

Message from Our Pastor – Rev. Dr. William C. Turner, Jr.

Presented to Members of the Mount Level Missionary Baptist Church

On

Wednesday, June 10, 2015

“Evangelism”

Ephesians 4:

3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

I was sitting on one of the patios on campus one day.

- It was warm and pleasant, so I didn't want to be inside.
- I looked for a spot that was not on the beaten path--or so I thought—away from the traffic.
- Well you guessed it: first there was a man from the library staff who recognized me and came up to speak.
- I couldn't bring myself to be rude.
- A student came and said he was going to send me a draft of some work to read.
- Again, I couldn't be rude.
- Shortly another student came: he was pastoring.
- We had a previous discussion about the church he serves and some interests I have over historical data.
- He made a comment about the church, in which he used a comment that resonated in a profound manner, and helped me wrap my mind around the word tucked in this text.
- I think it is good for us at this time.

He talked about the work he was doing in the church that was specifically intended to counter what he called "the empty nest syndrome" that is present among the people.

- It stunned me first.
- I have heard the expression used in homes where children leave, and nobody is there but the husband and wife.
- I know that scene intimately, but how does it apply to the church.
- He said it is the next stage before death, and that stunned me as well, because I don't tend to think of myself in that way.
- For a young man, I suppose facing the prospect of all the children leaving and facing retirement, it might look like a stage of waiting for time to expire.

As I thought more about the conversation, it did help me ponder patterns that lack energy and vitality.

- With men they use the term Low T.
- I don't know how that would translate for women; but I know how men can reach an age where they spend a lot of time reminiscing about the past.
- I suppose it is because deep inside we do have a sense that it won't be that long before we "wrap it up."

It occurs to me that a church can get like that as well.

- God forbid—and I don't mean no harm—but I don't see any future or excitement in bidding time, presiding over an empty nest, waiting for retirement, or sitting and longing to go home to be with the Lord.
- To take a trip on that Good Ole Gospel Ship.
- I argued with a woman the other day who told me her records showed that I lost my Medicare Eligibility, which is not reasonable.
- So it can't be as long as when I came.
- But to go "...sailing through the air" is another matter.

If what we have cultivated in this house by the grace of God is good only for our day, and our kolor, kin, and kind, we have been disobedient.

- It is not just for this generation, but for those coming behind us.
- We need confidence that God can do at least as good a job on those coming after us as God did on us.
- Jesus did not instruct us to tell our souls to take it easy; rather, he said: Occupy till I come.
- The text before us tells us to, to work, to strive.
- Specifically, it says endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Endeavoring, endeavoring, what a word; it implies strategy and intention.

- It calls for the power of the Spirit working in us.
- One of the great fathers of the church talked about knowing the ways of the Spirit through contemplating the Spirit's geography.
- That is following the Spirit's path, tracing the Spirit's steps, looking for the locus of the Spirit, seeing how the Spirit transgresses human boundaries.

The pressure of this text upon us here at Mt. Level is to consider what the worthy endeavor is going forward.

- I do believe it should have something to do with how we are connected to the community around us.
- It seems to me that there should be some resemblance between who is in the house and the surrounding demographics.
- That means, necessarily, learning the Spirit's ways of welcoming difference, showing signs that who is in our midst matters.
- It requires praying and seeking the Lord for how to exhibit interest and care for who is in proximity to us.
- It hinges on the faith and conviction that the Spirit does not work within the body of believers by accident or chance.

In the light of what we have called Vision 150 the time has long since come to obey the Lord's command.

- I quote the original iteration of that document:

- To be responsible disciples of Jesus Christ, our options are limited.
- We must take “spiritual custody” over the space in which we have been planted.
- There is no way to justify sitting on this corner if all we do is preach, sing, praise, and fellowship.
- By these means we are given power, energy, and vigor.
- But with the word that gives our identity is a calling to go into all the world, and the world begins at home.
- All we need to do is look around and we see that nothing has been provided for the people but houses, mortgages, and debt.
- There is nothing for the young ones but an invitation to trouble.
- In the words of The Late Reverend Prathia Hall Wynn: the fist of God is in our back.

Indeed, the hour is at hand.

- However, I am persuaded that little will happen without a deliberate endeavor to which we as a whole are committed.
- Jesus said to us as he did to his disciples: Look out upon the fields, but do not say we have so many months to harvest.
- I tell you, they already are ripe for harvest.
- He says to us as to the disciples: pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the fields.
- Or, the prayer is: Lord, make me one of those laborers.

Approximately one year ago I received a vision for what I nominated as Saturation Visits.

- I passed it on to our Evangelism Ministry and the Young Adults.
- As I began to make comments and go into details about what I saw, I felt persuaded to let them do it and not to cramp their style.
- I was amazed by their excitement, energy, and creativity.

We turned to Magnolia Point with gratitude to the Evangelism Ministry and to the young people who took the lead

- But our surroundings are much larger, and they continue to grow.
- We have done work at Sandy Ridge School, but even more focus is needed, and it needs to be sustained.
- Thank God for the work of the Wednesday night Ministries, Messiah’s House, the Food Pantry, Community Day, the Health Fair, and Transportation
- We have great expectations of Stevens Ministry.
- We do not in any way want to diminish or understate what is being done; indeed we are grateful to God for those making the sacrifice of their service.
- But the mission is not for a handful.
- Nor should it be only episodic.

I am not saying that no one has talked about such outreach before; I am not saying none have done it before.

- What we did was in part.
- Now we must return and do more.
- We must be a church in mission.
- This push is beyond a Team, or a Committee.
- The effort is to get the whole church involved in ministry.
- Nobody gets a pass.

Do we dare to turn the searchlight on this house?

