

Forty-Four Is Not a Biblical Number

It is certainly no record but I have listened to forty-four ordination sermons. The variety has been remarkable. Some have been pep talks. Others tested one's endurance for irrelevant pedanticism. Those that were deeply rooted in Scripture, real experience, and history brought helpful insight. Many were motivating. Some changed my mind. Not one put me to sleep.

My way has been to think about what I hear from the pulpit in light of what actually happens in life. So I am moved to condense the best of 22 hours of preaching into a three pointer knowing that outlines are out of fashion. Space will not permit the full text so I invite you to fill in the blanks.

- I. A pastor must have **guts**: an earthy way of saying "courage born of conviction."
 - A. It takes courage to receive forgiveness. Forced to admit that we are flawed.
 - B. It takes much fortitude to grow toward perfection. Painful, struggling process.
 - C. Coming to terms with the "call" requires fervent, honest prayer and examination.
 - D. In the parish every day is a test of nerve:
 1. Taking a stand where the Gospel confronts the world:
 - a. Racism
 - b. Sexism
 - c. Nationalism
 - d. Standing with the "outcasts" for Gospel's sake
 2. Keeping watch lest the Pastor :
 - a. Defines self by enemies in and out of parish

- b. Allows self to jerked around by feelings
 - c. Loses objectivity
 - d. Uses coercion, manipulation and not graceful persuasion
 - E. It takes guts to continually be out of step with prevailing attitudes
- II. A pastor must have **gumption**: common sense waltzing with reality.
 - A. What you see is not what you get
 1. Most life is lived under the surface
 2. Persons speak in code
 3. It is a mistake to inhale adulation
 - B. Some things matter and some things don't
 1. What matters to pastor may not matter to congregation and vice-versa
 2. Long-term, honest dialogue may be necessary
 - C. The medium is often the message
 1. Healthy relationships make communication easier
 2. Congregations often take pastor more seriously than pastor takes self
 3. What is clear in one's head and heart is usually stated clearly. What is not clear in head and heart . . .
 - D. Thinking seriously about what one does and says in terms of consequences and results is essential
 - E. The Gospel is not common sense. The Gospel is a scandal.

- III. A pastor must have some **theology**: a novel, God-centered way of looking at

- all of life.
- A. In contrast to the ivory tower the pastor is a practicing theologian-not a sociologist nor a psychologist nor a social worker
 - B. The Christian pastor knows his/her role as one who interprets existence in light of the God of the Bible, word become flesh.
 1. Universal Gospel
 2. God is active, providence
 3. God has a will that will ultimately be known
 4. God is a person who loves, redeems, and uses persons
 - a. All persons
 - C. The pastor reintroduces the congregation to 'sin' as a dynamic understanding of who we are and who we can be
 - D. Salvation has to do with spiritual space and is far more than a ticket to be shown at the gate
 - E. The pastor uses the extensive and profoundly meaningful vocabulary of the faith never leaving out "joy."
 - F. As a leader of worship the enduring question is: "What does this gathering say about God?"

Conclusion: To come to terms with it all the pastor must organize time, relate gracefully with other pastors, retreat, study, think, and pray.



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CLERGY Connection

HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Christ as Lord *Implications for the Local Church*

The Church lives in the aftermath and afterglow of Christmas as well as Easter. Whether in Epiphany or on Christ the King Sunday, whether in the first century or the twenty-first century, the Church lives in the afterglow of Christmas, God's Advent in the Christ-child, "the Word becoming flesh," God coming to us as one of us.

In the aftermath of Christmas we continue to hear the angelic announcement: "I bring you good news of great joy for all the people, to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"

(Luke 2:11). This single pronouncement heralds three of the great honorific titles for Jesus ... Savior, the Christ, the Lord.

We embrace Jesus as Savior, God's One who heals, restores, redeems our relationship with God, with another, even with ourselves. We embrace Jesus as "the Christ," God's Anointed One, anointed with the Holy Spirit to restore a broken humankind. We also profess Jesus as Lord.

J.N.D Kelly identifies "Jesus as Lord" as "the most primitive Christian confession" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 138). Kelly especially cites the Apostle Paul's affirmation in Romans 10:9 ("if you con-



fess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved") and Philippians 2:11 ("every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father") as basic Christian beliefs.

