

BECOMING CHRIST'S LETTER: PREACHING LIFE'S EXPERIENCES AT  
ESTRIDGE MORAVIAN CHURCH, ST. KITTS

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## ABSTRACT

### BECOMING CHRIST'S LETTER: PREACHING LIFE'S EXPERIENCES AT ESTRIDGE MORAVIAN CHURCH, ST. KITTS

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Throughout its one hundred and seventy five year (175) history, the pulpit of the Estridge Moravian Church located in Mansion, St Kitts has been filled by some of the finest preachers that the Moravian Church Eastern, West Indies Province has had to offer. These pastors and preachers have labored faithfully with their congregation, leaving a legacy of persons and lives touched and transformed by the Word of God.

In recent times, there has been a disconnection, a lapse between what is heard on Sunday mornings from the pulpit and how congregants transform words to living action. Often people cannot create a link between what is said on Sunday and what is done on Monday. There exists the need to feel (and know) an expanded understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ and how that discipleship can transform daily living. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine what it means to live a preaching life – preaching with one's life the Spoken Word in one's own experiences. Preaching revitalizes preacher and congregants when what is heard from the pulpit on Sunday is internalized, understood and translated into deliberate actions.

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*To God  
without whom I am nothing and to whom all praise is due,*

*To Janet my Mother, and Maurice my earthly Father,  
for your constant support and encouragement, for always believing in me, even when I did not,  
and for instilling in me that I can do anything  
I love you*

*To Janine, Jodie, Judith – the best sisters a brother could ask for—  
for always being there for me and supporting me along the way*

*To Y.O.U. who possess a desire for the anointing of Elisha,  
I am humbled, honored and left speechless at the depth of your love  
and support*

*To Jhonathan, my son,  
I love you – you are the wind beneath my wings*

*To my Local Advisory Committee, project participants and the  
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encouragement—I am grateful*

*To my friends, too numerous to mention, for believing in me  
and always encouraging me to go on:  
May the Lord Bless and Keep you*

*To the wonderful circle of friends who have become family at Drew University –  
professors and students alike—  
for checking up and checking in, pulling along and pushing along making this  
journey all the more enjoyable and rewarding*

## INTRODUCTION

The brand of spirituality that exists in the Caribbean could be described as conservative and traditional. This conservative brand of spirituality often places persons who profess to Christianity at a very high level of expectation. The community and society in which they live then expect them to live model lives that emulate the teachings of Christ to which they have subscribed. This holds a Christian, at times, to an almost unrealistic level of expectation. The expectations often become so burdensome that they can scare or deter persons from even trying to live a life for Christ.

The Moravian Church, located at Mansion village and named Estridge after the nearby sugar estate, exists in a small rural community. In this community, most persons are affiliated with the church in some way. They were either baptized in the church, attended Sunday school, were confirmed or have a parent or grandparent buried in the church cemetery. In this locale, persons who subscribe to Christianity are almost automatically looked up to for guidance and held to a higher standard of behavior and living. The expectation of higher standards sometimes results in an abuse of the model Christian in that he or she is never expected to exhibit human shortcomings.

On the other hand, there are those persons who might come to church but who do not describe themselves as Christians. These are the persons who will admit that they are not in a committed relationship with Jesus Christ, though coming regularly to church and even participating in church activities is a regular part of life's routine. These persons, like others may have tried to live out a commitment to Christ but may have been unsuccessful. Among these persons, as well as among those who would also profess to a

relationship with Christ, a disconnection takes place between the preached sermon and their daily lives. Often, the persons in this category are those who have tried unsuccessfully to live a Christian life, these persons may have experienced a disconnection between sermons and their daily lives.

These are the concerns the project seeks to address. The driving question is this: How might persons most thoroughly feel the connection between sermons heard on Sundays and their own actions as they live their lives? The project seeks to chronicle the development of persons engaged in an exercise designed to help them make the link between the pulpit and the daily lives of the hearers.

In Chapter one of this paper I seek to provide a somewhat historical and contextual environment for the sermon in worship. In this chapter, I seek to point out that the sermon is heard normally within the context of worship. I also point out that the sermon should not be seen as an opportunity for preachers to show off their academic and theological skills. However, the pulpit is the place where the pastor/preacher, as the mouthpiece of God speaks and gives a Word to the waiting congregation, and encourages them to embrace the possibilities that exists in the gospel. This chapter also discusses the reasons why this project came into being.

Chapter two provides the context of the project, and speaks of the physical place where the project takes place. It seeks to paint a picture of the physical structure as well as the dynamics of the congregation. The Biblical foundation for the project is also explored, sighting relevant scripture passages that encourage a preaching life.

The preaching life takes center stage in chapter three. This chapter defines a preaching life, explores what it means to live such a life, and looks at the nature of the

vocation, the calling.

With the awareness that the project impacts both the participants and the researcher, the conversation is extended in chapter four to concentrate on the project's effects on the researcher and offers reflection on new skills learned as a result of the project as well as on the overall impact of the research.

Chapter five provides an overview of the project, including the driving narrative and methodology. This chapter paints a picture of the project's design and implementation and notes relevant challenges encountered along the way.

Chapter six analyzes and reports on the feedback of participants. In this chapter, the participants' narrative is key to the project's success. This chapter explores how the project affected participants' lives and whether or not the experience changed them.

The final chapter is a collection of sermons preached during the period. The aim of this chapter is to show the varying avenues that could have been explored during the project implementation phase. These sermons serve as a postlude to the paper. Hopefully, the sermons will shed light on the integration of sermons' messages with lived experiences.

The calling of the believer is to emulate Christ. We will not be fully like Him until we transition out of life as we know it. It behooves us until then to aim to become Christ's letter and allow the gospel of Christ to emanate through our lived experiences



## CHAPTER ONE - WHY THIS PROJECT

A roving trip through many, if not all, worship services taking place in churches today would reveal that there are two main components that feature in the services. Worship services have a fair to high amount of singing and music that takes place, and most services do not end without the proclamation of the Word. It is this proclamation of the Word of God that takes center stage for many churches, especially within the Caribbean context. One of the expectations of worship on a weekly basis is that there will be a sermon. It is one of the traditions associated with worship. Preaching in worship comes down from a long tradition. Timothy Ralston observes that preaching in worship started to become a part of the reading of scripture at annual feasts.<sup>1</sup> This was a role that was assumed by the prophets, who would use this opportunity to challenge hearers to covenant obedience.

The practice of the proclamation of the Word continued as a practice in the Early Church, which added to it the component of the Lord's Supper of Eucharist (Acts 20:7-12). When the Reformation took place, the shift in worship for the Reformers came from the Eucharist or Lord's Supper towards a centrality of the Word.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of worship, many believers often see the sermon as the "main event." Some worshippers seem to come for what might be called advice within

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Ralston, ed., "Proclamation of the Word," in *Leadership Handbook of Preaching and Worship*, ed. James Berkley (Michigan: Baker Books, 2001), 193.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

sermon as if that were the central part of Sunday worship. It is also said that the sermon is the touchstone of ministry, used to assess a preacher's competence. In the chapter entitled "Coordination with the Rest of the Service," Thomas Troeger makes the following suggestion: Persons go to worship not preaching. Clergy who focus all their energies preparing for the sermon without careful attention to the other elements of the liturgy will offer a distorted version of the Christian traditions of corporate prayer, and may obscure the efforts of the Holy Spirit to reach people through a wide variety of means other than the sermon.<sup>1</sup> In *Preaching and Worship*, Thomas Morrow further underscores the priority of worship when he states, "we must always remember that we are not doing something for the people; we are doing it with them."<sup>2</sup>

For persons who engage in the art and skill of preaching on a weekly basis, it is worthy of note that the sermon is not the central act of worship but plays a part in the wider context of worship. To elevate the sermon to such a position that it is seen as separate and apart from the rest of the worship service would be an anomaly. The sermon and its role in worship should be seen as part of the worship. It is true that, "when we preach, we should expect to receive as well as to give a message from God... allowing God to not only speak through us, but to us."<sup>3</sup>

Warren Weirsbe rightly warns that worship in which preaching is not an act of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Troeger, "Coordination with the rest of the Service," in *Best Advice for Preaching*, ed. John S McLure (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Morrow, *Preaching and Worship* (London: Epworth, 1958), 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

worship leads the church to worshipping the preacher rather than worshipping God.<sup>4</sup> It is then clear that when one speaks of the sermon or of preaching or the Spoken Word, what is absolutely clear is that this Word must always point to God and not be seen in isolation from the rest of worship. In considering the role of the sermon in worship, one must also examine the preacher him/herself. After all, the preacher leads the people in worship and stands as God's representative to his people. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale states that the call to preach is a divine act which issues to the believer a call to speak on behalf of God.<sup>5</sup> The person who stands to preach must always remember that the act of preaching is a sacred treasure ratified by the community of faith and entrusted to the preacher by a divine call. Alvin Rueter suggests that it is a privilege to be able to preach the word of God because it is in preaching that one tells the "good news that the Perfect One was so full of grace that he met the penalties of the Law, that he measured up to the standards and set things right for all of us."<sup>6</sup> To this end, the one who engages in preaching must take the task seriously. Tisdale lists one of the goals of the preacher as guiding people in how to live faithful lives in their own particular time and place in history.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the divine nature associated with the calling to preach, the preacher

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<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship: Playground, Battleground, or Holy Ground?* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 120.

<sup>5</sup> Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, ed., "The Calling of the Preaching," in *Best Advice for Preaching*, ed. John S. McLure (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin C. Rueter, *Making Good Preaching Better: a Step-by-step Guide to Scripture-Based, People-Centered Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, ed., "The Calling of the Preaching," in *Best Advice for Preaching*, ed. John S. McLure (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship: Playground, Battleground, or Holy Ground?* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 123.

must possess some sort of learning and academic skill. However, preaching that is too academic loses the essence, the Spirit of God. Wiersbe notes that overly academic preaching becomes so wrapped up in content that the intent is lost.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that there is no place in preaching for a scholarly approach to the craft, for our churches today are filled with intellectual persons who need to be reached by God's Word.

However, the problem, with preaching that is too academic is that the preacher and congregation can get lost in the preacher's homiletic and academic prowess and lose the purpose of preaching. This observation can be made that "the purpose of preaching is not to inform the congregation of the minister's homiletic gifts; it's to bring the congregation face to face with the living God."<sup>9</sup> The role of the sermon in worship becomes clear when the preacher understands his/her role and function in the preaching process. In worship, the sermon should not be considered the "high point," in relation to which other aspects of worship are merely preliminaries. The sermon in worship is not that part in the service where the preacher's pet peeves or weekly opinions and ideas are advanced. It must be borne in mind that "church goers attend services not sermons".<sup>10</sup> The sermon in worship should call the hearers to do something about the revelation of God that the Spirit has brought to them. Thomas G. Long underscores this point when he says that, "a sermon is a work of the church and not merely a work of the preacher."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Troeger, "Coordination with the rest of the Service," in *Best Advice for Preaching*, ed. John S. McLure (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 182.

Sermons are a part of the whole of worship wherein God speaks to his people through the preacher and the people, as a result, are led to a resolve in their faith, entering into or renewing their relationship with God.

In *A Captive Voice: the Liberation of Preaching*, the point is further underscored and clarified by suggesting that the church's view, shape and image of itself are accomplished through preaching:

The character of the church is shaped by preaching. Again and again, preaching calls the church to repentance. And again and again, the absolution of God comes through preaching... preaching forms the Spirit of the church, a church that is ever judged and forgiven by Christ the Lord. But more, the church is also directed in its purposes by the Word and the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

What this posture leads to is an understanding that persons who preach cannot do so in a vacuum; rather, they must preach as an act of worship. This follows since most preaching is done within the context of worship. Troeger suggests that persons should, “preach as an act of worship.”<sup>13</sup> He suggests that the preacher should not so much engage in a method of preaching but rather take the posture of a soul that comes before God. Buttrick also highlights this point by stating that “spotlighted, center-stage pulpitering can destroy our common worship”.<sup>14</sup> This suggests to us that the preacher ought not to lose sight of the thought that preaching is a part of worship. Buttrick gives a summation which aptly defines and describes the role of the sermon in worship. He

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<sup>12</sup> David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 43-43.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Troeger, “Coordination with the rest of the Service,” in *Best Advice for Preaching*, ed. John S. McLure (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 124.

<sup>14</sup> David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 43.

states that one must keep the following in mind in the process of preaching:

Preaching does bring us Christ, the living Word, in-church preaching properly should occur in the context of worship. In worship, we hear and respond to the Word with praise; we know Christ in a new way, not merely as historical hearsay but relationally as our common Lord and Savior.<sup>15</sup>

In, *View from the Pew*, Lora-Ellen McKinney underscores this same point as she discusses the opportunity of preaching. She notes that, “preaching is an opportunity to bring God’s Word to the people, to use the corporate experience of worship to explore the deeper meaning of the Word, and to connect meaningfully to the needs of God’s people gathered for worship.”<sup>16</sup> When one mounts a pulpit to declare the Word, the moment and experience in the pulpit should be only about declaring a message from God and the truths of scripture to those who may be privy to hear the sermon.

