

I Kings 2:1-4, 10-12 Pray at all times Ellesmere United
Ephesians 6: 10-20 in the Spirit August 28, 1988
Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23 Gordon Laird

I am not going to comment in detail during this sermon on the outcome of "The Report" but will leave that until announcement time. Only to say at this time, the 130 page Report, which caused so much pain in March and April was not passed and is now History. What you need to read is a 4 page report, copies of which are being passed out to all Council Members and are available to any and all of you by request from our Church Secretary, Anna Enkelmann. I will give you some more details at announcement time.

Yesterday and today the colleagues who graduated with me 20 years ago are celebrating 20 years since ordination. Yesterday 7 of us gathered in the Board Room of the Vancouver School of Theology. We shared many poignant and dramatic stories from the times we all set out from Union College "into the world to preach the Gospel" - each couple [only Jack Carr was single - and he has since found Louise as a member of one of his congregations] - like Abraham and Sarah, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you..." Going to sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land. And that took us to places like Fogo Island, Newfoundland - Canora, Choiceland, Maymont, Tugaske-Eyebrow, Saskatchewan - Tahsis on the West Coast of Vancouver Island - Kalso, B. C. - Port Colborne and Welland in the Niagara Peninsula - Balmertown, Northern Ontario, Uranium City - Chinese United, Calgary.

We heard that one of us was censured publicly for smoking a pipe and dancing, another was censured for not attending a dance.

We groaned and smiled as we listened to this pot-pouiri of love and learning and pathos - as we all tried to learn to listen to people of vastly different cultures and backgrounds and respond to their questions and their needs - joined them in the joy of their new child and the loss of a teenager in an accident, wept while they wept, laughed when they laughed.

And experimented as we learned what it was to be able to be at one with the people and to be their pastor as well. We found

out that in addition to the pastoral ministry we have also, from time to time, published cookbooks and newsletters, taught school, made cabinets and toys, established computer publishing firms, organized the World Council of Churches General Assembly, studied in Germany, butchered game, taken Clinical Pastoral Training, become Personnel Ministers and Executive Secretaries, were in Ministry and Administration, became Chaplains of various kinds, wrote volumes of reflections, journals and studies, were involved in alcoholic and drug research and counselled families.

More than one family adopted a child from the land which God had shown them. The United Church is a Family.

I entitled this Sermon, "Pray at all times in the Spirit" because of the scripture passages today brought to us by the Lectionary readings, and because it was a constant theme for us who were privileged to be Commissioners to General Council.

I was in Victoria from Tuesday, August 16th to Thursday August 25th staying two to a room in the University of Victoria residence. We were on the run from 7 am every morning till 10 every night, with time in between only for a sandwich and a relaxing moment. By getting up at 5 am I found time to write 3 or 4 notes every day to help a group of ten people who were sending moment-by-moment reflections to a lot of people back home. I am surprised to find that I came away from that grueling experience with more energy than I went into it.

Thank you for your support of me as I joined the group of 380 Commissioners which represented our Church. The few times I made my way to the microphone I was to say: "Moderator, Gordon Laird of British Columbia Conference." That was a first for me.

The United Church is a family. Next to me was sitting the Secretary of the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education for Canada. When I found the empty common room on our floor at 5:30 am each morning I sat alone typing my impressions. At 6:30 almost every morning I was joined by the Secretary of the Division of Finance who wanted to catch up on the latest sports scores, particularly those of the Toronto teams.

Our brief chat became a morning ritual for both of us. One day we could not have it because the CBC cameramen were setting

up to interview for the Journal Marion Best of B. C. Conference, who shepherded the Sessional Committee #8 - Marion breezed into the room, said, "Hello, Gordon, are you going to stay for the interview?" Looking as if she was just back from a 3 week vacation somewhere, Marion had actually been doing interviews until 2:30 that morning and had grabbed 3 hours sleep. The United Church is a family.

Undoubtedly the highlight for me was the election of the Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee as our Moderator. I voted for him through all the six ballots which narrowed the seven candidates down to one.

Tell stories of who he is and how he came into the United Church.

