

# "A LINE IN THE SAND"

## Faith Promise Message

### Wapakoneta Church of the Nazarene

October 15, 2004

#### Introduction:

1. I am here today to say thank you for your outstanding support to the World Mission Enterprise of the Church of the Nazarene.
  - a. 742 missionaries
  - b. 260 churches
  - c. in 148 world areas
  
2. Anne, Stephen and I returned in April to Manila, The Philippines for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS, for short!) - One of 57 educational institutions of the Church of the Nazarene worldwide - 42 of them outside USA/Canada.
  - a. The Anniversary celebration was held in conjunction with the 2004 Commencement for the graduate school.
  - b. The April 2004 visit for us to Manila was so very special.
  - c. In April 1984 (20 years earlier) I was asked to serve as the Seminary's first full-time president.
    1. Though we had earlier served in Europe at the European Nazarene College we wholeheartedly accepted the invitation to move to Manila.

2. APNTS created to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> graduate theological seminary in the denomination.

- a. To serve as a graduate school for students graduating from the 11 Bible Colleges on the Region.
- b. To stop “brain drain”
- c. To “train Asians in Asia.” Gospel can be communicated in non-Christian countries by people from within the countries...
- d. To develop national leaders to serve in
  - i. Local churches,
  - ii. On districts,
  - iii. At regional schools,
  - iv. As missionaries.

3. The return visit in April brought back so many memories. From the AP region, alumni returned to campus. They are now serving throughout the region as district superintendents, school teachers & administrators, and missionaries. Great! Strong national leadership!!

2. The scriptural text of the Seminary is I Timothy 2:5, "*There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ.*"

- a. The April trip back to Manila not only reminded me of the scriptural text of the seminary, but of a defining moment in my life.
- b. Trips to two Asian countries and India during one year while serving as the APNTS President brought me face to face with the profound implications of

this passage, and forces me to grapple with the question: “What do I really believe?”

3. In June 1987, Anne, Stephen, and I spent a few days in Bangkok, Thailand. Although our nights were spent at the Alliance Church Guest House, the days were filled with visiting theological institutions and Buddhist temples. Never had we visited a country so predominantly Buddhist in orientation. Buddhist temples in Bangkok are as common as Christian churches in many North American countries. We saw more idols to Buddha than I ever dreamed possible. A tour guide evangelistically proclaimed to us the merits of Buddhism.

I returned to APNTS with a burning question within me. Do I really believe that there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ?

- a. Several weeks later, I was in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to speak at the Commencement exercises of the Indonesian Nazarene Bible College, and at the Indonesian pastors and wives retreat following the commencement service. Very early in the morning on my first day in Indonesia, I heard the eerie sounds coming from the Muslim mosques. Rather abruptly, I was reminded of the fact that approximately 85 percent of the approximately 200 million people in Indonesia are Muslims. Evidence of this vivid truth was found throughout the country and at all levels of government.

Again, I returned to my office on the APNTS campus with the searching question pounding deep within me. Do I really believe that "there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person of Christ Jesus?"

- b. In November 1987, I traveled to India to visit our educational institutions in the country as a member of the steering committee of the quadrennial Education Commission of the Church of the Nazarene.

Immediately, I was thrust into a culture where approximately 83 percent of the approximate 900 million Indians espouse the Hindu philosophy of life. I listened to the people and watched them in the exercise of their religious faith.

4. Again, I returned to campus shaken by the experiences in India. On my knees, I asked myself the question for the third time. Do I really **believe** (not just with my head, but with my heart) that "there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person Christ Jesus?"

- a. Is Christianity a "cultural" religious system for westerners alongside several world religions, all of which lead to a god, or is Christianity and its message the **only** means by which sinful people can be reconciled to a holy God? Is Jesus one of many prophets, or is He the only way, truth, and life? Is Jesus the Lord of **all**, or one among **many**?

- b. If my answer was no, then
  - 1) the life of holiness was unnecessary and
  - 2) the entire rationale and motivation for our evangelism mandate and for the world mission enterprise collapses.
- c. If my answer was yes, I must come to grips with the call to Christian holiness in my life. On my knees, I reaffirmed my convictional belief that "Jesus is Lord."
- d. To respond positively to this question **meant** that all of my thoughts, behavior, words and actions must be judged by the conviction that "there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man - the person Christ Jesus." The call to holiness is bedded in this conviction. My life must be "wholly" consumed with a passion to communicate convictionally this truth.

I have come to see that all Christians must wrestle with these fundamental questions:

- a. Do we really believe that there is only one God and one mediator between God and man - the person - Christ Jesus?
- b. If so, what are the life implications of this faith conviction for us?