This understanding of the role of the sermon in worship raised central questions in this project. The preacher receives much emphasis here. What is the role of the congregation member during a sermon? Do members of the congregation have responsibilities when hearing sermons? Very often at the end of a worship service, as is the custom at my church and also in many of the Moravian Churches that I have served, the minister stands at the door (often the west door) of the sanctuary and shakes the hands of the congregants, who would often (though not always) express felicitations and commiserations about the sermon’s timeliness, inspiration or power. Some congregants may speak with one another throughout the day, and perhaps for a day or two following

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>16</sup> Lora-Ellen McKinney, *View from the Pulpit: What Preachers Can Learn from Church Members* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004), 48.

the service and then go on to their own regular routines and daily lives. Beyond this Sunday morning experience, does the sermon go along with the membership and those who heard the sermon, being internalized and put into practice? Was the discipleship of the members of the congregation aided by the sermon preached? These questions began to create the narrative framework and concern of the project.

Even as this framework began to develop, questions began to revolve in my mind about the sermon in worship within my own context and my own role in the process. How detailed was I in the way I prepared the sermon? Did I allow for adequate time, amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday ministry for intentional and direct study of the Word so as to preach out of my own contact with God and God's Word?

More questions began to be framed in my mind, but more on the side of how the congregants receive the sermon. Do congregants put anything heard in worship into practice in their daily life and routine? Webb B. Garrison notes that "a typical congregation is like a tree loaded with apples. Each fruit represents an opportunity, but some are easier to shake down than others."<sup>17</sup> He makes the point that it is impossible for each person in a worship service to hear the same sermon and take away the same thing. Each person comes to church from a different perspective and life experience, so what each takes from a sermon will differ from what others take. This project explores what is done with what is heard from the pulpit. The project is concerned with the discipleship of persons who hear sermons within the congregation. Do sermons in general emerge as a discipling tool for those who hear them?

The questions raised above are those which drive the engine of this project. The

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<sup>17</sup> Webb Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Westwood NJ: Fleming H Revell Company, n.d.), 43-44.

project's purpose is to help persons develop a lifestyle and a spirituality that will lead them to preach with their lives the gospel of Christ so that the congregation at Estridge Moravian Church, St Kitts where the project will take place, will become a place where persons will become a letter of Christ to be read by all. The project would provide for persons to think critically about their lives and allow for persons to constantly keep the lives they live in the light of the Word. The overarching aim is to help persons deepen their spiritual awareness and walk with the awareness of God in their daily lives so that each becomes a living sermon. The aim of the Christian is to take what is heard through sermons and put belief into action.

We are called to be evangelists and as evangelists we seek to share the gospel. The calling of the Christian is to be as Paul notes in II Corinthians chapter 3 to be letters of Christ. For the purposes of this paper, the letter of Christ which is used as a metaphor is a term borrowed from the writings of Paul. The understanding being used is that persons who hear sermons should be able to pattern and model the lessons learned from sermons that what they live becomes something written in and through their lives that is read by the members of their community and family members. The letter that is to be read is not to be read by persons who are necessarily members of the church. The letters are an evangelism tool by our way life, and the letters that we write and read through our life's experiences we might win one person for God's kingdom.

Our life's experiences become the text of the letter. While we might not be able to control or dictate every experience of our life, we might be able to control how we respond to the varying challenges that life may bring our way. Our response is the text and would give testimony to the faith that we embrace and believe in. By allowing our



response to our life's experiences to become the text of the letter we write our lives become the method through which we communicate the gospel.

Annie Johnson Flint in her poem, *Christ Has no Hands to Do His Work*, underscores the importance of the individual Christian's role in communicating the gospel when she makes reference to the importance of living a Christ-like life:

We are the only Bible the careless world will read,  
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;  
We are the Lord's last message, given in word and deed;  
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?<sup>18</sup>

Flint's verse points out that Christians embody the Word—what Paul calls the “treasure in earthen vessel.” The verse reflects the point that the Christian has a responsibility for proclaiming the Word through the actions of his or her life. The poem also places on each Christian a sense of communal responsibility as it concerns the sharing of the gospel with others. When read in the context of sermons and preaching, this verse also helps us understand that the sermon goes way beyond the closing word of the preacher on Sunday morning. It helps us to understand that the proclaimed words should be part of our daily living as many persons may have never read a Bible or heard a sermon. Indeed, many may never have experienced a worship situation that provides formal exposure to the message of Jesus Christ. The onus is then on those who have heard and have experienced the Bible—“*the sinner's gospel, the scoffer's creed, the Lord's last message*”—to deliver its contents in our words and deeds. Simply put, it is the laity that may have the greatest impact on the world's perception as it concerns the decision to follow Christ by virtue of their paying attention to what they say

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<sup>18</sup> “Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today” - John Palmer." *Sermons.Logos.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Sept. 2013. <<http://sermons.logos.com/submissions/3920-Christ-has-no-hands-but-ourhands-to-do-His-work-today#content=/submissions/3920>>. (accessed, October 21, 2013.)

and do, based on their encounter with the proclaimed message of Jesus Christ in a preached sermon.

The believer who hears a sermon should be moved to live the faith to which the sermon they heard led them to embrace or to affirm. The living out of this faith becomes a visible expression for others to see. What persons live become a testimony to what they believe and a witness to those who don't believe. Everyday a person, through their life's experiences, should be moving towards becoming a more perfected letter of Christ.

## CHAPTER TWO - CONTEXT AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The matter of how individuals within the congregation who hear and respond to sermons, particularly within the context of the Estridge Moravian Church, St Kitts, drives this project. Perhaps if the intent could be summed up in a single sentence, it would be that, “preaching leads to changes in the hearers’ approach to life.”<sup>1</sup> Persons who hear sermons cannot just hear them and allow them to be recorded in their minds as good sermons based on either content or delivery. When taken as a whole, the sermon heard must call or challenge persons to respond in some way or form. While the response will not be the same by all persons, a response of some sort is still the desired aim. As Mary Alice Mulligan reasons, the notion as to whether preaching and sermons have serious effects on the persons who hear them<sup>2</sup> will eventually call them to offer a response. She goes on to note that, “whether their responses accumulate through multiple sermons over a long period of time...preaching makes a difference to them.”<sup>3</sup>

After reflection on these sentiments as expressed by Mulligan et.al, I must agree with their position. The preaching of a sermon in worship is not merely for entertainment purposes. It cannot be also that the preaching of a sermon in worship is merely to satisfy a liturgical position or expectation espoused by a particular denomination. The preaching

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Alice Mulligan, et. Al, *Believing in Preaching: What listeners hear in Sermons* (St. Louis, Chalice Press: 2005), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 193.

and hearing of a sermon, at least in my mind, must make an impact on lives that will propel persons to change. Through the prompting of the Holy Spirit the life change will eventually occur, if not at that moment (though not immediate, but the beginning of a process), over a prolonged period of time.

The site of the project is situated at the Estridge Moravian Church, St Kitts, where I have been serving as pastor since 2008. This congregation has been in existence since 1839 and has worshipped at its present location and in the present building since 1907. The church is located in a rural village on the northwestern side of the island, sandwiched between the sea on one side and the mountain range on the other. A majority of the members of the Estridge congregation live in the area and so walk to and from church weekly. Membership is made of up persons who are retired, unemployed, or currently employed. The congregation in Estridge is fortunate enough to have every generation represented from as far back as the 1930's to present day. This representation not only happens in terms of its membership roll but also in weekly attendance at worship. On any given Sunday at Estridge it can be noted that all generations or eras from as early as the mid 1930's to present are represented in the worship experience.

The congregation at Estridge has a membership roll of two hundred and sixty-eight (268) persons. The breakdown of this membership can be divided into those who are shut-in, children (persons under 12 years), active communicants (those who, according to the church constitution take communion at least three times per year), and non communicant (those who attend but do not take communion). The weekly attendance at Estridge ranges between one hundred (100) to one hundred and twenty (120) persons. Holy Communion is celebrated monthly on the first Sunday and sees an

attendance of at least 60 persons. The faithful of the congregation gather for worship on Sunday mornings at 9:30 AM. The service entails the singing of hymns, an opening prayer, a Litany of prayers, readings from Scripture, choruses of praises and worship and the Preached Word.

As pastor of the congregation, I am expected by the congregation to keep a keen eye on the spiritual life, growth and pulse of the congregation. In the culture that exists in St. Kitts, the pastor is viewed as the chief spiritual person in the life of the congregation. It is a widely accepted cultural expectation that the pastor is the one who directs and perhaps even dictates through teachings and programs the spiritual direction of the local congregation. While the pastor cannot assess the congregation on an individual member basis, he/she is responsible for ensuring that the necessary avenues exist for the facilitation of the spiritual growth of its members.

The pastor is the shepherd of the congregation. As in scripture, where the shepherd leads, guides and sees to the needs of the sheep, so too is the pastor of a congregation expected to see to the needs of the members. In this context it is expected and understood that as pastor he or she is the chief spiritual head of the congregation who maintains regular contact with God.

This view of the role and responsibility of the pastor therefore requires constant reflection/action on the part of the pastor. It is through this process of action/reflection that the project was conceptualized. The aim of this project was to examine the effects of preaching on the congregation and the preacher.

Having served over the years as the pastor of the congregation, I have noted that congregants have an affinity for high quality sermons preached in the congregation.

While this may be the case, there seemed to have been a disconnection between what was being preached and how that was being translated to everyday life. From pastoral visitations and knowledge of varying pastoral issues that have been brought to my attention, it was noted that persons were not connecting the sermons that they heard in the sanctuary to the sanctuary of their homes and lives. The letter of Christ that was to be written in their lives for others to read was being blurred.

This disconnection created a point of concern for me as the pastor. What was the issue? Why are persons' not seemingly able to connect what was heard from the pulpit with their daily life? How come the sermon was not part of their daily life? Out of this concern came the development of this project. If there was no connection between the preached word and the life lived, then the witness of the Church, and also the gospel was at stake. This project was designed to examine the effects of the preaching on the congregation and the preacher.

The St. Kitts context and the prevailing understanding of what it means to be firstly a church-goer, and more so a Christian, holds persons to a very high standard of accountability. In the local context saying that one is a Christian is not only about church involvement and attendance, but that must also translate into lifestyle. Within the context of St Kitts, and more broadly the Caribbean, this Christian lifestyle is considered to be very conservative at best with very high expectations, leaving very little room for error. It is often an unfair expectation, one that may call persons to negate the humanity of the person. The existing context being a small context it is often very magnified the lives of those who are considered Christian. This magnification heightens the necessity for being the letter of Christ. In a smaller context the letter is more intently and easily read.

In theory, a person is considered “Christian” and “living a Christian life” when he or she is regular at church and faithful in the reading and studying of scripture. A high level of church involvement and participation is a hallmark of a person who is considered to be living a Christian life. However church involvement and participation is not the only instrument of evaluation. The practical side of the Christian life is what might be considered the most important element. It is here, based upon what persons may see, and experience from interaction that the conclusion would be that a person is Christian. The Christian life within this context has to do with a person who has accepted Jesus as Savior of his or her life and has made this a public declaration. This person is one who then says that he or she has intentionally chosen to live a life of worship of God and service to God’s people. Within the context of St. Kitts, this person is also one who shuns certain environments that would be considered not conducive to the Christian life. As with most places, the persons who do not subscribe to the Christian life are often the most critical of those who do subscribe. They look at such persons and make conclusions based upon what is seen. It is with knowledge of this situation, that the desire for a project was birthed with the intention of aiding persons in becoming more intentional in making the connection between what is preached and what is lived.

The Holy Bible provides a good platform for persons to preach with their lives. The scriptures are replete with verses that call persons to engage in a preaching life. These scriptures form in part the biblical basis for this project. I often refer to the book of James as the book for practical Christianity. The book of James outlines practical ways for persons to live a life in Christ. From the very outset, James makes it plain that life-even new life in Christ- is not without problems, and encourages his readers to approach

difficulties in their lives not as a means of suffering but as a source of joy.

By the end of James 1, we read, “pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from world” (James 1:27).

This verse brings the practice of Christianity into action. It is not just enough to say that we are Christians or followers of Christ. What we say must translate into what we do. Such an admonition is made manifest in James’s bidding in verse 22 of the same chapter: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James calls Christians to preach with their lives in their actions. For James, Christianity must not only be something spoken but also something practiced, as our lives tell a bigger story than our words.

A further biblical exhortation to preach with our lives can be found coming from Jesus himself. Teaching his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the side of practical Christianity by giving his listeners a code for living in the Beatitudes. He then places some measure of responsibility on the listeners for the quality of the worlds that they live in: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor; how shall it be seasoned?” (Matthew 5:13). In this verse Jesus uses the analogy of salt as one way that seasoning and flavor may be added to the world. While this verse means much more than mere flavoring, it can be suggested that He is saying that in one’s mixings and mingling with persons, one must be the beliefs of which one speaks. Jesus encouraged his hearers to allow their faith to enrich the environment and community around them. Their lives were to be extensions and expressions of their belief systems, visible enough for the entire world to see and experience. In this same passage, Jesus encourages believers: “Let your



light shine before men and women that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). This is a call to bold action that Jesus extends to his hearers. He encourages them not to be afraid of letting others know their position by hiding their message.