"Lord" ... a word not used much in contemporary language but ever-prominent in Biblical days. Werner Forester offers an exhaustive study of "Lord" (the Greek *Kurios*) in secular and Biblical usage (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Volume III, 1039-1098). Our interest is his treatment of Christ as Lord.

Forester discusses the Lordship of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11. Forester mentions the importance of every knee bending and every tongue confessing Christ as Lord. In this passage, "the name of Lord implies a position equal with God" and "thus designates the position of the Risen Lord" (1089). According to Forester, the title Lord signifies Christ's preeminent position, that of resurrection, exaltation worthy of adoration. Yet in the same passage, Jesus is identified as self-emptying, a servant, human, humble, obedient, to the

The Clergy Connection

is a communication produced and written by the Clergy of Holston Conference for the purposes of deepening relationships, encouraging spiritual growth, increasing awareness of challenging opportunities, imparting useful information, stimulating theological exploration, providing a forum for honest expression and sharing the joys of creative ministries.

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The Clergy Connection exists to call clergy into deeper covenant with God through Christ and to call clergy to live in covenant with each other.



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Reflections on a Year as Student Pastor

As 2002 comes to a close, I'm in a reflective sort of mood. Now I have never been prone to such outbursts and have never kept a journal in my life (not even when required for Contextual Education), but I couldn't help thinking about this past year while gazing into the future of the year to come. This might quickly start sounding like



something between a travelogue and "dear diary." But hang on and bear with me while I clear my throat. **What is a student pastor?** Being a student pastor is something akin to being a superhero. Now before I lose every-

one, leave out the "super" part (and you might as well drop the "hero" part, too) and simply assume the two identities and you'll begin to understand. You might even want to keep one identity secret from the other. Some mornings I have awakened to wonder where I was (what city, what listing?) and what I was doing, not knowing whether to write a sermon or a paper. Sometimes the sermons came out like papers and the papers were just too "preachy," but everything miraculously gets done if not in the very best final form. During this second year, every professor has become my only professor (or at least they seem to think that!) and every assignment was due yesterday. In the midst of being in ministry to your church family and pastoral care, there is also the need to see to family and self. The challenge is to do all things well with too many irons in the fire and too many balls in the air.

Lessons learned and New Year's resolutions. First, I will never, ever commit to do too much! Well, that seems obvious, but in a gung-ho spirit, I have often tried to schedule too much fun into those already packed weekends. I remember a recent weekend that consisted of three services, two board meetings, and a partridge in a pear tree. Did I mention the funeral followed by the wedding one hour later? And that term paper is due before my Greek quiz!

I have resolved to relax and be faithful to God's call while keeping a little in reserve for the future. I don't have to do everything this week or there will be nothing to look forward to next week (you may also freely substitute any time frame you feel is appropriate). So that paper may not be as good as it could be

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Christ as Lord

continued from page 1

point of death on a cross (2:6-8). The highest One is the lowly One. The humiliated One is the exalted One.

Forester makes another central point about Christ as Lord in Paul's letters, "a series of higher and lower ranks" (1090). Referring to I Corinthians 4:19; 14:37, and 16:7 (among other passages), Forester says "KURIOS (Lord) refers to the exalted Lord who is authority ... The service of believers must be rendered to the Lord" (1090-1091).

Since we profess Christ as Lord as a most basic Christian belief, what are the implications for the Church? With Forester's article as background, the following implications emerge:

The Church belongs to Christ and not to us. A Church member said years ago, "this is OUR Church!" We have probably thought this, said this, acted on this. We may identify ourselves so closely to the Church that we may inadvertently claim ownership over the Church.

Jesus asserts in Matthew 16:18, "I shall build MY Church." In this first mention of Church in the New Testament, Jesus claims sovereignty, Lordship over the Church. If Paul says, "we are not our own; for you were bought with a price" (I Corinthians 7:19-20), the Church is certainly not our own but Christ's.

The Church's Vision is Christ's and not ours. The Church has rediscovered

vision-thinking and vision-language in recent years.

In so doing, the Church rightfully goes beyond organizational maintenance to a vision of a preferred future. The Church has grasped the truth of Proverbs 29:18, "where there is no vision, the people perish."

However, we may find ourselves using such language as "my/our vision" ... "her/his vision." Vision becomes domesticated and co-opted. We thus forget the root meaning of "vision" in Proverbs 29:18 as "revelation," not our plan but God's revelation, not our goals but God's vision.

