

Whatever Happens, Walk Worthy”
Opening of School Convention
September 3, 1998, 10:20 a.m.
Whatever Happens, Live in Peace
Ephesians 4:3

INTRODUCTION:

- A. I get many letters from students, present and former, and parents of students.
 - 1. all very interesting
 - 2. all very important
 - a. one letter recently received concluded that "college life at MVNC was the best four years of her life."
 - b. another letter received expressed extreme frustration.
- B. Often, after reading letters like these or receiving phone calls, I ask myself the question, "Is it possible - really possible - to live in peace at MVNC or other diverse Christian communities in the midst of such conflicting expectations?
The "peace" that is referred to in Eph. 4:3. "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He is speaking to Christians. He is talking about living together in Christian community.
- C. This broad concern of living together as Christians in the midst of diversity and conflicting expectations has captured my attention since 1978 when I moved to Europe to teach at the European Nazarene Bible College.
 - 1. In that rather small theological institution, students came from the northern European counties of Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, and also

from the southern countries of Portugal, Spain, and Italy. Very different cultures!

2. I began rather soon to ask the question, "How can we live together as Christians in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?"
- D. The pursuit of this question continued in Asia where I served with students from highly developed countries economically (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand), and students from underdeveloped countries economically or Third World countries (India, Indonesia, Philippines).
- E. It did not take me very long at MVNC in 1989 to discover the rich diversity and conflicting expectations associated with this campus.
1. And, soon, I began to ask the question again...
 2. "How can we live together on this campus in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?"
 - a. We ought to expect (even affirm) differences of opinions and ideas within a Christian community. After all, we strongly believe that every person is uniquely created in God's image and gifted by His spirit.
 - 1) MVNC is sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene, a holiness denomination within the early Methodist tradition, yet aggressively pursues students from other denominations - over thirty different denominations on campus.

- 2) And even if all of the students from the sponsoring denomination and the thirty-plus other denominations are Christians, there are genuine differences about the meaning and lifestyle of our Christian faith.
- b. Yet, not all students on campus profess faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 1) Some who do not, have grown up in the church, and for various reasons have rejected the claims of the gospel, rebelled or turned their back on Christianity.
 - 2) Still others are being exposed significantly to the Christian beliefs and lifestyles for the first time. Christian faith and local church involvement are really "new" for these students.
 - c. To complicate the issue even more, we are seeking to attract students from off our region (24 states represented last year); to bring international students to our campus; and are looking at better ways to recruit and maintain minority and immigrant students.
- F. We ought to expect conflicting expectations, with such diversity, differences of opinion, conflict of ideas, degrees of maturity/immaturity, varieties of traditions, and the uniqueness of cultures and numerous expressions of subcultures on campus.
- G. Back to my question. Is it possible to live together in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?

- H. My answer is a resounding **YES!** Yes, it is possible. It is very definitely possible if we reaffirm three fundamental convictions:
- I. We need to reaffirm, often, who we are as a higher education institution.
- A. We are a Christian community - a community of faith.
- B. The MVNC mission challenges us...
1. to provide rigorous academic programs for students that prepare them for careers and/or graduate studies;
 2. and to promote a distinctively Christian lifestyle and supportive environment where students can achieve their highest potential, academically, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.
- C. MVNC faculty and staff have heard me repeatedly speak of some of the implications of our identity as a Christian community of faith:
- #1. Every student can make a difference for Christ, regardless of her/his vocational choice
- a. high/low academics
 - b. from rich/poor family
 - c. from urban/rural cities;
- "One person can make a difference in this world. You are that person."
- #2. Every student should come to the point of viewing herself/himself as a world Christian with a global vision.
- "Red, yellow, black, white - all are precious in His sight." The world, the whole world is the arena of God's activity.

- #3. Every student, following graduation, can live a holy life to the glory or praise to God, regardless of where his or her vocational assignment takes him/her...

...to Mount Vernon or Manila

...to Columbus or Calcutta

...to Fredericktown or Frankfort

What we are, we are becoming. This means that we must now cultivate and develop a lifestyle of praise, worship, and thanksgiving.