I want to suggest three implications:

- 1. We must take seriously the distinctives of **our Christian faith**. What do we really believe about God? Man? Sin? Salvation? Do we know the Articles of Faith for the Christian? Have we memorized the Apostles Creed? Are we prepared to give

an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have? (I Peter 3:15)

- a. We must become familiar with key biblical passages which outline our faith convictions such as Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-41; Peter and John's response before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4; Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7; and Paul's speech before King Agrippa in Acts 26!
  - b. What is the basis for a "Christ-centered" faith? In increasing ways, if we believe, really believe, we must come to affirm and understand the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.
2. We must increasingly become world Christians and know the distinctives of the various national religions and contemporary cults. What do we know about Islam? Buddhism? Shintoism?
- We must know the distinctives of these "religions" and cults in order to defend Christianity when confronted with these challenges from national religions. We must be prepared to articulate our faith and challenge the foundations and assumptions of those philosophies which contradict Christian principles.
- a. Are you aware that experts tell us that Islam is the nations fastest growing religion?
3. Finally, if we really believe that "there is only one God..." then we must find specific ways to translate this belief into action. Our thoughts, values, priorities, attitudes, and behavior must be shaped by this conviction.
- a. This is why Work and Witness trips and Faith Promise opportunities are so important.

- a. MVNU students
  - b. Local church members
  - c. Their vision of the world is enlarged. They come to see that the world – the whole world – is the arena of God’s concern.
- b. These and other expressions give us tangible ways of stepping out...and affirming our faith...in ways that put our testimony on the line and in ways that give concrete expression to our belief. You may not be able to go to a world mission assignment, but you can support those who do!

There are specific ways by which you and I can draw a line in the sand and say, "*Yes, I believe...therefore, I will do this...and not this.*"

- c. There are approximately 700 million Hindus and 300 Muslims in Asia, in addition to the one billion Chinese who espouse Confucianism and Taoism. In fact, approximately one-half of the world population lives in Asia and the sub-continent of India, and only approximately three percent of this vast number professes Christianity.
- d. Christians globally must confront these staggering truths with a united strategy to avoid "cheap grace;" to "give up small ambitions" in order to proclaim that Jesus is Lord - the only mediator between God and man.

## CONCLUSION

1. Christians in Asia and the subcontinent of India taught me by word and deed that the simplicity of holiness is wrapped up in the chorus I heard them sing often,

*I'll say yes, Lord, yes, to Your will and to Your way.*

*I'll say yes, Lord, yes, I will trust You and obey.*

*When Your Spirit speaks to me,*

*With my whole heart I'll agree,*

*And my answer will be yes, Lord, yes.*

2. To make this commitment demands a purity of heart that wills only one thing. A commitment to and lifestyle of holiness is the one foundation on which a life can be built that seeks to "go where You want me to go, dear God, over mountain, on land, or sea, I'll say what You want me to say, dear Lord, I'll be what You want me to be."

In Manila or Mount Vernon,

In Columbus or Calcutta,

In Nashville or Nairobi,

To the rich or to the poor,

In the cities or in the countryside,

At home or far away.

3. Increasingly, I want this to be my epitath - if by radical faith, I convictionally believe - really believe - that *there is only one God, and one mediator between God and man, the person Jesus Christ...*
  - a. And this is my deeply felt prayer for each one of you,
4. Churchill is quoted as saying, "You make a living by what you get, you make a life by what you give."
  - a. "Support" - Stephen /Friend/ APNTS

- b. Story: Stephen re: building pledge and faith promise. Paid before he left for two years of Arabic language study in Jordan.
5. I ask you to “draw a line in the sand” -
- a. say in deed as well as in word, “yes, I believe . . .”
  - b. make a Faith Promise commitment today for the continuation of the World Missions program of the Church of the Nazarene in over 145 countries around the world.

A Faith Promise to God to give a significant amount of money on a weekly or monthly basis specifically for the support of mission efforts around the world.

- a. This is important for everyone - adults - teens and children.
  - b. \$5, \$10, \$20 per week, times 52 weeks, will make a difference.
1. Faith Promise - an opportunity to “draw a line in the sand and say, “yes, I believe” - an opportunity to match our deeds with our words.
6. The chorus to a song that was so used of God when Anne and I received the call to go to European Nazarene College goes like this:
- Freely, freely you have received,  
Freely, freely give.  
Go (and give) in My name and because you believe,  
Others will know that I live.

7. “There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the person, Jesus Christ.”

a. Do we really believe . . .

b. Yes, we really believe and are ready to draw a line in the sand, to express in deed as well as in word, our belief that “There is only one God and one mediator between God and man, the person, Jesus Christ.”

And I’m ready and willing to come to grips with the implications of this faith commitment -- even today in this Faith Promise service.

Amen.