

“DO I REALLY BELIEVE ... ?”

1 Timothy 2:5

Chapel Service

September 13, 2006

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As most of know, I am beginning my 18th and last year as president of Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

Knowing this chapel service will be one of the last opportunities I have to speak to you, I feel compelled to return to a theme I pursued in one of my early sermons to students soon after I arrived in 1989 on campus.

Therefore, I want to ask the student body, again, with passion and compassion, “What do you really believe?” “What do I really believe?” I cannot think of a more important or crucial question to ask a campus community in 1989 or in 2006.

1. Anne, Stephen and I were working at the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) in Manila, Philippines when we were asked to accept my present assignment at MVNU. Two years ago, we returned to Manila for the 20th Anniversary, one of 53 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 visit for us to Manila was so very special.
 - c. In April 1984 (approximately 20 years earlier) I was asked to serve as the Seminary’s first full-time president. APNTS was created to serve the 2nd graduate theological seminary in the Church of the Nazarene.
 - 1) We had earlier served at the European Nazarene College, therefore, we gladly accepted the invitation to move to Manila.
 - 2) Anne, Stephen and I enjoyed so much our years in Manila. We learned so much from Asian students, faculty and friends.
 - 3) By the way, Dr. John Nielson was elected president of APNTS in 1990 and Janice and Dr. John served twelve outstanding years in Manila.
 - 4) They are now members of the MVNU faculty. What a gifted and dedicated couple.
2. The return visit to APNTS brought back so many memories for our family. 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!

I. A Defining Moment

- A. The trip back to Manila not only reminded me of the scriptural text of the seminary, but of a defining moment in my life. The scriptural text of the Seminary in Manila

is 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the person Jesus Christ."

B. Trips to two Asian countries and to the subcontinent of India during one year while I was serving as the APNTS President brought me face to face with the profound implications of this passage, and forced me to grapple with the question: "What do I really believe?"

1. 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 men, the person Jesus Christ?

2. Several weeks later, I was in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to speak at the Commencement exercises of the Indonesian Nazarene Bible College, and to the Indonesian pastors and wives at a retreat following the commencement service. Very early in the morning on my first day in Indonesia, I heard the distinct sounds coming from the Muslim mosques. Rather abruptly, I was reminded of the fact that approximately 80 percent of the approximately 245 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 men, the person, Christ Jesus?"

3. 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 80 percent of the over 1 billion 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 men - the person Jesus Christ?"

- 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 is 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 and the Christian commission to "go into all the world and make disciples" On my knees, I reaffirmed my convictional belief that "Jesus is Lord of creation and He is Lord of my life."
 - 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 men, the person Jesus Christ." The call to holiness is embedded in this conviction. My life must be "wholly" consumed with a passion to communicate convictionally this truth at home and around the world.
5. 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 men - the person - Jesus Christ ?
 - b. If so, what are the life implications of this faith conviction for us?
 6. On my knees, three life implications burned within me!

II. Three Life Implications

A. *Implication #1:* We must take seriously the distinctives of our Christian faith. What do we really believe about God? Humankind? 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).

1. We must become familiar with key biblical passages which outline our faith convictions such as Peter's sermon in Acts 2; 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!

2. What is the basis for a "Christ-centered" faith and a "Christ-centered" education? In increasing ways, if we believe, really believe, we must come to affirm and understand the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.
3. MVNU unapologetically requires courses to be taken by our students on the "History and Faith of the Biblical Communities," and "Christian Beliefs." The freshmen course, "Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts Experience" is designed to provide an elementary rationale as to why we are passionate about Christian higher education, as well as to assist students in adjusting to life and study on a collegiate campus.
4. MVNU faculty, staff and administration seeks to model to students a commitment to local church involvement through systematic attendance in worship services, Sunday School classes, and small group Bible studies.
5. We must take more seriously the distinctives of the Christian faith ... if we believe, really believe, that there is only one God, and one mediation between God and men, the person, Jesus Christ.