The Apostle Paul adds his voice to the call for the preaching life through the words of I Corinthians 13, the passage often read at marriage ceremonies and which clarifies the nature of love. This chapter on love comes quickly on the heels of Paul’s teachings on spiritual gifts and how each is to be used. At the end of the chapter, Paul makes the point that God gives spiritual gifts according to his will and discretion so that we may build up the church. The chapter’s closing words prepare the believer for the chapter on the nature of love. “Eagerly desire greater gifts, and yet I will show you the most excellent way” (I Corinthians 12:31). Paul frames the focus that all our actions in community are acts of love. The sentiments of Paul are clear: if all the spiritual gifts are received, practiced and experienced, but there is no love concern, a practical application of this love to and for our brothers and sisters, our spiritual gifts are useless.

Paul adds an additional dimension to the actions of Christians by explaining that everything we do must be guided by the principle of love, which in its purest sense is action. Unconditional love should be hallmark of the actions of our lives. This aligns with the essence of Christianity “for God so loves” (John 3:16). Because God so loved the world, we too must love the world because to love is to be Christ-like. A person who seeks to ‘preach’ with and through life, being and constantly becoming a letter of Christ must have a genuine love and concern for the world. Even when rejected, grounded love reveals the true character of spirituality.

Another of Paul's writing provides a framework for the preaching life. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul admonishes them to give of their total self for the work of God. He was calling them to a sense of higher vocation in their action, which he defines as "reasonable service"<sup>1</sup>: "Do not be conformed by this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God"<sup>2</sup>.

The plea of Paul in this writing is to use one's self as an instrument to please God and not to separate or place in compartments what we believe and what we practice. Paul is calling us to use everything in our possession for the service and will of God. Therefore when we preach with our total selves, daily scripting Christ's letter not only are we being true and sincere in the fulfilling of our vocation, but our actions bring pleasure to God.

The emphasis as shown through the two passages is that whatever we do as Christians is for the building up of community. This is the same community that often (especially in the Caribbean context) aids in the validation of our call and vocation. The community then becomes enriched by the preaching of one's life experiences and the portrayal of Christ through these experiences. Our witness then has the potential to transform the life of someone and to fulfill the mandate of Christ to make disciples.

Understanding the preaching life must be reinforced by the thought that it is the call of every believer. Every baptized Christian, set aside by ordination or baptism, is called to live a preaching life. It is the daily mission of the baptized to live a life that in

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:1.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:2.

some way communicates the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A final consideration of scripture emerges from II Corinthians 3. Paul instructs his readers of the reality of who they are. He reminds them that they are the letter of Christ.<sup>3</sup> As a letter it is implied that at some point, someone will have to read this letter to receive information or a message of some kind. This states the practical admonition to believers for the expression of their faith to be open as a letter for all to read. The letter of the believer is written with ink of the Holy Spirit on our hearts; the added presence and person of the Holy Spirit points to the ongoing work of writing the letter. As the Spirit is never stagnant and does not manifest itself in the same way all the time, it is the same with how the Spirit would work in the life of the believer. The Holy Spirit would work and write and craft the letter to be read at the right time by the right persons. This gives the letter authenticity and constant relevance to the context in which it is read.

A letter written by spiritual ink to be read and ingested by others become a tool for evangelism. Further credence of the letter is given when the bearer of the letter demonstrates through their living that they have read and received from the letter of someone else and now by the Holy Spirit is writing their own letter.

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<sup>3</sup> II Corinthians 3:3

### CHAPTER THREE - THE PREACHING LIFE

It is often said that persons would rather “see” a sermon than “hear” a sermon. The faithful expect a preacher’s life to be in tandem with his word. Therefore, when one speaks of the preaching life, one does not speak of a cycle or series of sermons preached. In this work the expression “the preaching Life” refers to those experiences and situations that guide and influence the preacher. Spiritual understanding determines the way a preacher lives. The preaching life is that wordless sermon that believers and Christians seek to enact every day. It is through actions and in relationship with others-believers and non-believers alike-that a preacher’s sermons receive the loudest voice. This chapter seeks to explore one’s call to preach and the validation of that call. The chapter also examines the biblical foundation for a preaching life

The call to preach is one that rests on the life of every believer, whether or not the person is called to the sacred, ordinal ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Every believer through his/her embracing of Jesus Christ has also embraced the call to preach. It must be understood that this embracing of the call to preach might not necessarily mean an embracing of holy orders through ordination. Certainly, there is a place and much credence for those who are called and set aside through the Rite of Ordination.

However, for all persons, set aside through ordination or not, the call to preach begins with a distinct call from God. The manner in which persons seek to respond and eventually live out that call to preach varies from person to person. Barbara Brown Taylor notes that in seeking to respond to the call of God “people respond in a variety of ways. Some pursue ordination and others put pillows over their heads, but the vast majority seeks to answer God by changing how they live their more or less ordinary lives.”<sup>1</sup> This observation from Taylor allows us to conclude that the call from God encourages a response from the one who has received this call. What can be said is that the response made to the call will not be in the same way for every person. Some persons will answer in the affirmative; others will answer in the negative and seek to avoid confronting the voice of the call at all costs. In any case what Taylor asserts is that the response to the call, be it positive or negative, will require a change in behavior. When God calls a person, the call from God requires a response from the receiver. The receiver is challenged to give a response to this call, be it negative or positive.

Having heard and responded to God’s call, one is challenged to change one’s life and lifestyle to reflect the one who has issued the call. It is through deliberate attempt and action that one seeks to change one’s life in response to God’s call. One cannot hear or experience and respond to the call of God in one’s life and ever remain the same.

In the gospels, God in Jesus Christ called “the twelve” who were all skilled in their various walks of life. We note that when he called them, they all left what they were doing and made a deliberate change in how they went about living. Their lives and how they lived were different as a result of this call.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), Kindle Loc 314.

The call from God not only affects life, but also affects speech – our perception about God and ourselves-changes. This change comes out of a different understanding of God and what God desires for us. This call and response gives birth to a quest for a deeper and more personal experience with the divine. As our experiences deepen, we are then challenged to a new position of witness. This change in our understanding of our call not only comes in the story of our daily living, but also in the story of our daily speech. When we speak about God, what we say becomes an expression of what is in our heart. Therefore, our experiences with God become expressions of our lips and then testimony throughout our lives.

In his essay on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, A. N Williams notes how the Christian life is integrally linked to how we contemplate God. He notes that, “we do not speak in order that others will be persuaded; we speak because we have been transformed.”<sup>2</sup> This thought by Williams underscores the point that the preaching life is driven first by a life that has been in contact with and transformed by God. A person seeking to genuinely communicate the gospel does so after first having an encounter with God.

In understanding the call to preach it becomes clear that the call first and foremost begins with God. The call to preach whether it is from the pulpit or from the work place, comes not from the faith community but firstly from God, who transforms the life of the one called. Out of this heart transformed by God come the transformed and transformative actions lived daily.

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<sup>2</sup> Micheal Pasquarello III, *We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken: A Grammar of The Preaching Life*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Co, 2009), 5.

Living the call does not happen in a vacuum. We are not transformed from the inside out and then told to live privately. The experience of one's heart and life transformed by God is usually very intimate, involving a private commitment. However, the commitment first made privately is expected to be lived publicly. The test of Christianity is not heard in what is said, but known by what is done. Through varying gospel passages, Jesus intonates the importance of living the gospel. By either calling persons to recognize the seat of their thought –“it is out of the abundance of the heart that one speaks<sup>3</sup>”; or by saying, “by their fruits you shall know them”<sup>4</sup>, Jesus expresses the view that words must match actions. These passages help with the understanding that what has been purposed in the heart does not stay in the heart. What is expressed in action says the most about a person's commitment and heart. Barbara Brown Taylor, in quoting Alan Jones, explains that our lives are our sermons: “You are a word about the word before you ever speak a word”<sup>5</sup> She underscores that we take our entire selves, not just our spiritual selves, into the pulpit, bringing with us everything that we have ever done into the preaching experience. Our lives are the words we use to preach.

The call of God, therefore, is not lived out privately, for the call is affirmed and validated by a community of faith. The affirmation by this community gives credence to the expression of one's faith. This is particularly true in my Caribbean reality which is small; persons tend to be very observant of others' lifestyles and behaviors. A confession of a relationship with Jesus Christ is validated, affirmed and respected based upon one's

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 6:45.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:16.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), Kindle Loc 1035.

actions in community. It is within this community that one becomes a preacher of the word in action. This is what Barbara Brown Taylor calls a “vocation” By her definition, with which I concur a vocation is more than just doing a task or job. She notes that a vocation requires one “to be God’s person in the world, and that makes me the same as those among whom I serve.”<sup>6</sup> This sense of *being* is what the Christian life as a preaching life is all about; life lived as one’s vocation in fulfillment of God’s calling. This position takes the role and duty of preaching out of the sphere of only the preacher. If we understand that all our life is a vocation unto God, then we must also conclude that the believer’s life is also the life of a preacher. To this notion, Taylor adds, “preaching is not something an ordained minister does for fifteen minutes on Sundays, but what the whole congregation does all week long; it is a way of approaching the world and gleaning God’s presence there.”<sup>7</sup>

Taylor expands the sense of responsibility and implicitly advances the notion that the ministry of the word and the art and act of preaching are responsibilities of the whole church. Placing the onus on the entire congregation invites some observations. We note that with the entire congregation serving as preachers, there is a wider avenue for a greater impact on the community. This highlights the “each one reaches one” philosophy, that is, each member of the congregation seeks to reach one soul for Christ. The preaching ministry of the local church is not only entrusted to the ordained clergy but now becomes the ministry for the entire congregation, who will have more reach and impact than what a pastor may say on any given Sunday. With the onus placed on the congregation, the wider congregation has the responsibility for their lives. The

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Loc 362.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Loc 399.



possibility exists that persons may think that because they are not ordained, they are not at the same level of responsibility as the ordained preacher. However, this is not so since the entire congregation is called to live according to Christ's standards as each member becomes Christ's letter. Taylor's sentiments also highlight the fact that the wider membership of the church is not exempt from living a life that is acceptable unto God. The congregation is bound by the collective responsibility to live the gospel faithfully. Each member is charged with the responsibility of being God to the world.

Annie Johnson Flint underscores Taylor's point in her poem, "Christ Has No Hands,"

Christ has no hand but our hands to do his work today.  
 He has no feet but our feet to lead men in his way.  
 He has no tongue but our tongues to tell men how he died.  
 He has no help but our help to bring them to his side.  
 We are the only Bible the careless world will read.  
 We are the sinner's Gospel; we are the scoffer's creed.  
 We are the Lord's last message given in deed and word.  
 What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?  
 What if our hands are busy with other work than his?  
 What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?  
 What if our tongues are speaking of things his lips would spurn?  
 How can we hope to help him and hasten his return?  
 To hasten our Lord's return we truly need much power.  
 So let us all be spirit-filled, and awaiting him each hour.  
 In an hour that we think not, he said he should appear;  
 then let us walk in holiness, and meet him with a cheer.<sup>8</sup>

To leave the responsibility for the communication of the gospel up to the ordained clergy also limits the scope of where the gospel can reach and whose lives may be affected. When every believer gets involved, the Christian church has a greater opportunity to reach more persons with the gospel of Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> "Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today" - John Palmer." *Sermons.Logos.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Sept. 2013. <<http://sermons.logos.com/submissions/3920-Christ-has-no-hands-but-ourhands-to-do-His-work-today#content=/submissions/3920>>. (accessed, October 21, 2013.)

The preaching life has to be part of our greater understanding of what it means to be Christian in this world today. No longer can we wait on persons to come into our varying sanctuaries to hear the gospel. We now have to actively carry the gospel, and the best way we can do this is by allowing ourselves to become the letter of Christ. In becoming Christ's letter and preaching throughout our various life experiences, we allow others to hear and experience the gospel through us.

It is my deepest hope that more persons within congregations and assemblies are able to grasp this concept of a preaching life. Embracing active preaching through life experiences will benefit members of the assembly who will fulfill their own call and advance the kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER FOUR - PERSONAL REFELCTIONS

The Doctor of Ministry project is geared towards having an impact on the life and ministry of the congregation. It is hoped that the design and implementation positively affect and shape the congregation and, as a tool for growth, spur on participants to new levels of relationship with the church and with Jesus Christ.

The project's design also includes the researcher's deliberate planning of opportunities for reflection that inspire personal, spiritual and pastoral growth. This growth takes place through reflection, action, prayer, and collaboration. Upon the project's completion, the researcher ideally would see, in retrospect, steady development and measured growth. This chapter serves as a personal reflection from the researcher's viewpoint on the nature of this growth.

