at work in the hearts of persons. God’s prevenient grace is already at work in people’s hearts long before we can even say a word. They are waiting for a preacher – not necessarily a professional clergyperson, but anyone who will take the time to share with them the good news of God’s bountiful grace.

Theodore Parker Ferris tells a story of young Presbyterian minister of large city church. One of his members was a very prominent man in the city... a man of great wealth, status and power in that city. But, he never came to church and never showed any interest in the things of God...

One day, the young pastor said to himself, “I’ve got to go and do something about this man.” The pastor made an appointment to visit this gentleman in his office and on his turf. After a moment of exchanging pleasantries, he shared why he had come. He shared about the life, death, resurrection of Jesus and the new life Christ has come to offer to us all. He talked about what accepting this precious gift can mean in his life.

Then, he concluded his words by saying, “Sir, I think you ought to do something about his one way or the other!”

Across the desk the pastor was met with dead deafening silence. The man never spoke, never moved, sitting there like an intimidating stone. The young pastor not knowing what else to do, once again and wishing for a convenient exit, the man sitting across the desk reached for a paper pad, wrote something on it and he slid the paper pad across the desk to the pastor, who picked it up and read the following words which said, “I am so deeply moved, I cannot speak.” This man accepted God’s unconditional love and grace in his life that very day.

Friends, it can happen and it does happen. Even as Apostle Paul says in our reading for the day, we cannot earn God’s grace, love and mercy. It is a pure gift. That is, of course, the meaning of the word “grace.” The theme of God’s unmerited, unrestrained love for sinners was so important to St. Paul. It was important to him because he had tried his best to earn his way to heaven. He was the most passionate Pharisee of all. He had even persecuted the early Church in his zeal and passion. And yet, Jesus met him and turns his life around. He, who was in his own words, the chief of sinners, experienced God’s extravagant love and mercy – not because of works, but because of God’s grace. So, St. Paul wanted the whole world to know that salvation is something we cannot earn and it is a free gift to all, no matter who you are...The knowledge of God’s unmerited, unrestrained and abundant love and grace for humanity is a call to honest and utter

humility. We are all sinners saved by grace. None of us is superior to any other in God's eyes. God's grace is a call to acceptance of this gift with humility. C. H. Spurgeon said, "Between here and heaven, every minute that a Christian lives is a minute of humility and grace."

We also need to understand that the knowledge of God's grace is a call to ***compassion.*** Once we admit our status as sinners saved by God's grace then we must look with humility and compassion on others. You see folks, this was Jesus' problem with the self-righteous Pharisees. They had a superiority complex and a judgmental attitude that would NOT allow them to reach out to others with humility and compassion. Jesus was constantly talking about the sin of pride and self-righteousness, did he not?

Friends, often times we in the church have tended to divide and polarize the church and the world into two camps...

- We often say, you are saved and you are not.
- We say you are poor and therefore you cannot be a part of who we are...
- We say you are liberal and you are not...
- We say you are theologically to the right and you are not...
- We often say you can come into our circle and but you cannot...
- We say, open hearts, open doors and open minds but NOT for you...
- We say because you are gay, you are lesbian...and therefore you cannot sit at the table with us.

Friends, as much as I love the United Methodist Church and will give up for life for it, may I dare say, sometimes the church is so arrogant, judgmental,

proud and self-righteous and we too have repeatedly committed grievous sins like the Pharisees and we say, “God, I thank you that I am not as the other man or woman over there...” O God have mercy on us all! When the church is self righteous we cannot preach and proclaim Christ. When we polarize and divide the world, it is impossible to show extravagant love and acts of radical hospitality.

The Sin of pride, self-righteousness and superiority complex was so highly offensive to Jesus. Friends, the time has come for the Church of Jesus Christ to stop, yes, stop dividing and polarizing the church and the world. We need to rid the sin of pride, and the church must move toward unconditional love and acceptance of all persons with God’s generous grace, unconditional love and radical hospitality. “Radical hospitality,” in the words of Saint Benedict, “is to invite ALL in to your house as if they were Christ.” There is a seat, there is a chair at God’s table for EVERYONE. No one, no one is excluded from God’s table.

Every time I hear the words to this beautiful song it moves me to tears. It goes something this... Grace, Grace, God’s marvelous grace... Grace that is greater than all my sin... Grace, Grace, God’s marvelous grace... Grace that will pardon and cleanse me within... Friends, this is the message we preach, proclaim and live out.

To those who are retiring from active pastoral ministry we truly honor you today. We say thank you from the depths of our hearts for your faithful ministry to Christ and the Church, but I have some news for you!

Your work is never done. You can never stop preaching and proclaiming Christ. To my beloved friend and brother Jim Hanke, you can no longer say, I QUIT!!! Never stop...Never stop. Keep preaching Jesus! Preach the Word! Keep setting an example for us to follow. Keep preaching and proclaiming the Word in season and out of season.

To those who will be soon commissioned and ordained, as the Bishop lays his hands on you, you will hear him say, "Take authority and preach the Word of God." I plead with you in the name of Christ, be relentless, be relentless in preaching and proclaiming Christ! I plead with you to be bold and courageous in preaching Christ, crucified, dead, buried, risen again lives forever and is coming back to receive his Church.

As the mantle is passed to you and future generations, I hope you will write in your hearts forever the words of Apostle Paul: "In the presence of God and Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his Kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction."

Our mission and mandate is loud and clear: Go, go preach Christ crucified, dead, buried, risen again, lives forever more and is coming back to receive his Church.

When that day comes for me to go and be with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I want him to look deeply into my eyes, with a big smile on his face, I want him to embrace me and say, "Welcome home, welcome home, thou

Good and faithful servant.” When that day comes for you to go and be with your Maker, I want him to look deeply into your eyes, with a big smile on his face, I want him to embrace you too and say, “Welcome home, welcome home, thou good and faithful servant.”

So, I say, We’ve got a charge to keep: Go, go, preach Christ.

Thanks be to God.

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