B. *Implication #2:* We must increasingly become global Christians and know the distinctives of the various national religions and contemporary cults. What do we know about Islam? Buddhism? Shintoism?

We must increasingly understand the distinctives of these "religions" and cults in order to defend the foundation of our Christian faith when confronted with these challenges from national religions. We must be prepared to discuss our faith with clarity and challenge the foundations and assumptions of those philosophies which contradict Christian theology.

1. Are you aware that Islam is the fastest growing religion in America and around the world?
2. Again, we must become world Christians and know the distinctives of the various national religions and cults.
3. It is not our task to convert persons of other religious faiths to Christianity. However, we are called to give witness to and passionately communicate the Christian faith in a way that individuals with no background to Christianity can relate to and understand our faith.

C. *Implication #3:* Finally, if we really believe that "there is only one God..." then we must find specific ways to translate Christian belief into action. Our thoughts, values, priorities, attitudes, behavior, and worldview must be shaped by this conviction.

1. MVNU academic courses seek to integrate our Christian faith to the learning of the various disciplines. This is why Campus Ministry trips and Off Campus Study programs at home and abroad are so important

- a. for MVNU students, faculty and staff and
 - b. for local church members.
 - c. Through these study and work opportunities, our vision of the world is enlarged. We are reminded that the world – the whole world – is the arena of God’s concern. Red, yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight.
2. Seek out specific ways by which you can draw a line in the sand and say, "Yes, I believe...therefore, I will do this...and not this."
 3. We need small but tangible opportunities to step out ... and affirm our faith...in ways that put our testimony on the line and in ways that give concrete expression to our belief.

A very small step for you could be to make a new commitment to our chapel services each week. Before each service ask the Lord to teach you a new truth about Christian faith and life. Determine to listen intently and participate fully in the service. Seek not to be a distraction to others around you. Believe that God can speak to you and others in chapel services when the music and speakers may not at first appeal to you. Determine to attend every chapel service you can with an open heart to God and others. Be an example as a believer to those in the chapel service who have not yet come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

If you can, participate in off campus study programs or campus ministry trips overseas. You can be intentional about exploring opportunities to work and study overseas as well as in the large urban cities or the very rural communities within the United States.

And, every course on campus can be a means by which you enlarge your worldview and strengthen your faith that “there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the person, Jesus Christ.

4. There are approximately 800 million Hindus and over 300 million 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 profess Christianity.
5. 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 humankind.

6. Churchill is quoted as saying, "You make a living by what you get, you make a life by what you give." To what are you giving yourself? To what am I giving myself?

CONCLUSION

1. Christians in Asia and the subcontinent of India taught me by word and deed that the simplicity of holiness and the mandate to "go ... and make disciples ..." is wrapped up in the chorus I heard Filipinos 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, as the hymn so eloquently states, "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 epitaph. It must be, if by radical faith I convictionally believe - really believe - that *there is only one God, and one mediator between God and men, the person Jesus Christ...*
 - And my deeply felt prayer for each one of you is that you will "Draw a line in the sand" and, by God's grace, emphatically and convictionally affirm that, "yes, I believe!"
4. The chorus to a song that was so used of God when Anne and I received the call in late 1977 to go to European Nazarene College goes like this:

Freely, freely you have received,
Freely, freely give.
Go in My name and because you believe,
Others will know that I live.
5. Yes, I really believe and I am ready to draw a line in the sand, and go across campus or around the world with a convictional and foundational belief that "there is only one God and one mediator between God and men, the person, Jesus Christ."

- Will you join me in affirming that we are ready and willing, in word and deed, to come to grips with the implications of this faith commitment even as we study as a student and work as faculty or staff on the campus of Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

May it be so, Lord, for every person in this chapel service. Amen.

Please stand and sing with me the chorus I quoted,
“Freely, freely you have received ...”