As I began implementation of the project, I entered a phase of self-evaluation. I looked at myself which pointed me in the areas of the preparation, delivery, and effects of sermons. This breathed a certain amount of passion. Craddock notes that, "passion makes one persuasive."<sup>1</sup> Preaching with passion communicates to your hearers that what you are seeking to share is of great import and demands not only their attention to hear, but their action upon hearing. Craddock goes on to note, and I concur that to, "preach as though nothing were at stake is an immense contradiction."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 24.

The matters for reflection not only centered around the technicalities and techniques of the sermon. Moments of reflection were also spent on the person of the preacher. As a preacher the ways I preached my life experience came under my own investigation.

The project also prompted me to look at habits developed over my years in ministry. The implementation of this project came in my eleventh and twelfth year in ministry. During this period, I had served churches ranging from 5 members at its smallest to 350 at its highest. My present context represents a mid-range of an average of 125 persons per week. By this stage in ministry I developed a routine for preaching. Using a lectionary weekly, I would read the text assigned for a particular Sunday on Thursday morning, ending up with writing the sermon in the wee hours of Sunday morning. I also started to develop a habit of writing a script and then preaching without it. I reflected on these habits, wondering whether they helped or hindered me. I went through a period of reflection on whether my habits and routines provided effective preparation and delivery of the sermons. I identified which habits served me well and which detracted or represented a poor approach to preaching. I was forced to look at myself and the life that I lived and consider whether or not I was an example to my congregation and community. Craddock notes that, “the person of the preacher is a vital element in effective preaching.”<sup>1</sup> This was further complicated when my own personal story intensified.

During the early stages of the project’s implementation, my marriage began to unravel and ultimately ended in divorce. My private and personal issues were beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 22.

to play out on a public stage. Members of the congregation who would have observed and made conclusions about the marital relationship watched even more keenly and in some cases became very vocal about what they were seeing. There was much small talk happening in pockets of the community that was being served by me. During this period, as the ministry practitioner, I had to continuously check myself. While I was going through much pain and brokenness at this time, I had to make sure that at all times my Christian character prevailed. This was a difficult task as often I was unfairly and unnecessarily blamed and spoken about. I often felt as though the persons whom I loved in their moments of crises now turned their backs on me during my crisis. Although I was hurting and the marriage was unraveling, ministry still had to happen. At times I felt prohibited from having feelings, from being human. In this context of ministry, I had to become what Henry Nowen identifies as, “the wounded healer.” At this moment of my own anger, pain, frustration, I had to become one who, “not only look after their [my] own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others. They [I] had to be both a wounded minister and a healing minister.”<sup>2</sup> I became vigilant that my Christian words spoken on Sunday morning matched my walk after the benediction. My life was under review, not only by me, but also by many of my members who had heard of my situation. This scrutiny caused me to look at my life and my Christian walk in light of my own preaching. I found myself, in my own way, going through the project and trying to tidy up areas in my own life so that I could be an example to the members committed to my charge.

The experience of going through the dissolution of my marriage in the midst of

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<sup>2</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1972), 88.

the project and still doing ministry taught me a lesson about God. I learned afresh that God can use persons in the midst of their own brokenness. Upon reflection, I became amazed again at how God could use even the broken person to bring about wholeness in the lives of others. It became real to me that our purpose on our walk is not so that we may be blessed, but so that we may be a blessing to others, used for God's glory. I also realized that we encounter challenges not for our purpose, but so that we may help others in similar situations.

The project also called me to strengthen my skills as a pastor and further develop my pastoral heart. Throughout the project I had to remind myself that as pastor, I needed to show care as persons struggled through their own Christian journey. As persons walked the path, they would often seek out the ear, advice and understanding of the pastor, reminding me that as pastor, "I am called to a ministry of caring."<sup>3</sup> As the project progressed, opportunities arose to exercise the ministry of caring, and I learned again that the pastor's heart and caring for persons in the struggle are essential for effective ministry.

My appreciation for the Christian journey deepened during the course of the project and prompted deeper reflection on my own history. I was 16 years old when I preached my first sermon. Now as a more mature preacher, I have a greater understanding that the Christian life is truly a journey. Along this journey we all struggle and it is our faith in Jesus Christ that allows us to make sense of the struggle and come to a greater appreciation of the journey. It is also our faith in Jesus Christ that encourages

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<sup>3</sup> Louis W. Bloede, *The Effective Pastor: a Guide to Successful Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996), 6.

us to continue on in the faith, even when we feel like giving up. During reflection, I came to understand and appreciate that not all persons were at the same point in their journey; people naturally respond to life according to their own point or degree of their faith. This awareness reinforced my need to cultivate tolerance and understanding for all people.

Persons on the journey encounter many pitfalls—minor and major. Some struggle with feelings of wanting to give up and not continue. As the ministry practitioner with pastoral skills, I appreciate that I too am on the journey and have felt the same way. I have made mistakes and have fallen, have wanted to give up but kept going with the help of others. There were times when someone else who journeyed with me did not give up on me, and I cannot give up on others. Keeping this thought in mind helps me to find the tolerance, understanding and respect for others on the journey and strengthens my will to serve as preacher.

While the project would have had an impact upon me in my own development and life as a person, as Christian and as a pastor, the project also allowed me to make some discoveries about the congregation and those who listen to my preaching weekly.

The initial discovery made was that the congregation's culture was not one of overt expression. While they listened to the sermons and ingested them, the congregation at Estridge was not a congregation that readily expressed itself overtly. An interesting characteristic of the congregation was that they would more readily voice displeasure than pleasure. Coming to grips with this congregational trait taught me that I could not assume that because the congregation might not be overly responsive that they have not heard or that the sermon preached might not have made an impact.

Another moment of learning that occurred as a result of the project is the importance of the sermon in life, mind and perspective of the congregation. Through listening and engaging members of the congregation, it was discovered that the members placed a high importance on the preached Word. This discovery spoke directly to me as I was moved once again to a greater understanding of the awesome responsibility that is entrusted as a preacher. Persons take the spoken Word seriously and so when one stands in the pulpit one ought not to take for granted, (regardless of the preacher's own perception) the place and importance that the sermon plays in the life of the hearers in a congregation.

Closely linked to this discovery is the understanding that one cannot generalize an entire congregation based on the actions or thoughts of a few. Prior to the start of the project, I made the mistake of thinking that persons in the congregation did not appreciate or understand the importance of a sermon or preached word. The generalization was also made that persons were not keen on seeking to make any kind of change to their life based on what they heard. I learned that as preachers and persons who practice ministry in a particular context we ought to ensure that we do not generalize the congregation's interpretative ability based on perhaps our own readings or misreading of the context.

Perhaps the most telling discovery made in the progression of the project was the fact that the persons appreciated a structured approach to their spiritual growth. While persons had some issues with the journaling portion of the project and the difficulties of keeping recording, most persons suggested that the structure was beneficial. The approach and desire for a structure to aid in their own growth and development were



appreciated and welcomed. This discovery helped me to understand that while some scoff at a structured approach to things, persons who take their development seriously would use the structure to their benefit. A structured approach allowed persons to chronologically chart their own growth, an approach which seemed to have been appreciated.

Preaching through life's experiences is a process which calls for continuous growth and assessment. Life is not static, neither are the experiences we have throughout our daily lives. Therefore, as we seek to preach through life's experiences, we are constantly evaluating where we are in God. This evaluation should cause us to adjust and amend our ways as we constantly craft our life's sermon. As we write this sermon with our life we should become aware that daily our sermons are being read and heard by those around us.

One preaches through one's life, and I am aware daily that I can either assist people on their way or detract them from the path by the way I keep my own journey. In many ways, that responsibility keeps my life in check since I know that what I do or do not do can cause someone else to either stumble or go on. We should then do all within our power to safeguard our testimony and the authenticity of the sermons we live.

## CHAPTER FIVE - HOW THE PROJECT WAS DONE

In embarking upon this project, I recognized that its success hinged on persons' willingness to participate in the designed exercise. As I sought to design, implement and oversee the project, a Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) was selected. This committee was made up of persons from the congregation who were selected based upon their knowledge of the congregation – its history and culture. Members of the LAC were engaged and led in a time of sharing and orientation. The researcher shared some of the issues of concern that led to the original intent of the project. At these sessions, the researcher presented the concept and vision of the project and described the process of gathering information that would ensue. The researcher informed the LAC of the two main approaches to information-gathering and elaborated on the nature of each, and the researcher made deliberate attempts to make sure the LAC clearly understood the methodologies of collecting information so that research would not be prejudiced in any way.

The researcher conducted a discussion with the LAC members on issues, such as confidentiality, listening, reluctance to participate, and appropriateness of questions. This orientation session also allowed the persons who served on the LAC to ask questions about the project. At this stage members of the LAC gave expression to their own

narrative of concern for the congregation, some of which mirrored that of the main researcher. Members of LAC shared their stories, understanding that “we cannot discard our own histories.”<sup>5</sup>

Understanding their own stories at this level helped the LAC to understand the importance of the stories of the project’s participants and the role of history, culture and experience in shaping a life of spirituality. As this meeting concluded, the researcher and the LAC proposed names of prospective participants. At the conclusion of the meeting, we decided to disperse, pray about the names, and return a week later to make the final selection. This time for prayer was a deliberate act prefatory to requesting others to entrust us with soulful confiding and to allow us into the personal and intimate space of their relationship with God. An undertaking of this nature required prayer.

A week later we gathered together once again and were refreshed about the nature and scope of the project and began the process of selection of persons to participate. The LAC returned, mellowed by reflection and renewed with a sense of excitement at the prospects that lay ahead. All members of the LAC returned with names of prospective participants, which we listed, short-listed, and finally agreed on.

The project called for participants to divulge a good amount of intimate information throughout the process as they sought to exercise a hermeneutic of listening and practice in their lives. The project called for them to listen, note, reflect and then apply what was heard reflectively to the actions of their daily lives. This form of social research sought to look at human beings in a particular context—the church—and to explore how what is heard and taught in church applies to where they live and work. The project employed the research methodology of ethnography, among others. Ethnography

is simply defined as, “a form of social research used by sociologists, anthropologists, historians and other scholars to study human beings in their social and cultural contexts.”<sup>1</sup>

This form of research works best, as the definition suggests, when the persons observed and studied are in their normal environment. Remaining in their “natural habitat,” so to speak, participants have a particular comfort level and familiarity in context of home and church, the safety of the familiar. The researcher has the advantage of presuppositions determined by that context.

One presupposition is that everyone has a story. In every phase of life’s journey, we create and recreate another element of our life’s story. Don Cupitt notes that “a human person is not a timeless metaphysical entity, but an often rather loose-knit connection of roles that we fall into and act out in the many contexts, games and relationships of life.”<sup>2</sup> He further states that “we are a collection of stories that we are acting out, the stories that proliferate and reproduce themselves in us.”<sup>3</sup> He makes the point that all human beings, from the time of our birth to the time of our death, are stories. During the cycle of our lives, we collect and relive our story in various contexts. Cupitt notes that as we live out one portion of our story, we continuously make or recreate new stories daily.

This project consumed itself with the stories created and lived out by persons in particular relation to their church and spiritual life. The project took an expressed

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Don Cupitt, *What Is a Story?* (London: SCM Press, 2012), ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

interest in seeking to understand if sermons shaped or influenced the participants' life stories. Another presupposition of this project was that persons would be willing to tell their story. The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and I expected a high level of eagerness in persons who engaged and participated in the project to share and allow others into their story. In seeking to encourage persons to participate, we discovered that persons were not so willing to allow us to enter into their personal stories. This lack of willingness was surprising although Moschella has warned that, "people are often ashamed of congregational secrets, worried about the group's public image [I add their own personal image] and thus try to move on quickly."<sup>4</sup> The fear of letting anyone or too many persons know what has been going on in their private life, their struggles and personal points of concern in any sphere was a major turn off for some. I wondered if people felt that engaging in the project might make of them a spectacle or, worse, a specimen for observation. Some concerns may have derived from the threat of looking too critically at themselves and perhaps seeing too closely things that they might feel ashamed of or parts of themselves that they did not know existed.

It was also presupposed that persons who might have worshipped at the church genuinely had a desire for spiritual growth. This was a real eye opener for the LAC as we realized that there were some who wore masks and were not prepared to remove them for the sake of sharing their soul. It must be noted, however, that it was difficult to ascertain whether persons fled from the nature of the work required for the project or whether some simply did not have a personal interest in the project or its challenges. At

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 36.

this point, we stopped examining reasons why people were unwilling to participate, fearing to engender within ourselves a prejudicial perception. Carl Savage advises on this as he suggests a “*kenotic position*.” In the kenotic position “the researcher empties her/himself of preconceptions, paradigms of interpretation or presumptions about the stories that emerge.”<sup>5</sup> This really calls for a non-judgmental approach to the research process and its participants. The researcher must cultivate a level of respect and must exercise strict confidentiality about materials garnered in the project.