These three critical differences are the distinctive differences of an MVNC education.

- D. Again, "How can we at MVNC, in the midst of such diversity, live together as Christians in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?"

First of all, by reaffirming, often, who we are...we are a Christian community of faith.

- II. Secondly, we need to reaffirm often why we exist as a Christian community!
- A. We exist to communicate and nurture the life of faith in the context of a quality liberal arts educational setting.
- B. I believe a Christian college is the church at work in higher education
1. If this is true, then we should expect, and even desire, to see an increasing number of unbelievers.

2. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
 - a. Non-Christians in our institution provide an opportunity for Christian witness and proclamation of the Christian faith.
 - b. The Christian alternative lifestyle to the unbelievers lifestyle can take place through example, testimony, attitudes, chapel, classrooms, or informal discussions.
 3. But the task is not only to communicate the faith, our responsibility is the nurture the life of faith in every student regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey.
 - a. courses are taught from a Christian perspective;
 - b. Bible studies are formed for small groups to explore the Bible;
 - c. contemporary issues are addressed in forums from a Christian perspective;
 - d. chapel services are prepared to inspire students to worship and grow in their faith.
- C. We must never forget why we exist as a Christian community - to communicate and nurture the life of faith in the context of a quality higher educational institution.
- III. Finally, in order to live together redemptively, we need to reaffirm often how we are to live in a community of faith!

- A. We are to live as growing or maturing Christians in faith. We have not arrived. We sometimes make mistakes, error in judgments, as we need to ask for much forgiveness. But we seek to live as growing or maturing Christians in our faith.
- B. Listen again carefully to the key words of Ephesians 4:2—*humility, gentleness, patience, supportiveness (or caregiving)*. These are ways we are to live together in peace.
1. Humility – a word difficult to define but necessary if the leader is to be effective.
 2. Proverbs 15:22: *Before honor is humility.*
- C. In biblical perspective, humility is a prerequisite to the things we seek most in our lives.
1. Listen to these seven ways—very common ways—to spot a humble spirit.
 - a. Humility does not demand its own way.
 - b. Humility exudes an attitude of service (service is doing mundane things that help others).
 - c. Humility does not seek attention or credit.
 - d. Humility forgives when offended, but is hard to offend.
 - e. Humility does not criticize others.
 - f. Humility produces a teachable spirit.

- E. Remember the beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:9, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*
- Blessed are they who extend the shalom (or peace) within themselves to others, so that they, too, experience God's shalom.
 - Blessed are these individuals, these peacemakers, peace-givers, for they will be called children of God.
 - The Hebrew word "shalom" (translated peace) points to the internal, horizontal, and vertical dimensions of peace;
 - To have "shalom" is to be in right relationship with oneself, one's neighbor, and one's God.
 - We are urged to live in this peace (shalom) in all our relationships and to bring this dimension of peace to all our relationships.
- F. I want to be that kind of person, don't you?
- Don't you think people around us yearn to see some "peace-giving" or "shalom-giving" going on?
 - In our homes, classrooms, community?
 - In our dorms, apartments, churches?
- G. Whatever happens...in our relationships around us, as we seek to weak worthy of our calling—this is how we should respond to them—a proactive, distinctively-Christian response;
- not a response that matches their (often) non-Christian approach to you.

CONCLUSION

1. The key question again: How can we live together as a Christian community in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?

By:

- a. Reaffirming often who we are as an institution - a Christian community of faith.
 - b. Reaffirming often why we exist as a Christian community - to communicate and nurture the life of faith.
 - c. Reaffirming often how we are to live as Christians in this community of faith - as growing Christians in faith.
2. And by so doing, we embrace Ephesians 4:3, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Shalom!)
 3. By so doing we work out, together, in the midst of the diversity and conflicting expectations, our faith commitment that we can live together as a Christian community of faith.
 3. "Lord, make me an instrument of Your "shalom"—of Your peace. Dr. Liles will close the service by singing this Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, "Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace...."
 4. If you feel the need to pray this morning about the lack of peace within you, or your failure to live as a "peace-giver" to others around you, I encourage you to come to the altar for a prayer together before you leave the chapel.