

A FOND FAREWELL (1 TIMOTHY 2:3-7) 12/28/14  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, KS PASTOR LEE HENDON

IN 1967 I HAD A CALL FROM GOD TO GO INTO THE MINISTRY. I SAID, “**NO.**” GOD CONTINUED CALLING ME FOR 9 MONTHS UNTIL I FINALLY SAID, “**YES.**” MY NO WAS STRONGER THAN MY YES, BUT GOD WENT WITH THE YES & HERE I STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY. I SAID NO TO GOD BECAUSE I KNEW SOMETHING (I SUPPOSED GOD DID NOT KNOW) - THAT I WAS A REALLY FLAWED KID OF 19. I HAD UNPREACHERLY THOUGHTS - FREQUENTLY. STILL SOMETIMES DO. I WAS BADLY BROKEN & VERY INSECURE. GOD COULD NOT USE A PERSON LIKE ME IN MINISTRY - GOD PERSISTED THAT I WAS JUST THE KIND OF GUY HE WANTED TO USE - GOD DOES NOT EVER GIVE UP - I GAVE IN. WHAT NEXT? THEN THE ADVENTURE OF 48 YEARS BEGAN. I DID THE MATH:  $19 + 48 = 67$ . AS I LOOK BACK I CAN SEE HOW THE HAND OF GOD HAS GUIDED & EMPOWERED ME IN WONDERFUL & MAJESTIC WAYS.

BEING VERY MUCH AWARE OF HOW FLAWED I WAS AT 19 - COLLEGE & SEMINARY FURTHER CONVINCED ME OF IT - BEING VERY MUCH AWARE OF HOW FLAWED I HAVE CONTINUED TO BE - I MADE SOME VERY IMPORTANT DECISIONS EARLY IN MY MINISTRY.

FIRST, **I** WOULD NOT BE - **MY EXAMPLE WOULD NOT BE** - A FOCUS OF MY MINISTRY. I WAS NOT THEN NOR NEVER HAVE BEEN THE PREACHERLY TYPE - (ROY MERCER SAID TO ME LAST SUNDAY THAT HE DID NOT RECOGNIZE ME AS ONE - A PREACHER - WHEN I STEPPED OFF THE PLANE IN 2001 - WHICH WAS A COMPLIMENT TO ME) - I AM NOT VERY PRIM & PROPER - NOT THE SAINTLY TYPE - PIETY DOES NOT SUIT ME - KINDA NON-RELIGIOUS & EARTHLY IS MORE LIKE ME. THE TITLE **REVEREND** HAS ALWAYS BEEN UNCOM-FORTABLE TO ME BECAUSE I KNEW I WAS NOT SUCH. MY MESSAGE WOULD NOT BE ABOUT **ME** - I WOULD NEED TO GET MYSELF OUT OF THE WAY. EVEN NOW, I CONTINUE TO BE A POOR EXAMPLE BUT GOD HAS INSISTED ON CONTINUING TO USE ME - GO FIGURE IT!

MY FOCUS FOR MINISTRY **WOULD NOT BE ON THE CHURCH** - BECAUSE HOPEFULLY YOU HAVE LOOKED IN THE MIRROR LATELY - MANY CHURCH MEMBERS ARE A LOT HUMAN LIKE ME. DIFFERENT FLAWS PERHAPS BUT FLAWED NONE THE LESS. I GET REALLY BOGGED DOWN IN LIFE BY THE JUDGMENTAL & CONDEMNING ATTITUDES OF MANY CHURCH GOERS. SO, LEE, DON'T FOCUS ON THAT!

MY FOCUS FOR MINISTRY WOULD BE ON **JESUS**. PURE & SIMPLE, **JESUS**. I DO NOT LIKE TO CALL HIM LORD, MESSIAH, CHRIST, ETC. - TO ME HE IS JESUS - **MY PERSONAL FRIEND**. I HAVE ALWAYS HAD A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY I MAJORED ON THE GOSPELS IN COLLEGE & SEMINARY. I CANNOT GET ENOUGH OF JESUS. WHEN WE PUT JESUS FRONT & CENTER ALL OUR FLAWS & IMPERFECTIONS BECOME VERY MUCH **BESIDE THE POINT** - KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS & SEEK TO BECOME MORE LIKE HIM - DOES NOT MATTER OUR SUCCESSES IN DOING SO EITHER. JESUS KEEPS ME REFRESHED & REFUELED AS HE DISMISSES MY SINS & KEEPS PUSHING ME FORWARD IN MINISTRY. IT'S LIKE HE SAYS TO ME, “YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW

ABOUT YOUR SINS BUT THAT IS WHY I DIED FOR YOU ON THE CROSS - NOW GET ON BEING *YOU* - I HAVE CALLED YOU..." YOU HAVE PROBABLY NOTICED THAT THE MAJORITY OF MY SERMONS HAVE BEEN FROM THE GOSPELS? I KNOW THERE IS MUCH MORE TO THE BIBLE THAN THOSE FOUR BOOKS BUT JESUS WAS, IS, WILL BE MY FOCUS FOR LIFE & MINISTRY. BEING A CHRISTIAN IS ALL ABOUT JESUS & THAT'S THAT - FOR ME.

