

Installation of Assoc. Pastor Casey Dwyer

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.:* Casey, I suspect you're too young to remember the TV show, *Candid Camera*, but I'm sure you recall the premise. Basically, people were pranked while being filmed by a hidden camera. The only one I remember was about a prep school kid from New Jersey. A too-cool city boy. He'd taken a bunch of aptitude tests and now he sits down with this guy who says, "*I've gone through your tests and school records and I've come to firm and certain conclusion that you'd be perfectly suited ... to be a shepherd.*" The kid is stunned. Who in their right mind would even *think* of being a shepherd! Who indeed! But that's what you are. That's what we are commissioning you to be. Today you are officially a shepherd.
- B. When I was preparing our current sermon series from Galatians there were some verses that stood out to me as I thought about this special Sunday. In Gal. 1 Paul is spelling out his credentials as an apostle since they had been called into question. Neither you nor I are apostles but these words speak to you today as they have spoken to me.

Paul had evidently been accused of making the gospel too easy by eliminating the Jewish requirement of circumcision. His critics said he did that to win more converts; to please people rather than God. So he fires back in **Gal. 1:9-10**, "*As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*"

Casey, you certainly aren't watering down the gospel to build a ministry but any pastor would be struck by that business of "trying to please people." That is a pastoral minefield. **I can't think of anything that cripples and crushes pastors more than that: "trying to please people."**

I. PLEASE PEOPLE ONLY WHEN DOING SO PLEASES CHRIST

- A. The challenge is that we are called to serve people but serving people gets easily tangled up with trying to please people. In one sense, it is a very poor pastor who doesn't try to please people. Listen to **Rom 15:1-3a**, "*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself....*"

And **1 Cor. 10:32-33**, "*Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*"

So make no mistake, as believers and especially as pastors we must try to please everyone in every way for their good, to build them up.

- B. But the danger is when we seek to please people in order to make ourselves or our message more appealing, on the one hand, or on the other, to protect ourselves from criticism. In **1 Thess. 2:4** (which carries the motto of Trinity Int'l University) Paul said, "*We speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.*" Think if that! *Approved by God! We have been entrusted with the gospel!* **There are two risks:** pleasing people instead of God, and allowing our hearts to betray our gospel trust.

- C. You see what a fine line it is, don't you? You've told me how vulnerable you are to criticism; how much you want to avoid any conflict. Listen my young brother: **No fear has so misshapen my life and ministry as the fear of what people in my church might say or think.** Often, people are wonderfully supportive and encouraging. Often there is nothing whatsoever to be afraid of. But still, even when everyone is pleased, including God, it is dreadfully easy to live in fear of *not* pleasing people.
- D. How to know? Look again at that phrase, "*We are... trying to please God, who tests our hearts.*" **The hardest work of pastoring is dealing with your own heart.** You may have agreed to be a servant but when you're *treated* like one you may need to do some heart work with God. Sometimes we handle holy things so often that we are cauterized by them; we grow insensitive and insincere about what we do. Sometimes we do so because we're weary or wounded. Sometimes we're just too casual and cavalier. So we must always be sure we're *pleasing God, who tests our hearts.*

Now let's bump down to **vv.15-16**, "*But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.*" In pointing you to these words I'm not conferring apostolic authority on you! Paul here is reflecting on his violent pre-conversion persecution of the church, his blinding conversion on the Damascus Road, and his pioneering commission from Christ to go to the Gentiles, so he wants to make clear that he didn't need anyone else's authorization to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. **But while your background and calling are different than his, God's process is the same.**

II. GOD DESTINED AND CALLED YOU TO BE A SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE

- A. While your God-given calling is not so unique nor authoritative as the apostle's, you too were set apart for service by God from your mother's womb. Since birth, you have been on a course you couldn't see. All that has happened to you, all that you've learned, all that has tenderized you, all that has made you wise, loving and humble, your parents, your education, your marriage—all these things have been ordained by God to shape you into the image of the Good Shepherd.
- B. Then in the course of this journey, "God called [you] by his grace." There will be days when you feel that the weight of your pastoral call is too heavy. It isn't always enjoyable. Sometimes it is heartbreaking. **But never forget: this calling is a gift of God's grace that you neither deserved nor earned.**

Paul's conversion and call to ministry happened at the at the same time. Our experience is a bit different. This is how I describe it in *Pastoral Graces*:

There is a short video clip in Ephesians 4. Picture an upward road, crowded with an unchained gang of captives, newly-taken slaves who sing, "Free at last!" and "He has made me glad." They delight to see out ahead of them their Conqueror Christ. The biblical script says, "When he ascended on high he took many captives..." The captive church, including us, parades toward paradise.

But unnoticed by most of our brothers and sisters in their upward journey, Christ in his Emmaus disguise slips in and out among us. Here he taps someone on the shoulder and points to the side of the road. There, he slips in behind others and whispers to them. Their puzzled look says, "Who? Me?" and

he nods. Everyone on that highway was taken captive once by Christ, thank God, and now some are captured again. Captives twice over. Born again *again*.

