

A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE  
MEMPHIS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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THEY GAVE THEMSELVES

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“AND THEY EXCEEDED OUR EXPECTATIONS: THEY GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST OF ALL TO THE LORD, AND THEN BY THE WILL OF GOD ALSO TO US.” -II CORINTHIANS 8:5

WE GATHER FROM THROUGHOUT THE FOOTPRINT OF THE MEMPHIS CONFERENCE, AND BEYOND, ON THIS SUMMER AFTERNOON TO CELEBRATE, REMEMBER, CHERISH AND GIVE GOD THANKS FOR THE LIVES OF THESE WE NAME TODAY.

AMONG THEM ARE CLERGY, SPOUSES OF CLERGY, AND A LAY WORKER WHO SERVED MANY YEARS AS A MEMBER OF THE CONFERENCE STAFF.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE HAVING A MEMORIAL SERVICE WITHIN A YEAR AND IN SOME CASES SO SOON AFTER YOUR LOVED ONES PASSING OPENS A TENDER, PERHAPS PAINFUL PLACE IN YOUR GRIEF. IT IS OUR GOAL TO JOIN YOU IN HONORING THEIR LEGACY AND SHINE PERPETUAL LIGHT UPON THEM.

THESE 33 JOIN THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND SURROUND THIS GATHERING. THEY REPRESENT A THOUSAND YEARS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE AND WITNESS. THE WORLD IS GOING TO BE A LITTLE DARKER WITHOUT THEIR LIGHT. LIKE YOU, I KNEW MOST

OF THESE WE CELEBRATE TODAY. THEY WERE MY FRIENDS. THE IRISH POET JOHN O'DONOHUE SPOKE ABOUT FRIENDSHIPS IN THIS WAY:

“REAL FRIENDSHIP OR LOVE IS NOT MANUFACTURED OR ACHIEVED BY AN ACT OF WILL OR INTENTION. FRIENDSHIP IS ALWAYS AN ACT OF RECOGNITION.” THIS MEMORIAL SERVICE IS AN ACT OF RECOGNITION.

WE ARE A BETTER PEOPLE BECAUSE OUR FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES GRACED OUR LIVES.

I INVITE YOU TO THINK OF THEIR NAMES THROUGHOUT THIS SERVICE – HOW YOU ENCOUNTERED THEM – WHERE YOU SHARED LIFE AND MINISTRY.

THEY LIVED AND ITINERATED THROUGHOUT THE GEOGRAPHY OF THIS REGION. THEY SERVED MOST OF THEIR LIVING YEARS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. “TIME MAY CHANGE ME BUT I CAN'T CHANGE TIME.” – SAID DAVID BOWIE. HOW TRUE. IN TIME, THEY GAVE THEMSELVES TO GOD AND THEN TO US. THEY WERE PRODUCTS OF THEIR TIME, BUT OF THEIR OWN VOLITION, ALLOWED THE HOLY SPIRIT TO FORM AND SET THE TRAJECTORY OF THEIR LIVES.

EARL BAILEY STATED, “LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONES LIFE TODAY – SO THAT WHEN EVENING COMES WE WILL KNOW THAT WE HAVE ACCCOMPLISHED SOMETHING. IT'S A BIT AMBITIOUS ADMITTEDLY BUT WHAT BETTER PURPOSE TO LIVE TODAY?”

MANY WHOM WE CELEBRATE LIVED TO A VERY OLD AGE – WHILE OTHERS LEFT THIS LIFE MUCH YOUNGER. IT WAS WILLIAM SLOAN COFFIN WHO SAID, “WHILE ABRAHAM LIVED THROUGH ‘SUMMERS PARCHING HEAT,’ JESUS DIED YOUNG; BUT DID'NT BOTH SHOW US THAT IT IS BY ITS CONTENT RATHER THAN BY ITS DURATION THAT A

LIFE IS MEASURED?" THE LEGACY LEFT BEHIND BY THESE 33 SOULS INVITES EACH OF US TO LIVE LIVES OF SUBSTANCE.

RECENTLY, I SAW A TRAVEL POSTER IN AN AIRPORT CONCOURSE. IT SAID, "HAVE A GREAT DESTINATION." NOW I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED A TRAVEL POSTER IN AN AIRPORT TO READ, "HAVE A GREAT JOURNEY."

AS I PONDERED THE DIFFERENCE IN WORDING, I CAME TO UNDERSTAND THAT CAREFULLY CHOOSING A GREAT DESTINATION INCREASES THE MEANING OF THE JOURNEY.

THOSE WHOM WE NAME BEFORE THE LORD TODAY CHOSE WISELY – A GREAT DESTINATION TO THE ETERNAL PRESENCE OF GOD – WITH A JOURNEY POPULATED BY SERVICE TO ALL THROUGH WORD AND DEED.

THE APOSTLE PAUL CHALLENGED THE NASCENT CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO LEAD SUBSTANTIVE LIVES. DURING A GREAT FAMINE IN JUDEA, HE INVITED THE CHURCHES OF CORINTH, MACEDONIA, PHILLIPI, GALATIA, THESSALONICA AND BEREA TO BE CONNECTIONAL AND JOIN IN GIVING AN OFFERING TO REDUCE HUMAN SUFFERING.

THE RESPONSE OF THE MACEDONIA CHURCH IN PARTICULAR INSPIRED HIM AND HE SHARED A GLORY SIGHTING TO INSPIRE OTHERS. IN CHAPTER 8 OF II CORINTHIANS, HE CONTEXTUALLY DESCRIBES THE CHURCH BY SAYING THEY WERE EXPERIENCING 'DEPTHS OF POVERTY AND A GREAT TEST OF AFFLICTION.' YET, DESPITE THEIR CONTEXTUL CHALLENGE, 'THEY GAVE WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF JOY.'

