
PASTOR'S CHARGE CONFERENCE REPORT 2014

First United Methodist Church, Buckhannon, WV

Rev. M. Steven Meadows, pastor

Isn't it interesting how sometimes, you're looking for one thing, and you find something else, something that you haven't thought of for a long time, something that's important, like, old family photos, or an old watch, or your mother's Bible?

A few days ago, I was looking for our son's birth certificate. I'm almost sure that he had has it, but he asked me for it, so I started looking through folders of stuff in the house office. But what I discovered was a letter I haven't seen in years, the letter I wrote to the Staff Parish Relations Committee at United Methodist Temple in Beckley requesting the SPRC's recommendation to my entering the certified candidacy for the ordained ministry.

In my letter, I quoted some scripture from 1st Timothy 1:12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful appointing me to his service." And, I quoted some significant Discipline sentences that I thought needed to be included in the letter, and then, as I read the letter, I found these words, ...my words, "...I know that God calls me to a greater commitment. My search for inner peace has many times proved invalid but now I feel that I am finally approaching God's will. ...stories of my childhood told to me by my mother of how she dedicated me to God, ...I love the Lord and his people. Working for Him and with his people is one talent that I want to increase. ...my call to ministry ...has been heartfelt, growing for many years."

Every year at Charge Conference time, I remember the words from Jeremiah 29, the prophet's echo of God's promise. I don't know how many times I've used those words in my pastor's report. Actually, I think we need to hear them at least once a year, if not more times.

¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴ I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

And now, five appointments, college, seminary, ordination, crossing paths with many extraordinary people, and 27 charge conferences later, here we are, together, in ministry, in family, in God's hope-filled plan. Do you have any idea how wonderful it is to believe that you've been included in God's plans, plans for welfare and a future with hope?

I remember some of the things I heard from others before we arrived at First Church, Buckhannon. At a clergy meeting, one of my clergy friends asked me if I was staying at my previous appointment another year, and I said, "Nope."

His eyebrows raised, and he questioned, "Where are you going?" and I said, "First Church, Buckhannon." And another pastor who was eavesdropping on our conversation said, "Do you have any idea how many retired clergy are there? Better get your preachin' pants on! Boy, you've got your work cut out for you."

But, that's the good news...God has our work cut out for us.

"For I know the plans I have for you...a future with hope."

First Church is given great and bountiful blessings.

And, I proclaim today that the state of First Church, Buckhannon is a hope-filled future!

And because of such great blessings, there is much to do. In Luke 12:48, Jesus speaks to Simon Peter, words that reach all the way to us today. *“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”*

So what **do** we do? **We set our eyes on Jesus. We are disciples of Jesus. We assist others growing in their discipleship of Jesus Christ.**

I don't know if Jesus gave any instructions to Peter before he took his first steps out of the boat to join Jesus walking on the water. But, if Jesus did say something, I imagine it was something like this: **Peter, whatever you do—don't look down. Keep going. One foot in front of the other. Think Light thoughts.**

In my mind, I imagine that Peter's eye's were locked on Jesus—that during his water-walking experience, a fine-pointed attentiveness and alertness to Jesus completely commanded Peter's mind and heart. This time, Peter's focus is so very kept on Jesus. You know...like master, like disciple. You get the idea.

The Gospel record intends for us to understand something completely. While Peter's mind focuses on Jesus, he was empowered to walk with Jesus, on the water. When his focus was on the storm, or anywhere else for that matter, his fear short-circuited his ability to receive Jesus' sustaining power.

Hope got Peter out of the boat; Trust held him up.

Here in lies the mindset that is essential for First Church to live into the plans God has for us.

Call it hope; call it trust, or even, call it confidence. It is the single greatest difference between Churches that thrive and Churches that move into gate-keeper mode, churches working to just keep the lights on and the water running until they call in Hospice.

When hope is lost, the Church sinks.

Church, don't look down.

Hope is the fuel of the human heart.

Hope stimulates the disciple's heart.

Hope is the energy that brings life to the heart of the Church.

In a recent article, Rev. Dr. Tim Bias, General Secretary at the General Board of Discipleship, and former pastor in the West Virginia Annual Conference and friend writes:

“Recently I spent several hours in a room with five other people, including a bishop of our church, to work on a definition of “disciple of Jesus Christ.” ...In 1996 our church placed in The Book of Discipline the mission of our church, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” It seems that as a denomination, we do not have a clear understanding or a clear definition of a disciple that assists us in our mission.

I have thought of a disciple as a student or follower. In the Gospels and Acts ...every occurrence of disciple is connected to a person. Overwhelmingly ... that person is Jesus. As a result, as simple as it might sound, a disciple is a “grace-filled follower of Christ” who puts faith into action.

Five aspects of a “grace-filled Christ follower” are described in the vows of membership of our church:

Prayer – faith formation; **Presence** – participation in public worship; **Gifts** – generosity; **Service** – engagement with people; and **Witness** – sharing Jesus with others through words and action.

A disciple is a person who engages in the means of grace, works of piety and works of mercy, and the disciplines of the faith. It is interesting how our membership vows serve as a reminder of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

...it is clear to me that this is our purpose, to make grace-filled Christ followers who will engage in the communities in which they live.

What would happen if your congregation began to intentionally develop relationships with Christ and one another through the spiritual disciplines; if your public worship and giving we're experiences of means of grace;

if your service brought you into relationship with individuals in your community; and if you shared with people why you loved them the way God loves you?

I believe we would be less concerned about making better church members and more focused upon making grace-filled Christ followers who by acting in faith change their communities and the world in which they live. Our purpose is to assist people to grow in their faith to the point that they will assist others in growing in their faith and who will actively live out their faith in risk-taking and world-changing ways.”

First Church, Buckhannon will change Buckhannon and far, far beyond our beautiful stained glass windows by offering Hope with the love of God experienced in and through Jesus. And, as we live into the plans God’s has for us, may we seek to make grace-filled Christ followers that will change the world by learning about Christ, by following Christ into the world, and by living Christ in relationship with everyone we meet.

Isn’t it interesting how sometimes, you’re looking for one thing, and you find something else? Isn’t it interesting that when we live into the plans God has for us, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, and we find that following Jesus into the world, we become the Church.

Grace and peace,

M. Steven Meadows,

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