The project asked for a sample of persons to undertake deliberate listening to sermons. The location of these (heard) sermons were not limited to the context of Sunday morning or at funerals or on television or by radio. Having listened to the sermon, they were asked to make journal entries (or sermon notes) about the sermon while picking one thing that stood out to them that they could try to apply to their own lives. They were then asked to take this one identified issue and deliberately work on it for at least one week. The process was to be repeated each week for the duration of the project.

The projected timeline was initially slated over the six (6) week period of Lent. However after consultation with the advisor, it was narrowed down to a four (4) week period, giving each participant at least four (4) issues or struggles to identify and grapple with for the duration of the project.

The project sought to employ a mixed approach to garnering information. One approach to the research process was qualitative. This method was not the primary method; however, it accorded the opportunity to garner and develop stories and

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E Oats Institute, 2006), 76.

reflections. It was necessary to employ this model, as noted by Carl Savage, to “yield more objective findings and avoid myopic focus on one’s own preferred ideas or theories.”<sup>6</sup> We speculated that through the use of questionnaires, the quality of the stories given by the participants may have more depth and may allow for richer prospects for analysis.

As the primary researcher, as well as the LAC, we took a quiet and objective position of observation while participating. This approach also called for the researcher and the LAC to seek not to influence participants or the process of the project in any way. It called for an emptying of self, thoughts and perceptions so as to clearly hear and interpret the stories of those participating in the project. This approach requires a holistic understanding of the person(s), their history, background and culture and consideration of how each facet affects and influences the total person. To return to the selection process, the researcher and the LAC identified participants by undertaking a deliberate scan of the congregation, looking at the age, gender and perceived spiritual maturity of prospects. Weighty consideration was given to those in whom we perceived a desire for growth and spiritual development. Eventually, we chose five (5) persons to participate in the project. In choosing these five persons, consideration was given to gender, age and based on an observation of church participation. Before selection the committee deliberately observed the attentiveness of the persons during worship, and in particular, the Spoken Word. As the church is located in a close-knit community, persons were also selected based upon their observed living in the community. The selection of these persons also came after a time of prayer for guidance that the right

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E Oats Institute, 2006), 108.

persons were chosen. After consensus was reached on these persons, they informed the prospective participants in a meeting in which we discussed what was required of them. At this time we also fielded questions they had about the project, and we established a timeline for completion. As suggested, the LAC decided to schedule a “checking in” time midway through to ensure that all involved were on track and doing what they were asked to do. At this initial meeting we spent some time speaking with the participants in an attempt to evoke from them their own understanding of their spiritual journey. They discussed where they were in their journeys and where they would like to be. This time of sharing among the LAC, participants, and myself as the researcher was truly rewarding. From this sample, though small, I was able to get a glimpse of the thought processes of participants and also to experience some of their passion for the subject matter at hand. Their sharing led to the evocation of stories in their spiritual journey and the struggles and issues they have as they journey each day.

As I listened to, conversed with the members of the congregation, the issues surrounding my observations were confirmed. The narrative of concern was further thickened during a Board of Elders meeting. The Board of Elders is responsible for assisting the pastor in spiritual matters of the congregation. One member of the Board began a lament, decrying the fact that she did not think enough persons in the congregation were taking their Christianity and spiritual walk seriously. She observed that while persons were in church, there seemed to have been a disconnect between what was done in church on Sunday and what was lived on Monday. Her argument was based on the verse of scripture which says, “by your fruits you shall know them.”<sup>7</sup> She stated

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7:20.



that if persons were taking their walk with God seriously it should be evidenced in their commitment to service in the church, their financial giving, and their overall relationship with persons. In her mind, this proved that there was a problem with how persons were processing their faith. She asked passionately what could be done to aid persons in making the connection in their own lives. I wrestled with this question for some time until it became the focus of this project.

At the mid-point mark of the project, participants met again so that the LAC could get an idea of their progress. Persons suggested that while the thought of the project was useful, they struggled with the journal writing. The struggle for some was based on their feelings about writing; others confessed their disdain for and dislike of writing. One person admitted that she found the writing part of the project most useful and sought to encourage the others in a “how-to” of journaling. However, the crux of the project, i.e. the sermon’s application to life, was going very well for all. Persons reported at this point that they were already finding this part of the exercise useful to their own development.

The end of the four (4) week period saw the completion of the project. The LAC then summoned participants to another feedback session in which they were asked to come prepared to candidly share their experiences. The participants arrived and after prayer were asked to provide feedback on the experience. Their sharing carried both a buoyant and a somber tone. Buoyancy came as they were excited by what they heard in the sermons they had listened to; they felt challenged to listen more intently, which they found enriching. The general consensus was that it was easy to reflect on the sermons. However, most found it challenging to conscientiously apply the sermons to

everyday life. It was here that the somber feelings about the project set in. The reality of the challenge of living the faith became real for them; participants felt that while it was not impossible to live their faith deeply, it required them to be more intentional. (The next chapter will explore this theme in more detail.)

The methodology of the project lent itself to exploring intimately and deeply the mind and issues of those who participated in the project. The aim of this was to extract and track a journey towards a more Christ –reflected life guided and inspired by the sermons preached on Sunday morning. It is hoped that participants’ feedback reveals the goal reached beyond the project to affect the parishioners’ lives—for the rest of their lives. Further, we hope that this transformation in the lives of a few will expand to and contribute to transforming the lives of the members of the wider congregation.

As the project progressed, I had the opportunity to maintain a distanced and observing position. During this time, I also had an opportunity to participate in my own cycle of hermeneutical reflection. As I prepared sermons weekly, I was forced to ask myself if I was becoming the letter of Christ. I questioned myself as to whether or not I was preaching Christ through my own life's experiences. My own narrative became essential to a deeper understanding of the project. My life's experiences, past and present, became a focal point in my reflection. I recognized at this point that my life was filled with many rich experiences all of which have helped to shape the pastor and preacher that I am today. I could not deny or overlook the fact that those experiences were critical in shaping the letter of Christ that I have become.

While the past experiences helped to form who I am currently, they do not suggest that my process of formation is in any way complete. My present experiences

continue to shape and contribute to my formation as the letter of Christ, continuously in progress in my life. Reflection enabled me to come to a greater understanding and appreciation of my own journey. Admittedly, until now, I had not placed much value on my own life's experiences. However, through the project I was able to see and understand how important, and how powerfully influential, each of our life's story is to the preaching of Christ's letter through our living.

I therefore gained a better appreciation of the story and journey of others as they became Christ's letter. This understanding of the journey of others also helped to confirm the understanding that as our narratives are all different so too is the letter that Christ is writing in our lives and the letter that we preach through our lives. With appreciation of the experiences of others, we are able to grasp and more fully understand the portion of the letter that Christ has given them to preach.

It must be understood, however, that while each letter might be preached differently, the fundamentals of the letter – a surrendered life to Christ, a relationship with this Christ and a right relationship in community; remain the same. This becomes a teaching moment for all involved. We understand that we have a different portion of the letter and may preach it differently as our experiences differ. However, the tenets of our faith in Jesus Christ remain the same.

As we preach our own letters, we recognize that we are in some way engaging in the discipleship process. As persons engaged in the process of making disciples it is imperative that a holistic approach is taken. Therefore, attention must be paid to the physical, social, emotional, and financial areas of a person's life. To seek to disciple by only catering to the spiritual will not lead to a holistically balanced person seeking after

Christ. It must be remembered that the one being disciplined must exist in a context that might not always be Christian. Therefore, the process of discipleship must prepare him or her to live and make decisions in such a context.

Driving the discipleship process must also be the understanding that it is a love relationship. This relationship is one where the one being disciplined has a love relationship with Jesus. It is a relationship firstly with the Lord, where, “they love him because of who he is, what he has done and what he continues to do for them on a daily basis.”<sup>8</sup> Following this understanding is the thought that since we are in love with the Lord, our love for the Lord will spur us on to a right relationship with him and a desire to know him and make him known. This love relationship is not stagnant, but grows constantly, reaching new levels of understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

The life of a disciple is a life that is shared. This is a life that the one being disciplined first shares with the Lord in surrendering of heart, mind and will and then with someone else who serves as a mentor. This mentor is someone who has been on the Christian journey and is more matured in the faith and willing to share his life’s experiences and journey with the one being disciplined. This is the model of discipleship that Jesus himself used. In every case, he called his first disciples to be with him and to share the practical everyday experiences of his life. Watson notes that the disciples shared his life as they, “watched him at work, they worked with him, they questioned him, went out in pairs to practice what they had learned, reported back, asked more questions, received further instruction and slowly but surely they learned about the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Maiden, *Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Press, 2008), 20.

kingdom of God.”<sup>9</sup> Through this process of watching and looking and working and sharing, the disciples would have picked up traits, language behaviors of the one with whom their life was shared. Watson continued to note that the disciples were taught, “as much as by example as by precept.”<sup>10</sup>

Another part of the philosophy of discipleship has to do with the meaning of the word discipleship. The Greek word for disciple literally means one who, ‘follows behind.’ It suggests that the disciple follows a teacher or Rabbi closely. However, it must be noted that this is not a distant following or one in which the relationship between the Rabbi and student was strained. The Rabbi would take the student under his wing and teach, train and care as a son. It is more of a parent child relationship in which the Rabbi, “cared for him, providing for him, encouraging him, correcting him, until the day when the disciple would become a teacher himself.”<sup>11</sup> This close relationship provided a model in which the Rabbi would be able to see, observe and gauge the development of the disciple, knowing when to release the disciple on his or own to start the process over again, not as a student but as a teacher. It is the last sentiment that provides another level of understanding of the discipleship process.

When one has been disciplined, one is now expected to disciple. A holistic approach to discipleship aids persons not only in their own process of discipleship helping them to look in, but also should lead them to a posture of looking outwards at disciplining others. One also cannot seek to disciple without having an understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> David Watson, *Called and Committed: World Changing Discipleship*, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1982), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 54.

one's own faith journey. This understanding of self and of one's own journey should create a posture of patience and grace towards others as they seek to deepen their own relationship with Christ.

The participation in the project in the physical implementation of becoming Christ's letter was cause for all involved to evaluate their own lives. We were all challenged to examine ourselves in light of the letter that Christ wants to preach through our own experiences and to evaluate the letter we were currently preaching. In doing this, we cannot overlook the importance of our own narrative, embracing our own story, as we continue to journey through life. When we can fully understand and embrace our own narrative, we are better able to declare, through our living, the words of Christ, thus becoming His letter.

## CHAPTER SIX - EVALUATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The aim of the project was to assist persons in becoming better disciples of Christ. Through the process of active reflection, persons would critically examine themselves in light of what they heard from the pulpit. In the process of evaluation of self, several issues or challenges arose for the participants.

The study was shaped with the hope of gaining an insight into the continued application of what is preached on Sunday. This was going to be done by intentionally preaching on a number of themes during the Lenten season that would hopefully cause persons to evaluate their life and make changes if necessary. It was through the preached Word and its application that the project would take shape. It is helpful to note that the sermons heard were not only limited to those heard in the congregation at the project site.

The five persons chosen to participate in the project's implementation represented varying age groups in the congregation; each was at a different point in the spiritual journey. At the end of the project, we issued a questionnaire to gather information and induce participants to gauge the project's usefulness in their lives. From the questionnaires, it was noted that persons listened to an average of six to eight (6-8) sermons during the period. These sermons were on a wide range of topics, and participants noted that not all the sermons they heard summoned them to a personal challenge.

The questionnaire (SEE appendix) sought to ascertain an understanding of the participants view on the importance of hearing sermons weekly, and the process of application of what is heard to their daily lives. It also sought to understand the participant's view of having a life that is a preaching life, that is, a life that lives out sermons from day to day. Insight into the importance of hearing a sermon weekly was also garnered as a result.

The questionnaire also sought responses to questions about confronting challenges, their own growth points, and ways to improve a relationship with God. The questionnaire also sought to enlist a communal response by seeking to ascertain if the person was now in a better position to assist someone else on their quest. Finally, the questionnaire sought to gauge how challenged participants were in carrying out the project. The questions were designed to evoke thoughtful answers from the participants. The project's objective was to learn from the respondents the level of impact that the challenges had on them. The research also sought to gauge overall spiritual growth and a deepening of spiritual maturity as a result of the process.

The questionnaire first sought to understand the importance of hearing a sermon on a weekly basis. All participants noted that it was very important for them to hear a sermon weekly. When asked why, three out of the five persons participating said that hearing the sermon weekly helped them in their spiritual growth. Two of the five participants said that it was important because the sermon offered them guidance and a sense direction for the week ahead. Another participant said that hearing a sermon on a weekly basis served as a reminder to them of who they were supposed to be during the week. While the participants noted the need to hear a preached Word regularly, the



questionnaire did not seek to find out if this need was out of a personal desire or out of a cultural norm. What it revealed was that the participants placed a high level of importance on hearing a preached Word on a weekly basis.

