

"Dear Friends"

NT: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

OT: Exodus 3:15-17

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God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

When I became a pastor over 10 years ago now, I had a book handed down to me entitled "What the Bible says to the Minister." At the very opening of the book, there is a letter:

"Dear Friend,

Picture this: a business or professional person in the secular world must speak at a conference before one or two hundred of his/her professional peers. How much time will he/she take out of their weekly schedule to prepare for this speech? Two hours? Five hours? Ten hours? What if he/she had to speak to the same group two times- or three times- all in the same week? How much time would he/she then take out of their regular duties to prepare two or three different speeches?

And what if he/she had to do more than just prepare and deliver two or three speeches? What if he/she had to look after and minister to every one of the two hundred persons who attended the conference? What if he/she had to minister- to personally minister- to every one of them:

When one of them got sick and went to the hospital; when one of their family members was hospitalized: when a serious problem arose; when some counseling was needed; when a family member died; when a child got married; when a major committee met.

And on top of this, what if the professional had to manage the conference: its business, work, committees, schedules, finances, building program, whatever came up- with all

the surrounding problems of management? What if the professional had to be constantly out visiting and reaching new people to attend and join the conference association? What if the professional had to constantly face the scrutiny of his/her peers and handle any and all criticisms, grumblings, and divisions that arose?

Many a professional person would throw up his/her hands, walk off the job, and quit. But this is your task- the task of the minister- in today's industrialized world. And what a task it is, humanly impossible! But not with God. You are God's minister- God's choice servant- whom God has called to minister to God's precious people. God knows every throb of your heart...

Every joy, pleasure, ache, burden, cry, tear, and care; every trial and temptation that often attacks you; every person who criticizes, opposes, and persecutes you; every duty and demand you face; every sermon you must prepare and deliver and the pressure of it; every burden for your dear people and for the lost of the world; every care you have for the church and its believers; every moment of disappointment and discouragement you face.

God knows. God knows all about you. God knows when you have need and exactly what the need is. God knows your need even better than you know. More importantly, God wants to meet your need. God wants to give you the exact provision you need- perfectly and completely. God wants to fill you with the very best, with God's very own fullness, the fullness of God's presence and provision."

I can speak from my short 10 years serving as a pastor that the role of a pastor as minister is humbling. There are days you feel like you are riding on cloud nine never to come down and there are others that force you to your knees. Some days have you doing both. There is a reason we pastors might often say is has to be a calling instead of a choice.

The main point of my sharing this letter with you all today is not because of me and my call, or Chad's, to serve as ministers. I mention it because I believe the letter leaves something very important out. In addition to God being with us and knowing us and providing for us, there are also hundreds and thousands of others working with us as well. That body of people is what we have come to know as the church. So yes, God is the ultimate importance for God is our true boss, but you, the church, are our coworkers to the call.

Growing up in the church as a PK and a GPK and a 2GPK and a 3GPK (that is 5th Generation for those counting fingers and toes), I inherited a very important belief: Pastors are not the only ministers. All members of God's church are ministers. On the front of the bulletin I would see my father's name listed as the pastor, and the pianist or organist's name listed and then their title, and then it would read "Ministers: Congregation."

As time would have it, and my studies and experience in the church would reveal and affirm, I am 1000% in agreement.

In the theological world, we might call this the “Priesthood of all believers” or as Paul put it “the royal priesthood.” It means we are all chosen, claimed, called, and empowered to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Matthew 5:16-20); vessels of God’s mission; instruments of God’s purpose; teachers, leaders, prayer warriors, servers, care takers, hosts, witnesses, and bearers of God’s name. This is what it is to be a Christian; a disciple of Jesus; a believer and follower of God; a part of the body of Christ; a member of the church; a minister.

In the Presbyterian tradition, there is yet another name we use to define a minister: Elder. Today, we are celebrating the Ordination and Installation of Elders in the life of First Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg: a unique celebration that fully embodies our call to be ministers in the “priesthood of all believers.”

The “priesthood of all believers” strongly supports Paul’s image of the church as the “body of Christ.” Christ is the head of the church, and we, God’s children, in belief and faith of God’s claim and call upon us, serve as Christ’s hands, feet, shoulders, knees, waist, chest, organs, blood, tendons, ligaments, and bodily skeleton.

As a pastor called to serve this church at this time, I wish to pass along to each of you the same letter passed along to me, as we all work to serve God’s church together.

“Dear Friends...

Prepare. Proclaim.

Look after. Minister. Personally care for and minister during sickness, hospitalization, serious problems, death. Celebrate birth, marriage, life accomplishments.

Manage the programs. Be good stewards of the facilities.

Visit. Reach out. Invite. Welcome.

Listen. Be patient. Work through. Try to understand.

Sound impossible? It is not with God. God provides. God empowers. God delivers.

Still sound impossible. It is not with each other. You have a gift. We all have gifts and they must be shared for this body to be healthy.

This is who we are. Now let’s be who we are. Let’s do what we were created to do.”

Casting Crowns wrote a song several years ago entitled “If We Are the Body.”

It's crowded in worship today... As she slips in... Trying to fade into the faces

The girl's teasing laughter is carrying farther than they know... Farther than they know

***But if we are the body
Why aren't his arms reaching
Why aren't his hands healing
Why aren't his words teaching
And if we are the body
Why aren't his feet going
Why is his love not showing them there is a way***

*A traveler is far away from home... He sheds his coat and quietly sinks into the back row
The weight of their judgmental glances tells him his chances Are better out on the road*

***But if we are the body
Why aren't his arms reaching
Why aren't his hands healing
Why aren't his words teaching
And if we are the body
Why aren't his feet going
Why is his love not showing them there is a way***

*Jesus paid much too high a price for us to pick and choose who should come
and we are the body of Christ. Jesus is the Way.*

I cannot scratch the surface of my call to serve as a pastor of this church without you. Chad cannot scratch the surface of his call to serve as a pastor of this church without you. We are not able to do all the teaching, caring, discerning, praying, and governing. If we are to only look at it from a governing perspective, nothing would ever be accomplished, because we don't vote. It is these, along with others, as your elected Elders serving on session, who hold the honor and empowerment of discernment and vote. It is true that we have voice and we work very closely with the process of how things are done, but when it comes times to make decisions on what to do at this time in the life and ministries of the church, it is the decision of the session. This system of checks and balances is great because it assures us all that things cannot and will not simply be Peter's way or Chad's way or the highway.

Our single goal as God's church is to do things God's way. And the only way we can do that is if we are a body with arms reaching, hands healing, words teaching, feet going, love sharing, and compassion giving. Dear Friends... this is our call. Thank you for being here. Thank you for saying yes. Now, let's do what God created us to do, by celebrating and inspiring with grace and love and generosity and joy.

Let all God's people say... Amen.