Christ's Lordship is humility, servanthood, and obedience. Immediately after Jesus' teaching of denying themselves, taking up their cross and following Him (Mark 9:33-37 and parallels), Jesus' disciples sought position, privilege, and standing. We may identify ourselves so closely to the Church that we may inadvertently claim ownership over the Church. Christ's Lordship was/is expressed through humility, self-emptying, servanthood and costly obedience.

The Church heralds Christ's victory and not the world's despair. In his biography of John Adams, David McCullough quotes Mr. Adams as saying at a critical point, "I shall not despond." The Church and the world have countless earthly reasons to "despond." The more we focus on our-

selves and the world, we find little reason for hope. We have little to offer the world. Christ as Lord of history (and not only individual hearts) changes everything.

What is the Church's response to Christ the Lord of the Church? The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer offers a powerfully faithful response:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
To thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine, and I am Thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven.

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Pastoral Uses of Scripture

Not a Ring, But a Sword*

Recently, The Lord of the Rings has captured our imaginations. In that medieval world, Good and Evil clash on battlefields with mighty swords. The writer of Hebrews depicts the weapon of Christian faith: "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." (329) Here are some of the ways that the sword of Scripture enables us pastors to do battle.

"In the beginning existed the Word..." (133) Like many of you we were born into Christian homes filled with Bible stories and songs. Yet there came that moment when we heard the Word of salvation, repented, believed, and were transformed by Jesus Christ. Years later God called us into full-time ministry, and our seminary training built upon our own study of God's Word. As bread, it has fed us, and as light, it has led us to lead

others. Like John Wesley we aspire to be "homo unius libri" (xiii), a man, a woman, of one book. As pastors we live with, meditate on, and wield in battle – the Word of God.

Just like Frodo, Deborah, and Paul, we face a world that is dangerous, wounded, and needing a savior. In the Lord's army, we take many roles in this quest, and our primary resource is the Bible. As a doctor listens to our heart and lungs with a stethoscope, Scripture helps us diagnose spiritual illness. Churches, as well as individuals, exhibit such symptoms as divisions, prayerlessness, and a need to control.

*The Scripture and other quotes here are from John Wesley's New Testament Anniversary Edition, The John G. Winston Company, 1953. Numbers in parentheses reflect page numbers in this source.

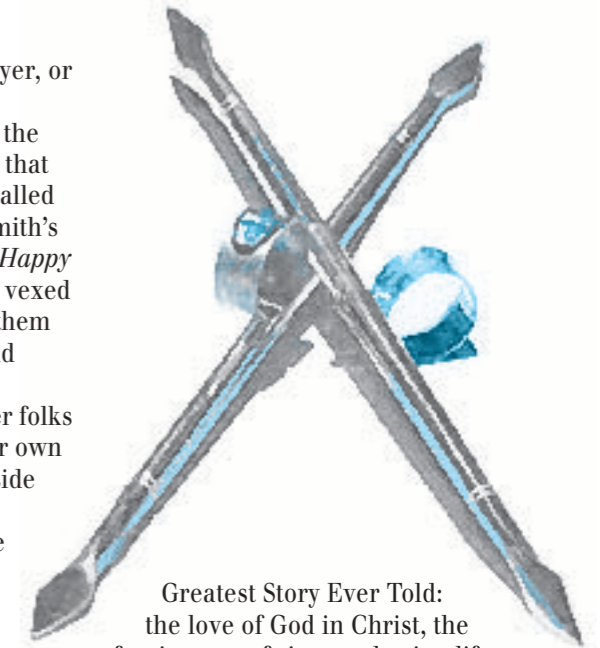
God's Word urges agape love, prayer, or spiritual warfare.

Once we find spiritual disease, the Word often becomes the medicine that brings the cure. E. Stanley Jones called it the Way to health. Hannah W. Smith's classic, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, states that whenever she was vexed by difficult people, the Lord used them as medicine bottles for refining and shaping her life.

As pastors we often encounter folks who want to run their lives in their own way. It may be living together outside marriage, or padding an expense account. In such cases, we are like troopers who 'pull them over' and point out the speed limits set down in the Scriptures. Whether or not they listen, we try to show them the harmful consequences down the road.