From the responses to this question it can be concluded that the sermon (at least hearing one) weekly played a role in the life of the participants. It is also clear that the sermon provided a different function in the minds of the hearers. Whatever the function, a high level of importance is accorded to it.

The work of the sermon in terms of what it is to accomplish was also examined in the questionnaire. Three out of five participants said that the sermon was to teach and explain scripture, strengthen faith and also help them to understand and face daily life. One of the five participants noted that the sermon was to help them prepare for life after death.

From these responses we note that the purpose of the sermon was generally to aid in the spiritual development of the participants. They also saw the sermon as having an educating purpose in helping them learn and understand the Bible and God better. The sermon was to inspire, educate, and cause one to examine one's own life.

Mulligan et.al identified this as a small cluster of persons through their own research. They termed it that the sermon is supposed to convert people.<sup>1</sup> Conversion suggests a deliberate change as a result of a stimulus.

This is an important observation as it shows that in suggesting that sermons are to convert. In the minds of this sample of listeners, sermons are supposed to aid and call persons to change their lives. This is at the heart of this project. Implicitly stated in their

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Alice Mulligan, et. Al, *Believing in Preaching: What listeners hear in Sermons* (St. Louis, Chalice Press:2005), 12.

responses is that a sermon that has caused persons to examine and change their lives has accomplished what it has set out to do.

The matter of what is done with the sermon, and the ability of applying the sermon to life was then questioned. The responses here were varied and reflected some measure of difficulty. One participant said it was very easy while another said it was not easy. Two participants said that it was sometimes easy, while another said that it was dependent on the issue and the spiritual maturity of the person attempting to apply the message.

These responses highlight that applying a sermon heard is not always easy. The responses reflect that there are some parts of the Christian life that are easier than others and that it might take varying degrees of maturity to actually apply a sermon. Implicitly stated in these responses is the fact that to apply a sermon takes deliberate action on the part of the hearer. Whether the application process is easy or challenging, to seek to apply the sermon requires a deliberate plan of action on the part of the hearer.

The believers' life as a sermon was evaluated. In response, all five participants unanimously agreed that it was necessary to preach with one's life. When asked to give reasons for their answer, all five participants also agreed that actions were greater than words. Therefore, it was important and necessary that the lives preached what was thought to be believed in the heart. They acknowledged that for persons who might not come to church, it is the lifestyle that could be an evangelism tool, and that through the life lived a person might become interested in the Christian faith. By this position, they underscored that through their life they are communicating a message – the gospel. Their lives are preaching a sermon that has not been heard by someone who did not worship

with them on Sunday.

The feasibility of preaching with one's life was questioned. While all participants thought that it was possible to preach with our lives, the scope of this was viewed differently by the participants. Three of the five participants said that lives should embody what is heard on Sunday. They suggested that if it was not embodied during the week, then it was a useless exercise or just a routine to hear the sermon on Sunday. This response was closely linked to the question about the purpose of hearing the sermon on Sunday. While the other two participants agreed with this position, their response took it a little further by suggesting that, while it was possible, that preaching with life required effort. For these two, they acknowledged that the temptations of the world and the varying things that were attractive made preaching with life possible, but difficult. They noted that it took more effort for them to deliberately live out their Christian convictions based on their past as well as other issues that may tempt them. The silver lining for me was the desire of such persons to at least try though it was deemed difficult.

The response of the participants leads to the conclusion that for persons to preach with their life is not an unattainable requirement. Preaching their life's experiences then becomes necessary though challenging due to worldly temptations.

Through the questionnaire, participants critically examined themselves in areas varying from the spiritually intimate to the practical, including themes of God's grace, obedience to God, listening to God, commitment, time management, leadership and service. These topic areas touched on aspects pertinent and essential to the life of a Christian and represented key areas of the discipleship and requirements of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Through the questionnaire, this researcher sought to explore how participants addressed particular pertinent issues, which they had identified themselves. Each participant chose his or her method, manifesting his or her own uniqueness and individuality and conveying the sense of personal responsibility we each must take in pursuing a life in Christ. As teaching tools, the process and the questionnaire were intended to illustrate a Christian journey in which each of us takes responsibility for ourselves and our actions. Our discipleship with Christ and the message of our experience is under our control until yielded to the Holy Spirit.

From the questionnaire, four out of the five participants placed great importance on the role of prayer. They reported their strong and firm belief in the power and necessity of prayer and supported all their efforts with prayer, reporting that they found themselves engaging in prayer regularly as a way to approach and overcome their challenges.

The fifth participant employed a different approach. This participant found it necessary to seek out and engage an “accountability partner,” someone who would be deliberate in checking in on the participant to keep that person in line. The partner then became part of the process, functioning as one who ensured that the main participant did as he said he would. The accountability partner engaged the participant in regular discussion throughout the entire process, guiding the participant to be true to himself and to stay the course on which he embarked on. The accountability partner also doubled as a prayer partner and remained in constant prayer for the individual. Although this approach was unexpected, I found it very admirable, employing as it did a biblical approach to helping one another and embodying the true spirit of Christian fellowship.

The approach taken by this participant highlighted the role of the community of faith; we assist each other as we grow. The pact between the partners demonstrated a depth of commitment, characterized by humility and trust.

In addressing the concerns, participants noted that the exercises forced them to look at habits they had practiced over the years that affected not only their spiritual development but the whole of their life-choices and progress. As researcher, I found this exciting in that it pointed to potentials of total transformation. My hope was that, in some way, the project would not just enhance the spiritual life of the participants, but their total selves, confirming my belief that Christianity is not just about the soul but about the whole person.

The questionnaire not only sought to get an image of the actual implementation of the project, but also reflection on the individual's relationship with God. Hence, the instrument raised the question as to whether the person had achieved any spiritual growth. All the participants indicated that they had achieved some measure of spiritual growth in their walk with Christ. They also found that, though the project was over, they were still seeking to make the transfer of integrating the sermon's words from the pulpit to an application of action in daily life.

It is worthy of note that one participant reported that he was now experiencing a heightened awareness of what God had demanded in the role of a Christian. Reality hit home when this participant recognized the responsibility to represent God in everything, in all actions and all words.

All participants also noted that while they found that the project served to assist and to enable them to grow spiritually, they still struggled with their relationship with

God. This thought gave me pause and cause for reflection. I was moved to ask some questions of myself. What is spirituality? What makes a person spiritual? What is the measure by which a person may suggest that their relationship with God is weak or strong? What makes a relationship with God a “struggling” one? As I pondered these questions, eventually I concluded that what really mattered was that we have a relationship with God. By attempting to define the quality of that relationship, I would be passing judgment on something about which we can only be partially aware, not being privy to all the facts.

The questionnaire also led participants to look outward and to realize that their discipleship was not only for themselves but for others. I sought to discover whether, having participated in the project, persons now felt in a better position to help others in their spiritual journey.

All the participants again recognized their own struggles and suggested that helping others would not be easy. They noted that to assist someone else in a walk with Christ would take a deep understanding of the journey and the struggles associated with it. One participant acknowledged that, in order to assist someone else, he/she would have to keep in mind that they too journeyed and moved through transforming experiences. This awareness of the humanity and struggles of others on the journey is an essential point in the matter of discipleship. My own theology and philosophy of discipleship helps me to understand that one cannot disciple without acknowledging the humanity of others. In seeking to disciple persons, one cannot embark on the process of discipleship without fully embracing that all persons have shortcomings and that in agreeing to engage in the process of discipleship is agreeing to confront them.

The questionnaire asked about challenges faced in completing the exercise. All participants noted that in many ways the exercise was challenging. They found that they had to constantly remind themselves that they were engaged in a process in which it was necessary to deliberately and frequently recommit, as it were, to their personal missions. This was particularly so in the early days of the project. However, as two participants noted, the task became somewhat easier as the weeks progressed.

A central question in the instrument asked how (or whether) the project would impact their overall lives. Based on the responses of the participants, it is fair to conclude that the project made a positive impact on their lives. The questions prompted the participants to reflect upon their own relationships, their closeness to God, and their ability to live a Christian life. All participants noted that they now felt closer to God and that through the exercise they were able to walk in line with God, more literally, align with Him.

This new level of relationship with God affirmed their walk. One participant noted that as a result of the project she is now more confident about being a Christian. She also noted that she was able to say with more confidence that she was walking with God without feeling as if she had failed her professed obligation. This shows a point of growth in the life of the individual. This point of growth also boosts confidence not only in self but also in one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

This thickening of their own spiritual narrative could only augur well for their future development in Christ. It is this new deeper level of relationship that persons long for but are often unable to achieve. Through this project, participants moved a step closer to that level of relationship that empowers a person to progress to new levels of

spirituality by combining desire and action.

Being Christ's letter and preaching life's experiences cannot be a simple task. To accomplish such a task takes commitment and dedication to purposeful process, requiring persons to critically look at themselves and change, not only in attitudes, but in mindsets and behaviors. The process would call for persons to be personally honest and use the Word of God spoken from pulpits to inform and influence their actions. Moving from what is heard to what is done would be the first step in becoming the letter of Christ for others to read in the world. The tendency to separate various departments of their lives is a real struggle. It is only left for those who communicate the gospel through preaching and teaching to constantly teach and call persons to complete surrender of the total selves so that transformation may occur in all areas of their lives. With hope, this movement will impact not only the participants, but also the world as individuals receive and partake in a deeper relationship with Christ.



## CHAPTER SEVEN - SERMONS

This chapter contains sample sermons preached during the project period. Participants heard sermons from my pulpit as well as sermons spoken at funerals, on radio or on television.

These sermons were preached during the Lenten season of the church year. This is the period in the life of the church when many members engage in varying practices, some spiritual disciplines. These are engaged in with the hopes that at the end of the Lenten period there would be some measure of growth in their spiritual lives that will ultimately lead them into a closer relationship with Christ. The intent of the sermons was to offer encouragement along the Lenten journey while calling to the minds of the hearers varying aspects of the Christian life.

These sermons were selected with the hope that it would have offered to the hearers, particularly those engaged in the project and the wider congregation a framework for evaluation of their Christian journey. The sermons as presented below offers a detailed outline and not actually what was preached from the pulpit in the preaching moment. They are included at this point in the project so that they may infuse and inform the understanding of what the participants would have heard during the duration of the project.

Stick with It!  
Job 2: 1-10  
Estridge Moravian Church  
February 17, 2013

We are living in a world today where it seems like no one wants to stay with anything for too long. We start something, we do it for a while and suddenly we are too bored to continue. We start something and as soon as we encounter a bit of challenge or if things do not go smoothly, we are ready to throw our hands up in the air and walk away saying it's too hard, or it's not going to work, or it doesn't make any sense.

At times, our commitment to anything is limited and our integrity is limited since we are so fickle and so quick to give up. We come to feel as if our integrity and our commitment do not matter anymore.

Our scripture reading this morning from the book of Job speaks to us directly and brings the whole issue of commitment and integrity into view. I want to suggest today that the story of Job is as much about commitment and integrity as it is about faith in God.

The story of Job is intriguing. Philosophers and theologians have examined and reexamined Job's story and have argued and come to varying conclusions about Job. Here is a story about a man, we are told in Chapter 1, who was a very rich man. He was a rare combination of wealth and holiness. We are told that Job was upright and perfect and feared God. Job was a man who intentionally steered clear of evil, a family man. He looked out for his family and provided very well. In fact, Job grew extraordinarily wealthy.

In chapter one, the devil bartered with God, and God allowed him to take Job's wealth and his family because the devil was convinced, wrongly so, that the things of the

world were more important to Job than his relationship with God. However, Job, in the face of all of his losses, dropped before the Lord and worshipped and said in effect, “I have come naked and I will go naked. God gave to me, and God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Shocking! Job shocked the devil and stuck to his commitment to God in the face of all that happened. Job did not turn away from God.

Here in Chapter two, evil makes a second appearance before the Lord, coming to barter again for Job. This time he says, take his skin—skin for skin. In this episode we see Job’s commitment and integrity come to the fore. In this barter, Job is as a pawn moved about between God and Satan and is afflicted with sores on his skin. Scripture says that he is afflicted with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. In the midst of this setback, Job takes a piece of pottery and begins to scrape his skin, and then sits in the midst the ashes of the pottery and skin mixture. Here we gain our first lesson about integrity and commitment, about sticking with it.

**We are to stick with it in the midst of affliction.**

We notice that Job, covered with sores and suffering a hideous affliction, did not whine to God, “How can you do this to me?” Job did not walk away in his suffering; rather, he stayed with God. In the midst of all that was going wrong in his life and in his body, he stuck with God. Pain or no pain, he stuck with God. Wealth or no wealth, he stuck with God.

You see, it is when we are in the midst of afflictions that we begin to grow. It is in the midst of afflictions that we begin to understand the power and the faithfulness of God. The church was afflicted for just about 500 years and when the church emerged

through the affliction, it came out as a roaring missionary church eager, and willing to spread the gospel.