Try to assess the importance of his election for:

"Ethnic" congregations - the Vancouver Korean Choir
Native people

Toronto Conference

Try to assess the challenge which The Very Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee brings to the United Church and to Canada -

What is the Spirit teaching us by this election?

A time of increasing suspicion and resentment of people of other races joining our Canadian family. A time when columnists may openly champion the cause of racial purity and make racist slurs and find that this results in a following of people whose very fears have been named.

Dr. Lee referred often to things which happened to him which he did not understand at the time, but which were in the intention of God. He mentioned his own baptism. And certainly his election as Moderator.

He feels that God is doing a great unifying work in the world. God wants us to be one, wants the whole world to be one, wants

people of all races and cultures to be one. This is not the work of humankind, our hearts lead most of us in the opposite direction - but of God [Jessie Jackson].

That is what is at the heart of Holy Communion. Holy in Common

Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

"Go out into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

I Kings 2:1-4, 10-12

When David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may establish his word which he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.'

Then David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Ephesians 6: 10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefor, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I

am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) And the Pharisee and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

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You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men."

And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man, are what defile him"

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, covering, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 1988 10:00 am

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ORGAN PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

"PRAYER OF APPROACH● (Unison)

HYMN Red 50 "Holy Holy Holy"

Please remain standing

"PRAYER OF CONFESSION● (Unison)

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

First lesson: I Kings 2:1-4, 10-12

PSALM 121 (Responsively)

"CHOIR:●

Second lesson: Ephesians 6: 10-20

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

HYMN: Red 233 "O Spirit of the Living God"

"SERMON:● Pray at all times in the Spirit

HYMN: Green 102 "In Loving Partnership"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

"THE OFFERING AND DEDICATION●

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

HYMN Red 146 "The Church's One Foundation"

THE COMMISSIONING

THE BENEDICTION AND CHORAL AMEN
ORGAN POSTLUDE

Announcements - August 28, 1988

There is a copy of The 4-page Report in the Church Office for every Council Member. Everyone else in Ellesmere congregation is eligible to receive a copy from the Church office. Please ask Anna for your copy.

Please remember these points:

1. The 130 Page Report is now HISTORY! This is very good news for a number of people for whom that report was the problem.

It was by action on the last day of debate - Wednesday - that that decision was made. It replaced a decision that The Report would further be made available in congregations. So those many congregations who wrote petitions asking for the defeating of the whole report - you were LISTENED TO. You were HEARD.

2. Now all the attention is properly placed on a 4 page report - very readable - but it is essential to get that into the hands of people right away. The newspaper reports - on the whole accurate - are not sufficient to understand the outcome of this issue. [We made the same kind of arrangements to get the report to all the congregations which we did when The Report came out. One minister picked up three copies and dropped two off on his way. I delivered two copies. One of our ministers took it off the AGORA local bulletin board and printed it up for his congregation and for others.]

- 3.

I make this plea: Please don't make an important life decision on the basis of a three day old newspaper headline which was composed on the actions of Tuesday! Take time to PRAYERFULLY and CAREFULLY read the final report - in a quiet place, then discuss it with a few friends, and with your Minister.

- 4.

The final 4 page report may not satisfy a number of people. But I think when you read it you will grant that a number of the concerns in congregational petitions WERE addressed: The importance of Christian Marriage, a valid place for those who live a single life without sexual relationships with others, the need to concentrate on Bible Study.

5.

One of my colleagues whose congregation is Very Upset about this topic listened closely when I told him about the election of The Very Rev. Dr. Sang Chul Lee as Moderator and how it seemed very much Right to the Holy Spirit and Right to the Church to make this choice. He was thirsty for Good News and was comforted by that information.

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The secretary of a congregation in our area where we have our Lectionary Group each Tuesday morning was very upset a few months ago. She did not like The Report and could see no reason at all why the Church would consider the idea of Homosexuality and Ordination. Pat phoned me Friday morning and left this message with my secretary - "I want you to know, Gordon, that I have read the new Report and can agree with every word!"

Pat wanted me to have that gracious message so that it would encourage me in the work I have yet to do as a Commissioner.

with love and thankfulness, Gordon

Being at this General Council - my first - was one of the highlight experiences of my life.

Richard, thank you, Brother, for your note. dgl