

(The following sermon was given by Rev. H.R. Patteson, who was serving as the pastor of the Eau Claire Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina; during the first General Assembly of the Continuing Presbyterian Church, later to become the Presbyterian Church in America.)

“Preaching and the New Church”

Text: I Corinthians 1:10-25

The minister of the Word is the first office in the church both in dignity and usefulness. It carries with it many demands. The variety and weight of the responsibilities can be seen in the names given the Minister of the Word. He is Bishop, Pastor, Minister, Presbyter, Ambassador. In addition he may find himself serving as administrator, clerk-typist, welfare agent, parole officer, civic leader, construction engineer, common laborer, architect, and others.

During the past two decades that I have been in the ministry, in the growing number of roles a Minister must fill one has been diminishing in importance while others have been gaining in emphasis to the detriment of the Church. That one is the role of preacher. There has been a de-emphasis and even a down-grading of the role of preaching in popular circles of the Christian religion.

The passage we have read for our devotional lesson this morning has several things to suggest to us as we begin a new denomination, which we trust will be faithful to Scripture and the Reformed Faith.

1. Preaching is important. It is the first Business of the Church. The exposition and proclamation of the Word of God throughout the entire world is the mission the Church has been sent into the world to accomplish. To those who do not understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ, preaching may appear to be a foolish exercise. To those who look at the needs of mankind through compassionate yet unregenerate eyes, it may seem to be foolish to spend time and energy preaching when there is so much that needs to be done. But on the Church’s work schedule the stamp of “First Priority” is placed upon the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

Preaching is important.

2. Preaching is important because it is the means which the Lord has chosen to convict the world of sin and to reach and to save His elect people. Though it appears foolish to the natural man, preaching is effective to the purpose for which it was ordained. Even the foolishness of God – if God could do anything foolish – is wiser than all the wisdom of men.

We are saved by faith. But faith is generated in the heart as the Holy Spirit takes the proclaimed Word of God – whether it be written or spoken – and applies it to the

heart. And that faith is the gift of God. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

3. Preaching is important because of the message it intends to communicate. The message of the preacher as he expounds and explains Scripture is generally referred to in our passage as “The word of the cross.”

Specifically, we preach “Christ crucified.”

It is the message of salvation from sin through the atoning death of the Lamb of God.

The message is that He who was without sin became sin for us, bearing all the punishment due us, enduring the agonies of hell for us, that we might be righteous before God and might have eternal life.

The message is that the holy and righteous God has condescended to man and has offered salvation, that sinful man might walk in fellowship and communion with his Creator.

Of course, the Word of God, when rightly expounded and applied to individual lives, has much to say concerning the believer’s walk and way in the world in civic, social, economic and political matters.

The preaching of the message of salvation is of great importance because man is a sinful creature.

And although he may be free from outward pressure to do wrong, he is never free from the control of his own sinful nature which causes him to do wrong. He may be surrounded with all the inducements to live a good, useful and upright life but because he is subject to his own degenerate nature he cannot live up to the right and the good and the honorable.

Preaching the message of salvation – the “word of the cross” – “Christ crucified” – is the means God has ordained to bring to rebirth those whom he has elected to be His own people before the foundation of the world.

However, this word of warning concerning our preaching of the Word of God: (it is very pointedly stated in the message Baaliam sent to Balak, king of Moab in the twenty-second chapter of Numbers) “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.”

We must always guard against imposing our own qualifications and conditions upon the message of God.

We must be careful that we do not make the door of entry into the kingdom of Christ more narrow or wider than the Lord Himself has made it.

4. Preaching the message of salvation is important because of the person who is behind that message.

Of course, the person behind the message is none other than the Lord, Jesus Christ.

All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Him. He is the Lord of the universe, the King of all the earth. Before Him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is the Lord of glory – Creator – Redeemer.

It is His message we are to proclaim.

We are His ambassadors, His stewards, and faithfulness is not only expected but it is required.

As we begin a new denomination, I would submit to you that preaching the message of Jesus Christ – the word of the cross – Christ crucified – is the most important work the Church has to do.

In 1923 at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia when delivering the James Sprunt Lectures, Dr. James I. Vance said:

“All that the Church has is a message. This is all that it had at first... This is all the Church has ever had. It has sought much else, and often its search has been successful but sooner or later it has discovered that what it sought outside of its message was fool’s gold. It has sought the patronage and protection of the state only to learn that a state-fed church cannot save a lost world. It has sought numbers and wealth and scholarship, only to discover that without the message these are mere straw assets. It has sought to build stately churches and imposing cathedrals, and it has seen them become the tombs of religion, without the Gospel.”

“All that the Church has today is its message. Silence that, and the Christian Church goes out of business. Let that ring clear and true, and you may burn down every church and wipe out all of the elaborate machinery that has been built around it, you may strip it of its wealth and numbers and influence, but if it still has left a voice to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love, it remains in possession of all that it ever had and of all that it needs to bring the lost world back to God.”

As we begin a new denomination, I would urge upon you this fact: The preaching of the message of Jesus Christ – the word of the cross – is the most important work the Church has to do.