One of our main responsibilities is teaching from the Bible. Our "syllabus" must conform to the Book, or it is not pastoral teaching. With inductive Bible study, we can examine the text itself from many angles, and then enlightenment comes to us and our hearers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew deepens the impact.

Finally, the Word of God is like an advertiser's commercial. We are the announcer who does the voice-over proclaiming this awesome Good News – and how people can find it. We persuade, we use humor, and we dramatize, all for the purpose of sharing the



Greatest Story Ever Told: the love of God in Christ, the forgiveness of sin, everlasting life.

We use Scripture in many ways and pray with Paul that we will handle the Word of Truth rightly. John Wesley "knew that the changed life produced by conversion could be preserved and extended only when established in a knowledge of Scriptural truth."(xi) That is our privilege and high calling, to wield the sword – not the ring – of the Lord, that saves, transforms, and changes lives.

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How to Think About the Sacraments

Finding Grace in Every Aspect of Creation

We know that teaching about sacraments is essential, but it is also incredibly difficult! Our Baptism and Eucharist liturgies draw on numerous scriptural images and convey multiple layers of meaning. And yet, the “sign/acts” themselves are straightforward and powerfully simple. We all understand cool, cleansing water and bread when we hunger. It is this union of complexity and simplicity that brings both new disciples and saints back to contemplate their abundant meanings.

To talk about sacrament is to talk about grace. Sacraments are sign/acts that signify God’s undeserved love. Of course, we do not believe that sacraments are the only places to experience such grace. We can find grace in every aspect of creation – if our eyes are open to see it! Baptism and Communion are two vehicles of blessing that God has promised to use, but all of creation is “sacramental.”

A wonderful way to approach teaching sacraments is to study how Jesus created the new covenant sign/acts by transforming old covenant images.

Jesus was (and still is) in the business of transformation. But it wasn’t only people’s lives that were transformed – our way of experiencing God, and God’s grace, was permanently altered by Jesus’ life. The day of Pentecost is a good example. Pentecost was an old covenant holy day that celebrated harvest and the giving of Torah. How wonderful, that on the day that celebrated the Law as the foundation of God’s old covenant community, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit – the new covenant foundation! Jesus transformed old covenant Torah into new covenant Spirit.

Likewise, Jesus transformed the sign/act that brings us into the faithful community. The old covenant initiation ritual of circumcision is replaced by the new covenant sign of Baptism (Col 2:11-12). Where Circumcision was limited to Jewish men, Baptism is open to men, women, and chil-



dren - even Gentiles! This transformation brings God’s original promise to Abraham and Sarah to fulfillment that “through you, all nations will be blessed.”

There are other examples of such transformation. Consider the Eucharist. Before his arrest, Jesus and his disciples gather for the Passover, the meal that celebrates and renews the old covenant

family. Sitting at the Passover feast, Jesus took the unleavened bread and Elijah’s cup and redefined what they mean in the new covenant. “(This is no longer only a sign of the Exodus salvation...) This is my body, which is given for you.” Just as the entrypoint into the new covenant emerged from the old (baptism from circumcision), so now the renewing celebration is drawn from the old covenant meal.

This transformation from old to new covenant imagery is at the heart of the Great Thanksgiving. Examine the three movements of this Communion prayer. The first movement recounts God’s grace in the old covenant (“you delivered us from captivity”). The second movement builds on these scriptural images but celebrates how Jesus transformed them in the new covenant (“delivered us from slavery to sin and death”).

How appropriate that in the third movement, the church family calls on God to transform us!

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A Primer to Prime Interest in Holston’s Structure

Not too long after I accepted the position as Director of Connectional Ministries for Holston, a Holston clergy person said to me, “There is no program ministry going on in Holston Conference now.” Having been in this position for more than two years, I would have to disagree wholeheartedly! As a matter of fact, a recent experience with my daughter’s boyfriend has helped me to clarify my feelings in response to this statement. He was raised in another denomination that does not have much of a connectional structure, and he has asked lots of questions – not just about how we United Methodists are organized – but also about why we are organized as we are. I have had to think through my answers very carefully to help him understand our structure and why we operate in this structure.

Interestingly enough, I also get lots of questions from persons right here in Holston about our structure for ministry, and one of my most frequent phone calls is from clergy persons seeking help as they begin the process of reorganizing for ministry in their respective local churches.