What does Jesus do with these captive captives? He outfits them with the Word and gives them back to his upward bound church as gifts. “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. . . So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (Ephesians 4:8, 10-12).

There is no earthly reason why the Lord pulled these particular captives out of the company of the heaven-bound and set the Word burning on our tongues. All our saintly siblings are gifted by Christ to serve one another in His body as surely as we are, but we are among the Wordworkers. The apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. So far as I can tell, God did not single any of us out for this work because he liked our resumes or found us in a talent search. I suspect he chose us because, going back to creation, God finds special creative delight in making something from nothing. ...

I think of pastors and teachers as the journeymen of Wordworking. The gospel tradesmen with sweat-stained work shirts, well-worn tool belts, achy knees, and the insider’s knowledge of how souls are built.

- C. Next Paul says, “God... was pleased to reveal his Son in me.” Another version says, “to reveal his Son to me and through me.” You’ve told us how you came to put your faith in Christ. God revealed his Son *to* you and we have called you to this position because we have seen how God reveals his Son *through* you to us and to our children. No Christian is worth their salt unless Christ is revealed to

them and through them. This is how it is to be with all believers but pastors bear a special responsibility because people look to us as God's agents, his spokesmen, his shepherds. This is indeed a mystery to me, but **sometimes if their pastor has been with someone it is easier for them to believe that Jesus has been with them, too.**

I have been shaped by part of a little poem from the 1930s by Beatrice Cleland, entitled, "A Portrait of a Christian."

*For me, 'twas not the truth you taught,
To you so clear, to me so dim,
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of him.
And from your eyes he beckons me,
And from your lips his love is shed,
Till I lose sight of you, and see
The Christ instead.*

- D. All that preparation "so that you might preach him." The word is evangelize, proclaim and embody God's good news as a pastor. You will so often feel inadequate. Sometimes you may wish you could sell insurance or be a Walmart greeter but this is the call upon your life. This work is what God destined you for.

There is one more short phrase I'd like to show you in **v.24**. Paul is explaining that the churches back in Judea, in and around Jerusalem had never met him. He says, "*They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'* **And they praised God because of me.**" "**And they praised God because of me.**" There is a most worthy life goal! Of course, we have all come to praise God for the Apostle Paul for many more reasons. And so it will be for you.

III. MAY YOUR CREDENTIAL BE, “THEY PRAISED GOD BECAUSE OF ME.”

- A. We do praise God because of you. We hear of your life story, and what God has done in and through you, and we *do* praise him. I’ve watched your deep love and joy in ministry to our kids and I’ve thanked God. I’ve thanked God that I once again have a colleague whom I love down the hall. Likewise, Danielle, I praise God for you, especially for your joy and spunk. You encourage people and I praise God for that. You are a suitable partner for Pastor Casey, and we praise God for his matchmaking.
- B. Once I was young like you, new to the ministry, and now, some 40 years hence, and I can tell you that there are few if any vocations so rich in opportunities to bring praise to God. **They praise God because, in league with God’s Holy Spirit, we move them toward God, and there is better service than that.**

There are people who will never forget you even after you have forgotten their names. I’ve done weddings, dedicated babies, and baptized people whom I no longer remember. But they will never forget! And they praise God for the memory. Someday, unless Christ returns first, a 50-year-old man or woman will thank God for your ministry to them when they were just a kid. I had a man come up to us at a school function several years ago and tell my son, “Your dad led me to Christ at Baker’s Square restaurant in Deerfield.” Later I learned that his son, who became a stellar student at Trinity, also recounted how I had led his dad to Jesus. I don’t remember it at all, but they continue to praise God because of me.

- C. Jesus told a story about the great King who separated the sheep from the goats based on the measure of their small

services to others. *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”* I wrote this:

I can think of few Christians who have more opportunities to get rich slowly than pastors. When we were trudging down hospital corridors or going back to the church for evening counseling, when we were squeezing in a visit to a shut-in or meeting with a 17-year-old just to talk about school, we were **bringing food to hungry hearts. We were inviting in strangers. We were clothing people**—maybe in garments of white. **We went into prisons, some with unseen bars, and jingled the keys of grace.** It was so ordinary, so small, but look where it got us: *“in his glory, and all the angels with him.”* And they praise God because of us. It’s an amazing thing!

Conclusion

Like the man said, “I’ve come to firm and certain conclusion that you’d be *perfectly* suited ... to be a shepherd.”

No one is born with the aptitude for being one of the Lord’s shepherds. No one starts planning their career thinking, I guess I’ll go into the practice of grace. But when we are called, God gives us a miraculous instinct for the work. We commonly call it “a shepherd’s heart.” While I suppose that some pastors have personalities that give them a leg up, no one has the makings of a shepherd apart from God’s grace. You think you’re headed for a career in business or education, a trade or an art, and the next thing you know, you’re standing there in some pasture with a shepherd’s crook in your hand, surrounded by sheep. It’s a career comedown unless you know about grace.

[Introduction, *Pastoral Graces*]