We must be able to stick with God in the midst of afflictions because Romans 5:3-5 declares unto us that we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Despite our walking with God, things may not always go so well. We may feel under a lot of pressure, losing more than we are gaining. Our perceptions may be distorted; we might be seeing signs that suggest we are losing when we are really steadfast in God. Job teaches us in the midst of affliction that we must stay with our commitment and stick with it!

It seems as if the church is under affliction. Within and without, we are under affliction. The word for us as a church is to keep on in the name of God, and speak as God says to speak. Proclaim the Gospel that Jesus saves! Don't give up! As a church we are commanded in the midst of afflictions to **STICK WITH IT!**

So Job holds his own until he goes to the one place where he feels he can seek solace, his wife. He has already lost his money, his children, and now his body is filled with sores. His wife now approaches him and says to him, "Are you still holding on to God? Are you still committed to God and holding on to your integrity while you barely have a body? You barely have strength? You are a mass of sores, and you still talking about God?"

You know sometimes the hardest persons for us to remain faithful to God among

are the people with whom we live, our family. Those with whom we are closest know our buttons, know how to rub us the wrong way, wait for us to slip up so they can accuse “and you say you follow God?” We are called to stick with it even, sometimes most especially, at home.

**In the midst of differing opinions by family – stick with it.**

Our family members sometimes come to church with us, yet when we go home with them the things they do and the things they say may make us wonder if we all just came from the same church. Instead of encouraging us, some family members want to push us down the path of wrongdoing rather than support us with positive direction.

Job teaches us today, that even when family members come with opinions that might be true to our convictions, we must stick with it because it is not the family members who will lead us to heaven; it’s not the family members who will work the miracles. It is not the family members who will provide when we are in need. So I will stick with God, for it is God who shall provide and it is God who will say that he will keep us when we stay with him.

So it makes no difference what family members may say and do; I will keep my God and go to heaven without a family because it is better for me to go to heaven without a family than to go to hell with a family. Jesus reminds us in the gospels that it is better for us to get to heaven with one eye and one foot and one hand, then for us to go to hell whole.

When family members approach us with an option and opinion that is contrary to what we believe God is saying and doing, and what we know God has promised is and say to us that we are to abandon this belief that we have, our integrity and our

commitment should not falter. We must **STICK WITH IT!**

There is also another lesson we learn here from Job. When Job asked his wife, should we only expect to get good from God and not evil, the text said that Job did not sin with his lips. There is inherent in Job's statement a firm belief that as we stick with our commitments and maintain our integrity, God will take care of us.

### **God will take care of us**

In no situation can we doubt that God will take care of us. If we are afflicted, God will take care of us. If our families turn their backs on us, God will take care of us. If we are lost, in need of a compass, God will take care of us. If we are in any difficulty, God will take care of us. These are the words that we receive from the Lord today: He will take care of us if we stick with it. Now is not the time to give up. Now is not the time to falter. Now is not the time for us to allow our integrity and our commitment to God to be sold out for a friendship or a relationship or a companionship of anyone or anything. Now is not the time for us to sell out our integrity and commitment to God because times are hard and we can't take what we are going through. Stick with it because God will take care of you. Stick with it for with God in our vessel, we can smile at the storm! Stick with it, for greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world!

**STICK WITH IT!**

SHHH! What are you hearing?

I Samuel 3:11-21

Estridge Moravian Church

February 24, 2013

We looked sometime ago at what is commonly referred to as the call of Samuel.

We revisit that story again today. Looking at the first 10 verses of I Samuel chapter 3, we took into consideration all the realities of the text, and we came to know that Eli was old and we know Samuel ministered to him in the temple. The facts are that Eli, a leader, was seated in a place of punishment as it were by God because he failed to manage his own family. We recognize from the story that in Samuel's call we can learn something about responding to the call of God. We seek to understand the call in our own lives, bearing in mind that we all have a call from God.

From the first 10 verses of Samuel chapter 3, we concluded three major points. We concluded that when it comes to the call of God, we can run but we can't hide. We also concluded that we must be careful who we allow to advise us when we seek to discern the call. Finally, we agreed that when it comes to the call, we must answer: "Speak Lord I am listening."

This week, we return to the call of Samuel to consider the other portion of the text. Having understood the call to some extent, and, having received the correct answer to the call, we must ask ourselves what are we being called to do? What does the call mean? Now that God has our attention, what do we do? We must understand that when God issues a call, he is not calling for calling's sake; He is calling for action. He is calling us to do something, to get up and take some form of action. In scripture when He called persons He was calling so that they would go and do something—deliver a message or take some sort of action. It is the same with us. When God calls us, He is not just calling us so that we can say that we have been called. God is not calling us so that He can boost our ego so we think that we achieved some measure of "spiritual maturity." God is not calling us so that we can note it down on our notepads and in our journals, or

somewhere in our Bibles, “I received a call from God on this day.” When God calls us, He is calling us to do something; God is calling us to action.

The call from God affects, not only our own life, but, most significantly, the lives of others. In the case of Samuel, God called him to deliver a message that would directly affect the life of Eli, the priest; however, on a larger scale Samuel’s action influenced an entire nation. So what lessons can we learn from what Samuel heard after he said to the Lord, “Speak I am listening?” What can we learn from Samuel as it pertains to our own calls from God?

### **We learn that what we hear will not always be pleasant**

When Samuel turned his ear and began to listen to what he was hearing from God, he realized that what God was saying to him was not pleasant. Samuel hears from God that he, young Samuel, merely 12 years old, was to say to Eli, his senior and the one whom he served out of duty that God was going to punish Eli. How could he, a young man, deliver a menacing message to someone who was considered his leader and his senior? How could a young man speak such harsh words?

But God will not always call us to give a word of hope. God will not always call us to do an act that will put a smile on the face of someone and make the person feel good. There will be times when God will call us to speak and do things that might anger some people or make them feel uncomfortable. However, if we hear such guidance from God, that is what we ought to do. Jesus made this point when he said if anyone should come after me they must “deny self, take up their cross and follow me.” In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus called those first disciples to follow Him although following Him meant giving up their livelihood as fishermen. The men gave up what was comfortable



and familiar for the sake of answering the call of God in their lives. This could not have been pleasant or easy for them.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing on this matter of discipleship and answering the call of God, puts it even more frankly. He says, “When God calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>1</sup>

When God calls us, what we hear from God might not always be pleasant.

**We also learn from the text that our failure to speak will have consequences**

What Samuel heard from the Lord made him uncomfortable. It was not pleasant, and now he had a hard task. The text says that Samuel was afraid to repeat to Eli what he had heard from God. But Eli in his wisdom reminded Samuel in a unique way of his responsibility to share what he had heard from the Lord. Samuel then spoke, and he spoke with some measure of boldness. He told Eli what he had heard from the Lord, and Samuel knew he would have to suffer consequences for his act of witness.

This story instructs us, my brothers and sisters, that whatever we have heard from the Lord, we have to act on and speak about—even boldly. Our failure to speak the word will be to our own demise. Not speaking, not acting as God has told us to act will cause us to pay harsh consequences.

All too often, we allow everything else to get in the way of our being agents of God. We let personalities and we let status and we allow our own human frailties to hinder us a lot of times from doing what God calls us to do. When this happens, we rob ourselves, we rob others, we let our own minds and our wills play God and decide what we will or will not say. When we do this, we cause ourselves and others to miss out on something that God has in store for us and them because we were not bold enough to

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, New York: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

speak and to act when God spoke to us. Very often we fail to remember that our actions have an impact beyond us and beyond the small community of our world. Failure to act on God's call affects us and everyone around us.

We act upon the call of God in our lives because there are consequences to our actions.

**We learn that obedience to the call leads to God's favor.**

In the closing verses of I Samuel 3, we read that God favored and honored Samuel by allowing his words never to fall to the ground – his words came through. Samuel continued to have regular interactions with the Lord and regular hearings from God.

So you see, all that we see happening here is that Samuel proved himself faithful in little things, and faithful in speaking to one man, so God favored him to speak to the nation. But what it really says is that obedience to the call of God leads us to experience God's favor!

I want to suggest this morning that when we hear what God is saying to us and when we answer the call of God, and when we are faithful in small things, God will reward us fully with greater things.

So today, what are you hearing? What is God saying to you? What does He ask you to do? Will you do it? As you ponder in your heart what you are hearing from God, remember that what we hear will not always be pleasant. Remember that there are consequences when we fail to carry out the call of God. Remember that obedience to God's call leads to His favor.

What is God saying to you today? Will you answer and say, "Yes, Lord, I will go

where you lead me?” Will you be bold enough and faithful enough to say, “Yes, Lord, I will.” We must respond as God wills for others depend on us. What are you hearing today?

The Power of Grace  
Timothy 1:12-17  
Estridge Moravian Church  
March 10, 2013

We turn our attention today to I Timothy 1:12-17. In this book, the Apostle Paul is writing to young Timothy. He is instructing and giving him encouragement through this pastoral epistle. Paul and Timothy shared a special relationship. They were very close and Paul used Timothy several times to lead churches that he had founded.

In this Epistle, Paul writes to Timothy and gives him practical advice for the ministry that he is to perform. In his writing, and particularly in chapter 1, Paul is giving the authority by which he has to write. In doing this, Paul reveals his own background and admits that he was “chief of all sinners,” yet he experiences the mercy of God in his life. Then Paul makes a major statement of doctrine: Christ came to save sinners. Paul counted himself as chief among those sinners.

In reading these verses, we begin to understand that grace has power. We must not mistakenly take the idea of grace as some pie in the sky or some abstract concept having no real effect on our lives. Grace is not just a theological concept, abstracted from our real lives.

We know grace through the experience of grace. In that experience, we know its power. According to this text, what power does grace have? First, grace has the power to transform (v. 12-14); 2) its power releases us to praise (v.17).

**Grace has power to transform.**

When we read the text closely, we begin to get an idea of Paul's life before he found the Lord. Look closely at how he describes himself. He says that he was a blasphemer – one who spoke irreverently about God, and the sacred things of God. He pushed it a little further and he says that not only did he blaspheme, but he was also one who persecuted—literally hunted and killed—anyone who would own the name of God. Paul said that he was a violent man.

We must understand that what Paul was saying here was that he was no stranger to sin. Prior to his Damascus Road experience, Paul was one terrible person. He had no regard for church. He had no regard for Christ or even the name of Christ. If there was anyone who was sinking deep in sin, it was Paul.

By the time Paul gets around to writing to Timothy, he has made a round-a-bout turn in his own life. In verse 12 Paul gives thanks that God has called him into service despite all of the horrible things that he used to do. But by verse 14, he attributes his turn around, his transformation from what he used to be to who he is now, to God's grace which poured abundantly into his life.

This says to us my sisters and brothers that when we consider the life of Paul and see where he is coming from and where he got to, we recognize that the grace of God has the power to transform lives. The grace of God has power to reach persons regardless of

sin, regardless of status, regardless of position, regardless of their past. God will take them and transform them and use them for His good work.

We must never think that we have sinned so much that God's grace cannot touch us. There may be some things you have done that are so bad, you can't even mention them. Every time you think about your past, you hang your head in shame. And if anyone ever did find out what you have done, you would be too ashamed to own up to it.

But I want to declare this truth today: God's grace is potent. It is strong, and it is able to reach even the lowest of the low. The grace of God, regardless of our sins, regardless of our past, regardless of all the things that we have done, reaches us and transforms us.

When God's grace pours into our lives, we begin to shake off the dust of sin, and grace infiltrates into our once sinful lives and begins to transform us. It begins to lift us and rescue us out of the clutches of sin, so that we are able to walk with pride again because the wonderful grace of Jesus has reached us.

The grace of God has power to transform!

**The grace of God has power to release us to praise.**

After Paul speaks about himself and about the power of God's grace in his life, he brings this portion of the epistle to a close, using a doxology which is quite common throughout his writings. In verse 17, he attributes his transformation to God. He attributes all his good works to God's pouring grace into his life. He stands and testifies to the glory of God.

In verse 17, Paul uses the doxology where he ascribes honor and glory to God and says that God is King—eternal, immortal, invisible, the Only GOD—this from the man who used to persecute the church.

God's grace releases us. God's grace inspires us to say truths we would never say. God's grace enables us to do what we had been unable to do. I am sure that when Paul wrote about God, he must have looked back and said that can't be me. In a sense, he'd be right. It was not him; it was the grace of God. God's grace released him, freed him to act.

Prior to Paul's recognizing the grace of God in his life, he was hindered by the guilt of his sins. The things that he used to do and say hindered him. At some point, Paul recognized that God's grace set him free. The shackles that held him fell away, and Paul was free to sing the praise of God, to declare that God is King of kings and Lord of lords.

When we receive the grace of God in our lives, we are liberated, free, inspired to sing God's praises and give all glory to Him.

The grace of God sets us free so that we may realize that if it had not been for God's grace in our lives we could have been lost and on our way to hell. Because of God's grace, we have life everlasting. Until that day when we shall inherit eternal life, we will praise God, we will give to God all the glory and honor due unto him because if it had not been for the Lord, we'd be without hope. If it had not been for God's hand that snatched us when we were lost, we'd still be lost. If it had not been for God's grace pouring into our lives, we would be without joy.