HOW DID PAUL ACCOUNT FOR A GENEROUS RESPONSE FROM A CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CHALLENGED CONTEXTUALLY BY POVERTY AND PERSECUTION? HE SAYS, "THEY GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST TO THE LORD, AND TO US IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S WILL."

FRIENDS, I BELIEVE WHAT WE AFFIRM MOST TODAY IN THE FAITH OF THESE 33 WHO HAVE BEEN PROMOTED TO GLORY IS, THEY GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST TO GOD AND THEN TO US.

THEY GAVE THEMSELVES TO GOD BY RESPONDING TO THE PREVENIENT, JUSTIFYING AND SANCTIFYING GRACE OF GOD, FOUND IN LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, JESUS OUR LORD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. THEY PUBLICLY PROFESSED THEIR FAITH, FOLLOWED THE LORD IN BAPTISM AND SERVED THE LORD THROUGH THE CHURCH. THEY WERE DISCIPLES, LIKE THE MACEDONIANS, WHO GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD IN DISCIPLESHIP, WITNESS AND SERVICE. EACH OF THESE CLERGY, CLERGY SPOUSES AND LAY WORKERS GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD FIRST AND THEN TO US. NOTICE THE ORDER, GIVING ONESSELF FIRST TO GOD AND THEN TO OTHERS.

I DO NOT BELIEVE THE WOMEN AND MEN WE CELEBRATE IN THIS SERVICE COULD HAVE EFFECTIVELY GIVEN THEMSELVES TO US HAD THEY NOT FIRST GIVEN THEMSELVES TO GOD AND WERE AT PEACE WITH GOD'S CALL AND CLAIM UPON THEIR LIVES.

AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT GIVING OURSELVES TO GOD FIRST LOOKS LIKE IS THE WESLEY COVENANT PRAYER:

**LORD, MAKE ME WHAT YOU WILL.  
I PUT MYSELF FULLY INTO YOUR HANDS;  
PUT ME TO DOING, PUT ME TO SUFFERING,  
LET ME BE EMPLOYED FOR YOU, OR LAID ASIDE FOR YOU,  
LET ME BE FULL, LET ME BE EMPTY,  
LET ME HAVE ALL THINGS, LET ME HAVE NOTHING.  
I FREELY AND WITH A WILLING HEART  
GIVE IT ALL TO YOUR PLEASURE AND DISPOSAL.**

ONCE WE HAVE TRULY GIVEN OURSELVES TO GOD, FIRST, WE ARE IN A POSITION – AT PEACE – TO GIVE OURSELVES TO OTHERS. THE MACEDONIANS AND THOSE WE CHERISH IN MEMORY TODAY – GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST TO GOD AND THEN TO OTHERS. NO DOUBT, THE MACEDONIANS EMULATED THE EARLIER TEACHING OF PAUL WHEN HE SAID, “LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. IT DOES NOT DISHONOR OTHERS, IT IS NOT SELF SEEKING, IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED, KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS.”

CIRCUMSTANCES DID NOT DETERMINE THE GENEROSITY OF THE MACEDONIANS; OR THE NAMES OF THE BELOVED SERVANTS WE CALL BEFORE THE LORD TODAY – THE GENEROSITY OF GIVING THEIR LIVES FLOWED FROM A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND NEIGHBOR. THEIR RESOURCES FLOWED HEAVENWARD AND OUTWARD AS A RESULT.

BEING A CHRISTIAN WORKER OR THE FAMILY MEMBER CAN MEAN NOT UNDERSTOOD, NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATED, LONELY, STRUGGLING WITH LACK OF RESOURCES OR SUPPORT. OUR LOVED ONES OVERCAME AND PERSISTED DESPITE THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES BY GIVING THEMSELVES FIRST TO GOD AND THEN TO US. IT WAS NOT EASY FOR THEM. AS OUR COLLEAGUE RICK DYE SAYS, “LIFE IS UNFAIR, BUT GOD IS GOOD.”

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE SAID PRIDE, IT IS USELESS SAID EXPERIENCE, IT IS POINTLESS SAID REASON. GIVE IT A TRY WHISPERED THE HEART.

IF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR – IT IS – BECAUSE THIS DIDN'T ORGINATE WITH THE MACEDONIANS OR PAUL – IT IS SIMPLY THE GREAT COMMANDMENT – LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL OF YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL OF YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL OF YOUR

STRENGTH AND WITH ALL OF YOUR MIND AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

WHEN WE GIVE OUR LIVES TO THE LORD, OUR LEADERS, AND TO OTHERS, WE LIVE A GENEROUS LIFE THAT REFLECTS THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD AS SO ELOQUENTLY EXPRESSED BY ST. PAUL.

NOW, UNITED BY A COMMON GRIEF, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSS OF SO MANY FOR SO MANY. YET THEIR FAITHFUL PRESENCE REMAINS. IT WAS THAT GREAT PROPHET WINNIE THE POOH WHO SAID TO PIGLET, "IF THERE EVER COMES A DAY WHEN WE CAN'T BE TOGETHER, KEEP ME IN YOUR HEART. I WILL REMAIN THERE FOREVER.

LET US PRAY:

WOMEN AND MEN OF VALOR, TAKE LEAVE OF THIS WORLD AND REST;

IN THE NAME OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY WHO CREATED YOU;

IN THE NAME OF JESUS THE CHRIST WHO REDEEMED YOU;

IN THE NAME OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO SANCTIFIES YOU.

AMEN.