SECONDLY, MY MINISTRY WOULD FOCUS ON THE BIBLE. I HAVE LITTLE TRUTH IN MYSELF WHILE THE BIBLE IS OVER-FLOWING WITH THE WORD & TRUTH OF GOD. **STICK TO THE BOOK!** SO I HAVE TRIED TO EMPHASIZE BIBLE STUDY - BIBLE PREACHING. I WAS STRONGLY ATTRACTED TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) BECAUSE HISTORICALLY WE HAVE CHAMPIONED **THE BIBLE AS OUR RULE & GUIDE**. WE STARTED OUT AS A MOVEMENT TO RESTORE THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH - THOUGH WE HAVE SADLY LOST THAT FOCUS - ME THINKS. BIBLE STUDY IS IMPERATIVE FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH & MATURITY. I HAVE LEARNED IT TO BE IMPORTANT TO EMPTY MYSELF OF MYSELF AS I STUDIED SCRIPTURE SO THE WORD COULD HAVE ITS WAY WITH ME. A FAVORITE QUEST OF MINE IS TO **CRAWL INTO THE PASSAGE** - PUT IT ON & ALLOW IT TO LIVE IN ME. I AM AMAZED THAT EACH TIME I STUDY THE BIBLE I DISCOVER OR AM ENCOUNTERED BY NEW FACETS OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDINGS & INSIGHTS. UNTIL I HAVE AN "AHA" IN MY STUDY OF THE BIBLE I WILL NOT LET IT GO. OUR OPINIONS REALLY COUNT FOR SO LITTLE - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE MATTER - THAT HAS BEEN MY QUEST & WILL CONTINUE TO BE.

THIRD, MY MINISTRY WOULD FOCUS ON LOVE - NOT THE CHEAP KIND OF LOVE IN THE MARKETPLACES OF LIFE BUT UNCONDITIONAL LOVE & ACCEPTANCE. THE BIBLE CALLS IT **AGAPE** LOVE - THE LOVE THAT GOD & JESUS HAS FOR US. WE SO DESPERATELY DESIRE IT FROM GOD & JESUS - WE RECEIVE IT FULLY - THAT IS THE KIND OF AGAPE LOVE WE ARE TO SHARE IN OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER & WITH THE WORLD. MAKE GOD HAPPY - JUST KEEP LOVING ONE ANOTHER NOW & FOR ALWAYS - THERE CAN NEVER BE ENOUGH LOVING - WHICH GIVES OPENNESS & HONESTY TO THE FELLOWSHIP THAT WE SHARE. THAT KIND OF LOVING CAUSES ME OR GIVES ME PERMISSION TO BE REAL - NOT FAKE & PHONY. WHICH HAS IN TURN GOTTEN ME INTO TROUBLE THROUGHOUT MY MINISTRY. COUNTERFEIT LOVING SEEMS TO BE THE CURRENCY OF THE MARKET PLACE & IN MANY PEOPLE'S POCKET BOOKS OF LIFE. AGAPE LOVE COMES FROM JESUS AS THE WAY - THE TRUTH - THE LIFE. THERE JUST CANNOT BE TOO MUCH AGAPE LOVE IN OUR LIVES - NEVER! UNCONDITIONAL LOVE & ACCEPTANCE!

THE CROWNING JEWEL OF MY MINISTRY HAS BEEN THE 13 YEARS OF MINISTRY I HAVE SHARED WITH FCC, ATCHISON. I HAVE BEEN BLESSED THAT YOU HAVE PUT UP WITH ME THAT LONG! YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH ABOUT LIFE & LOVING & ABOUT BEING A MINISTER. ONE OF MY FLAWS IS THAT I AM INCLINED TO TAKE MYSELF TOO SERIOUSLY - WHICH MEANS I AM TO GET BACK TO MY AFOREMENTIONED FOCUSES FOR MINISTRY - JESUS - THE BIBLE - LOVE. I FEEL A LOT OF SATISFACTION FROM YOUR ENDURANCE & ENCOURAGEMENT OF OUR TIME TOGETHER. IT HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN APPLE PIE & ROSES - BUT

THEN AGAIN - THERE HAVE BEEN OPPORTUNITIES TO BE **REAL** WITH EACH OTHER. I HAVE COME TO TRULY LOVE YOU AS JESUS LOVES ME - FLAWS & ALL. IF & WHEN WE PRETEND TO DO OTHERWISE THEN THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US.

IT IS TIME FOR ME TO **RETIRE** - FOR MY SAKE & FOR YOURS.

I HAVE LOST MY EDGE IN MINISTRY & YOU ARE IN NEED OF NEW & SHARPER VISIONS FOR MINISTRY - TO RESHAPE & REDIRECT YOUR FUTURE TOGETHER AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD. AS I BRING MY MINISTRY TO A CLOSE HERE I DO SO WITH A GREAT DEAL OF SATISFACTION. WE HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH & LOVE TOGETHER. THERE IS YET MUCH TO BE DONE IN ATCHISON - JESUS CAN & MUST BE TRUSTED WITH THE OUTCOME FOR OUR LIVING & OUR DYING. GOD'S GRACE & LOVE FOR EACH OF US IS ALL THAT REALLY MATTERS - **IT IS ENOUGH** - NOW & FOR ALWAYS. FCC WAS A GOOD & STRONG CHURCH BEFORE I CAME - FCC WAS A GOOD & STRONG CHURCH WHILE I HAVE BEEN HERE - FCC WILL CONTINUE TO BE A GOOD & STRONG CHURCH INTO THE FUTURE. THANK YOU - THANK YOU - THANK YOU - FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE BEEN YOUR SENIOR PASTOR.