But because of the power of God's grace in our lives we can stand up and shout and dance and praise God even in the midst of battles, in the midst of trials, in the midst

of tribulations, in the midst of hardship because we know that God is more than enough. God's grace is sufficient for us!

Do you know the power of grace? Do you know the power of God that transforms? Has your life been transformed by God's grace? Have you been released from the burdens of life by God's grace in order that you may praise God in the way that He deserves?

Today I invite you to experience the power of grace in your life. There is no sin, no wrong that you have committed that is out of reach of the grace of God. There is no need to be guilty because God's grace can pour abundantly into your life.

Will you receive God's grace today?

What is Your Response?  
Romans 12:1-2  
Estridge Moravian Church  
March 17, 2013

In listening to some music this week, I came across the hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." As I listened to the hymn, I was strangely moved by its meaning. I picked out some thoughts from each verse. Today, I want to focus mainly on verse 4 of the hymn.

The first verse helps us to understand that we need to take a personal look at the life of Christ. In this verse, we look personally and discover that we must know who died for us. We also learn from this verse that nothing compares to Christ's cross, and we must accept the challenge of the cross.

In the second verse, the hymn writer asks us to keep life in perspective and to remember that our only Glory is in the work of the Cross. We must know our vices,

those actions that cause us to stumble and fall, and we must know the power of forgiveness in the blood of Jesus.

Looking at verse three, we take an early look at Calvary. Here we observe that Christ's going to Calvary was an act of commitment that we must not take for granted. Christ's commitment was the ultimate act of love.

Today, we come to an end of the series as we consider the verse in Romans 12:12 under the theme, "What is your response?" As the hymn concludes we are moved through the verse to consider our ways, and we are prompted to make a response.

You see, we must be aware of the fact that when we encounter Jesus Christ, there is no way that we can encounter God in Jesus Christ and not be moved to make a response. We see this in scripture when Moses encountered God in the burning bush and his response was to take off his shoes for where he was standing was Holy ground.

Isaiah had his encounter with God. What was his response to that encounter? Isaiah's response to God was, "Here I am. Send me."

In all the gospel accounts of Jesus' encounters with persons, some healing, some change, some miracle takes place.

The Apostle Paul encountered God on the Road to Damascus and his response was to change his whole life; he went from being a persecutor of those following Christ's Way, as stated in Acts 9, to one who finally preached the Way. The power of Paul's response resonates in the New Testament.

We cannot come into contact with God, we cannot take a serious look at the cross of Jesus Christ, or spend time in the presence of God and not be moved. God moves us



to respond to His goodness and moves us to make changes in the way we speak and the way we live.

That is where we are brought to today. For today, the hymn-writer's verse is more reflective. Having spoken about the acts of the cross, he now asks himself as he pens the last verse, what can I give? How can I respond to all the works of the cross? How can I respond to such a wonderful act of love and commitment?

The hymn-writer responds, "Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

This is what the Apostle Paul speaks of in Romans 12. As he continues to teach the Roman Church he gives God's words to these wise, intelligent persons who were struggling between embracing Christ and holding on to the Greek culture and its temptations, prevalent in Rome at that time.

Paul asserts the need for an affirmative response to God. He says in Romans that in view of God's mercy, respond by presenting your bodies, your words, your actions as your sacrifice. Your response to the mercy of God must be to stand out from the world. Refuse to conform to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and heart.

So when we look at this text both from scripture and allow the scripture to bring some lessons from the hymn verse, what do we learn about making a response to the cross of Christ? In making a response, we learn that we are not rich enough to buy what Christ did for us on the cross.

Hear how the songwriter writes in the verse: "Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering FAR TOO SMALL." In essence, he was saying that even if

he had money and even if he was rich as the richest man, he could not match in material wealth the value of what Christ did for us. Christ's action was so precious and priceless that money, islands, diamonds and rubies could not pay for it. The attempts would pale in comparison, would be FAR TOO SMALL. It would be an insult to try to buy or to try to pay for what Christ did.

So if we understand this we can make two further conclusions. We can conclude that since we cannot buy it, it makes no sense to try to win our way into the kingdom of God by church service. If we are going to work in the church, we better work with right motive because we cannot buy our way into the kingdom.

Those who work trying to buy their way, we know them; for if their names aren't called and if you don't agree with them, they stop, they bad talk, they try to sabotage.

We can buy human fame and worldly honor but we cannot BUY GOD!

Because Christ's sacrifice was priceless, we must conclude that we are precious to him. We are priceless and cannot be bought! The world might not put any value on me, yet now I know that I am priceless. In God's eyes, I am high maintenance; for God, I am precious. In God's eyes, I am worth something so much so that his death and precious blood redeem me! I AM PRECIOUS! So I look differently, speak differently. Christ and his blood flow through me. So I cannot BE BOUGHT!

**In making a response, we have to declare our view of God's love**

The songwriter then says, not only could he not buy what God did on the cross, but he had to come to grips with how he saw the love of God. In the previous verse, he recognized how God viewed him. He saw that God loved him so that he sent his only Son.

The writer speaks here about how he sees God, how he describes God's love. You see people can love you, but if you don't love them back, their love doesn't matter. If they view you as the apple of their eye, but you see them as the pain in your right hand, their love doesn't matter.

The songwriter refers to LOVE SO AMAZING, SO DIVINE. He saw the love of God for him was so amazing. He was amazed that God could love and save a wretch like him. His love had to be amazing that he could take on suffering in deep faith and in love.

How do we view the love of God? Another songwriter says the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell. That was his view of God's love; he didn't have enough words to describe the love of God. HOW do we view the love of God? What word could you use to describe God's love.

You see when we can name and claim God's love, we allow it to keep us in check on our own walk with Him. When we know how we feel about the love of God, we won't do certain things to disappoint Him because loves us.

We have to come to a position on how we view God's love.

**In making a response, recognize that it calls for a total response**

Hear the songwriter: "it demands my soul, my life, my all."

Notice that the response that the songwriter speaks of starts from the seat of the SOUL. When something has your soul, you are fully engulfed. It moves through visible and invisible worlds, and flows through your life through EVERYTHING! God's comprehensive love calls for a total response.

We cannot look at Christ on the Cross and give a half-hearted response. It calls for us to totally surrender ourselves—everything about us: our love lives, our church lives, our financial lives, no matter how meager. Give to God and God will bless you. Pay your tithe in obedience and God will reward your faithfulness. **ALL PARTS OF US MUST BE GIVEN IN RESPONSE.**

Too many persons give half-hearted, lip service response, but God wants it all. He wants your hands, your feet, your brain, your intellect; he has given these gifts to you so that you can use them to serve him. **TOTAL SURRENDER!**

The church has everything we need to be and who we need to be right here. However, nobody does anything for free anymore, not even for God. The call today is to make a response. Respond to the awareness of God's love in your life. As God's love is unconditional, our response to him must be total.

What is your response to the cross today? We surveyed it, kept it in perspective, spoke of Calvary. What is your response? God sacrificed just for you. What is your response today? Will you surrender your all today?

## CONCLUSION

A preaching life, where, as the letter of Christ that we become what others read does not come easily. In seeking to cultivate this life, we will often find ourselves stumbling along the way. This life is often a struggle as we are brought face to face with our humanity. The test of our commitment and our discipleship comes with our wrestling with ourselves to accept God's call and accept who He wants us to be on a daily basis as we continuously seek to become Christ's letter. The thought of 'becoming' helps us to understand that we have not yet attained or achieved the position that God in Christ has for us. Every day we grow one step closer to who Christ calls us to be. As we mature in our journey, it may become somewhat easier to be the letter of Christ in the world.

This project sought to embrace the practice and journey of "becoming." It sought to call the participants to an understanding of their journeys to becoming who Christ has called them to be. The project sought to engage participants so that their personal discipleships have public implications as each lives out his or her calling in society. When persons have embraced these implications and deliberately seek to live and preach life experiences in Christ, we move one step closer to fulfilling the mandate of the Church to be disciples. We also move closer to being the church in the world and the salt of the earth.

The preaching life is not one reserved for the ordained clergy alone. As stated in

previous chapters, all baptized persons play a role in the preaching life. One must not raise clergy preaching done in the sanctuary over the preaching of the laity done in community. Clergy and laity, while seeking to fulfill their divine calling, are prone to human error, failure and disappointment. Such setbacks are opportunities for soul searching, compassion and tolerance for ourselves and for others as we encourage one another to be Christ's letter as it unfolds in our lives.

The biblical admonition of Paul to be the letter of Christ remains the challenge in the twenty-first century. He asserts that the letter of Christ was written with the ink of the Holy Spirit. As such as people who are the letter of Christ, the modern letters are also written with the ink of the Holy Spirit. The story to be told and read by others is one that has been infused and inked by the Holy Spirit.

The admonition of Paul to the Church at Corinth has become our own. His words resound for us today in the 21st Century. Perhaps they are more potent now than in former days. In an era when persons are not so prone to walk into churches to hear the gospel, the gospel must be taken to the streets. Persons have become too busy now to give perhaps even an hour to sit through a worship service. Therefore, the onus rests upon those of us who are regular attendees at church to become the gospel for those who do not enter a sanctuary to hear a spoken sermon. We are called to engage in a preaching life, to be Christ's letter and allow our life experiences to communicate the gospel of Christ. We are all called to be preachers and live a preaching life.

It must be concluded as well that the implications of this project goes well beyond the community in which the project was implemented. Persons who attend church and

worship services have a life beyond the four walls of the church. Persons live a very diverse life which may carry them into different spheres and cause interactions with various persons. As such, post-modern culture now dictates that life is no longer lived within a village, avenue or city settings. Persons now have, and are a part of, an online community via Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites. Life also creates another community of friends for persons via social messaging.

This project sought to demonstrate that it is possible for there to be a connection between what is heard in the pulpit on Sunday and what is lived throughout the remainder of the week. It demonstrates that with some measure of discipline and intentional action on the part of individuals' spiritual growth can be achieved. If persons were to make a deliberate and conscientious effort to apply what is heard from pulpits weekly, they would experience spiritual growth in their lives.

Although this project worked with a small group, this researcher believes that an entire congregation can benefit from some profound effects the participants experienced, for those who participated, through their testimony, inspired others to try the same project on their own. The congregation would do well to embark on such an effort as it would mean a greater and deeper level in their relationships with Jesus Christ, arousing anew a passion that would spur persons into action. With persons preaching their life's experiences and seeking to be Christ's letter in the world, the communities and nations in which they live stand better chances of evangelization.

It is my belief that this project has a scope for the future. Certainly perhaps in another context the project could be implemented again encouraging persons to participate as part of their spiritual journey. I do believe that it would make a good

exercise for Lent as persons would often engage in varying exercises aimed at their spiritual development.

As we preach with our lives in the midst of failures and disappointments we must also remember that what we preach is grace. Our lives are graceful sermons because we are recipients of God's grace. We declare and exhibit God's grace in our lives and through our preaching. We become Christ's letter and preach our life experiences through our actions because the kingdom of God is at stake, to be made manifest through us. It is my genuine hope that all people respond to the call and recommit to living the Word.



APPENDIX I

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

How important to you is hearing a sermon on a weekly basis? (please tick the relevant response)

Not important\_\_\_\_ Fairly important\_\_\_\_ Important\_\_\_\_ Very important\_\_\_\_

In your opinion, what is the sermon supposed to accomplish?

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How easy is it to apply the sermon (s) you hear to your life?

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Is it necessary to 'preach' with your life? Say why.

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Do you think it is possible to preach what you hear on Sundays with your life? Say why.

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How many issues did you seek to confront during the period of the exercise?

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How did you go about confronting and addressing these issues?

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Now at the end of the exercise do you see yourself as a better Christian?

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Do think that you are now closer to God and more in tune with living a Christian life?

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Do you think that you are now in a better position to help others live a Christian life?

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What challenges did you encounter in seeking to complete the exercise?

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## APPENDIX II

## PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this project as I seek to complete the requirements leading to the degree of Doctor of Ministry of Drew University, USA. Your participation is appreciated and I am grateful to you for the same.

The instructions for the project are as follows.

1. Over the next four weeks, you are being asked to keenly listen to sermons either at church or over the radio. These are sermons are not only limited to what may be preached on Sunday mornings, but also at funerals and other occasions.  
You are asked to take notes of the sermons that you hear, highlighting any major points.
2. Having listened to these sermons please identify one issue that you will address in your personal life for the week after you have heard the sermon.
3. You are being asked to keep a journal which will chronicle not only the issues you address but also your thoughts throughout the week. This journal will keep track of your struggles and successes as you seek to implement the issues you have identified. The journal will remain private.
4. Be prepared to attend a “check –in” meeting in week three to track your progress
5. A questionnaire will be provided at the end of the period to capture your thoughts and expressions on this exercise.

Thank you once again, and may God continue to bless you as you seek to draw closer to Him.

God’s peace,

Rev. J

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