- Look with boldness to see where the Spirit is attempting to lead us.
- I declare, if we do we will see boundaries erased, transgressed, eliminated, and eradicated.
- In place, we will see bonds of peace—wonderful bonds the Spirit can create.
- There is unity we have not seen and blessings we do not know.

God has given talents, and knows where they are deposited.

- Has told me to go and get them and call for them.
- We have good things planned in this regard for the summer, but we need more.
- The choice in the moment is to obey or rebel.

In the Covenant we read together we "...engage by the aid of the Holy Spirit... to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances."

- That surely extends to the neighboring communities.
- Further, we covenant to "...Strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness" and to devote ourselves to an "evangelical ministry."
- This is in part the way we respond to the commission given by the Lord to "...go into all the world..."
- We have no choice but to be witnesses if we have received the Spirit.
- And if we have not received the Spirit, we can expect to be feeble.

We put the marquee in the front to draw attention to website.

- But nothing will take the place of direct, personal contact to tell our neighbors: We know you are here, and we care.
- Let's face it: we have lost the connectivity of the past through the large interconnected families, with Millgrove and Hillview Terrace.
- There still is significant connection with Old Farm.
- But most of us drive in and drive out to this church.

Taking Spiritual Custody

We have proclaimed Spiritual custody over this community, believing that we do not sit here by accident.

- The time has come to make the proclamation a reality.
- While there are those designated to lead in this aspect of ministry, it properly belongs to the entire church.
- Put another way, it is our essential mission.
- The starting point is Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and the utmost parts.

How do we put tissue on this notion?

- What is meant by Saturation?
- It means making direct contact with all who live in proximity of the church, sparing no residence.
- I am talking about a neat and compact item [perhaps a card] that looks like an invitation.
- It needs first to be a clear gesture of welcome to Mt. Level and an invitation to join in discipleship and ministry for those who have no spiritual home.
- It needs to include basic information about the church and a bid to visit us at 316 Hebron or at the website.
- We have a Logo that depicts spiritual custody, corresponding with the angel in the stained glass in the front of the church.

The method I envision is packets of these cards connected to a "cluster" of addresses.

- Clusters will be assembled in such a manner as to cover all the housing in the proximate area of the church.
- The aim is to insure "saturation."
- The encouragement is for persons to set their own time for visits, and to move in groups of at least two if possible.
- A record should be kept of who has taken these packets so there can be reasonable assurance of full coverage.

The card needs to be attractive and give pertinent information: time of service, ministries in which we are involved, and clear ways to respond.

- Some inventory is needed for knowing what responses are being made--whether by telephone, website or whatever.
- Virtual visits from the pastor, the minister and officers can be afforded through the website.
- Provisions should be made for those desiring a visit in the home or at the church.
- Links can be provided to the Food Pantry, the Community Haven [501c3], and Vision 150 to show our endeavors to be connected with the community.

Broadest use should be made of the marquee along with the website.

- Each ministry of the church can present itself.
- We can set times when we pray for needs the community makes known to us, saying when this will be done and uploading the same on the website.

- Offerings can be made to the community through the website to include bible study, seminars, and workshops.
- Ministers and others with teaching gifts are encouraged to develop units for inclusion that draw on their expertise.

Upload worship services, concerts, and special features offered by the departments, auxiliaries, and ministries of the church.

- This implies a website ministry led by someone with the gifts and devotion to the same.
- Make provision for members of the community to speak back to us, saying what the needs are and even if there are those who might have gifts to offer the church.

Let us not go another season without a basketball team.

- The youngsters are inquiring.
- Busses are coming in from churches outside this community.
- These are our children.
- Revive the scouting program.
- Look for the many ways to reach our youth.

Before the larger project begins we can make gestures of welcome to the larger community, with features like a small park, a gazebo, a walking trail, picnic area, etc.

- Presently, we look well preserved and off-limits--not inviting to the community.
- While we say differently and know to the contrary in our hearts, optics are important.
- We can consider a temporary facility [like a trailer] for some of the ministry needs, since the old fellowship is offline.

I suggest that this can be explored by the Trustees, and Vision and Planning.

Consider also periodic evangelistic services for the community, perhaps making use of the Friday night hour.

- I am thinking particularly of a Youth Focus.

We are careful to share this aspect of the Vision in advance of the nomination and election cycle that Orders the House for the upcoming year.

- This is so those with gifts in pertinent areas may give timely, prayerful consideration and offer themselves for service where election to office is involved.
- Pray about it if you have not found your place in the service of the Lord.
- We want the new blood as well as the old.
- Don't let it be said: I'm here but not needed, or that some supposed "They" do it all.

There are blessings we cannot receive till we know him in his fullness and believe.

- We are the ones to profit when we say: I am going to walk with Jesus all the way.
- Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly dove, stay right here with us filling us with your love.
- If we do that we can sing in the words of this same song:
- There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord.
- Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly dove, stay right here with us filling us with your love.

I saw what the Spirit's unity looks like in a figure.

- Not so long ago I was offering Morning Prayers, and the discipline took me to Psalm 29.
- I have special affinity for Psalms like 19, 23, 24, 27, and some others.
- But I had never paid much attention to 29.
- I think the Lord wanted to show me a picture of what the Spirit's unity might look like—in Mt. Level, if you will.
- What struck my spiritual optical nerve was the scene where it said: At the word of the Lord the flame divided [v.7], and every voice in the house shouted, Glory [v. 9].

What I saw in that figure was a house that glorifies God and a flame that divides to go where the Lord sends, does what the Lord requires, seeks whom the Lord is seeking, and then returns to the house where every voice crying " Glory."

- In anticipation of such unity, I would that the whole house would cry "Glory."