Understanding our structure is crucial to understanding the ministries supported by the seven ministry teams. The overarching team in the area of ministry is the Discipleship Team, the team that has the

formidable responsibility of seeking to discern God’s will for Holston Conference and to guide the work of the six Ministry Teams. Under the umbrella of the Discipleship Team come the six ministry teams:

Communications, Missions, Nurture, Outreach Advocacy, Stewardship, and Witness. Of these teams, three have a function that is obvious by their names, while three – Nurture, Outreach Advocacy, and Witness – might call for some explanation. These three teams constitute the NOW, or Nurture-Outreach-Witness, structure referred to in the 2000 Book of Discipline. However, I have discovered as I relate to other Directors of Connectional Ministries around the country that the NOW structure can take as many different forms as there are Annual Conferences! The same titles are used, but the words of description vary tremendously. The same is true within local congregations in Holston.

In Holston, the Nurture Ministry Team is responsible for age-level ministries, education of the laity, Higher Education and



related ministries (Conference colleges and Wesley Foundations), and Conference-level camping programs. Our Outreach Advocacy Team represents the social justice ministries and works on such topics as peace with justice, neighbor-

hood reconciliation, religion and race, prison ministries, disability concerns, and health and welfare, to name a few of their emphases. Holston’s Witness Team is the primary force behind our new church development and congregational revitalization efforts.

Thus, the Discipleship Team and the six related Ministry Teams are the primary program ministry function of the Conference structure. And contrary to what I was told in my “early days,” program ministry is occurring in Holston!

Anne Travis is director of connectional ministries for Holston Conference



Standing and Seeing

While attending seminary, I took an ethics course with Sally Purvis who spoke one sentence that remains firmly embedded in my memory bank. She said, “Where you stand determines what you see.” For the last eight years I have stood in many places where clergy sexual ethics have been discussed. None of these gatherings has been easy, primarily because of all the issues discussed and the emotions stirred up in each person present. I cannot speak for all the other persons, but I can speak of what I have seen and felt and some things I have learned.

Primarily I have seen and felt the immense pain that occurs whenever there has been a breach in ethical behavior. Victims have felt their spirits wounded

because they have lost the ability to trust in their pastor, the one to whom they would normally go for counsel and spiritual support. With that help gone, they find themselves cut adrift from the spiritual aid previously found in church, in their pastor, and in their God. They have been violated by the betrayal that comes when someone they have trusted unconditionally to do them no harm suddenly proves to be otherwise. They struggle with attending church, and feel great anger when they finally realize that what happened to them was not love, but was instead a boundary violation so horrendous they wonder if they will ever trust themselves, any clergy, denominational leaders, or God again.

Clergy perpetrators feel the pain of regret, disbelief, and great sorrow while struggling to understand how they could be involved in such behavior that was most often the last thing they could have imagined. It is not uncommon for them to feel a loss of clergy connection while finding themselves isolated from their ministerial call as well as from others within the denominational system. Anger, guilt, despair, frustration flow into and out of their lives while they seek to understand the causes of their behavior.

Family members of victims and perpetrators also experience a sense of betrayal and loss of trust. Pain and anger are prevalent when they are forced to deal with the results of behavior over which they had no control. Additionally, they often feel there is no one within the church to whom they can turn during these painful situations.

Having stood and seen these sights during the past eight years, I have spent many hours wondering what can be done to prevent such occurrences in the future. I believe it is not enough to simply say, “that will never happen to me.” We should always be willing to admit that even though we might not want to be involved in any misconduct, it is always a possibility. Consequently, it is imperative that we take every opportunity to learn more about our own attitudes and our vulnerability to the abuse of the power that is inherent in our ministerial roles.

We might become better informed by taking the opportunity to attend workshops with an open mind, always believing that we will learn helpful information for our lives and work. Most importantly, we must **avoid isolation** by maintaining contact with colleagues, **maintain and**

nurture healthy personal and family relationships, and **develop spiritual practices** that strengthen our life and work.

Let us stand together on solid covenant ground so that all may “share in Christ’s body, the Church, [as it] is intended by God to be...a means of reconciliation, justice, faith, hope, and love.” Let all see that “sexual harassment and misconduct, and other like actions ... are unacceptable in the community where Christ’s ministry of grace is proclaimed and experienced.” (*Holston Conference Ministerial Sexual Ethics Policy*)

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