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Community Baptist Church
Sunday Evening Service
Andrew Norton Ordination
643 South Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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WELCOME TO THE PRESSURE COOKER 2 Corinthians 11:28-29

A couple of weeks ago I heard Garrison Keillor tell a story on the *Prairie Home Companion* with which I could identify. He told how the pastor at their local Lutheran Church resigned and the conference appointed an interim pastor while they looked for a new one. Keillor described the man as being older, gray haired, and possessing an overall appearance that caused people to think that he should have had more wisdom than he actually exhibited. He said that the man typically preached a homily that lasted about twelve minutes and generally challenged the people to do better or something along that line. He confessed that quite honestly it was difficult to ascertain exactly what it was the preacher thought the people ought to do. This failure to convey the need might have been due to the fact that the minister spent a large part of the week either playing golf or sitting in his office playing solitaire. Or at least he did until the computer went down.

Keillor concluded that the interim pastor was the kind of minister that the people called a “coaster.” These were fellows who could see retirement coming in the not-too-distant future and decided that they would just spend the rest of their days in ministry coasting. Keillor said, “Unfortunately we have known too many coaster who began their coasting right after their ordination.”

I do not say that I can identify with the story because I fancy myself to be a coaster. But, like Keillor, unfortunately, I have seen some of those myself. That is not the person who Christ the Master has called into His service. When Christ issues a call to the gospel ministry, that calling is recognizable, it involves equipping, and it involves appointment. The appointment part is where some servants

run into difficulty—difficulty that might be so discouraging that the servant decides to become a coaster.

However, virtually all pastors/teachers will find themselves at some point in circumstances that seem very much like a pressure cooker. That’s okay, because it is through the pressure-cooker experiences of life that God gets glory for Himself through the servants work and reactions. Ordination is not the end. It is the beginning. It is the beginning of a life dedicated to heaping up glory for God who calls.

The Calling.

A man becomes a minister because God calls His servant to that end. Or at least that is the way it ought to be. We discover this instruction in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians. *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)*. Each of these responsibilities in the Church Christ is building prove that the man is a recipient of God’s calling. To that end, every true preacher of the gospel has experienced an undeniable calling to that task.

From the inception of the building of the Church, Jesus Christ has *given* four gifts for communicating/teaching His Word. The spiritual gift of apostle is no longer functioning because it was intended only for the founding of the Church. The spiritual gift of prophet is not longer functioning in the sense of the person receiving new revelation from God. However, this gift can be considered functional in the sense of a man declaring the already revealed message of God. The gift of evangelist is a specific spiritual capacity to besiege people’s souls with the preaching and sharing of the gospel. Probably this capacity of service is most evident in church planters and missionaries. Finally the gift of pastor and teacher is the spiritual capacity necessary for the person who the Lord calls to lead and teach the people Christ places in various local churches in the process of “building His Church.”

Christ “gave” this capacity to serve in the form of individuals in eternity. That requires that God does not decide after watching a man if maybe, could be, he might work out as a pastor/teacher. Rather, in eternity, God determined that Andrew Norton would be

one of those “gifts” Christ gave to the Church for the purpose of teaching and building up individual believers to conform to the headship of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:12-16). There is good evidence in the Bible that some of the servants God called in the past had learned or confessed this reality. For example, Jeremiah the prophet/preacher learned directly from God that “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations*” (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul, who was possibly the greatest evangelist and sometimes pastor in history, confessed of Christ’s work: *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone*” (Galatians 1:15-16).

The called man is a recipient of God’s grace. Pastor/teacher is a special gift, a special capacity for serving Christ. No pastor/teacher acquires the gift through hard work or even a willing heart. This gift is not achieved in seminary. Knowledge about the Bible and ministering the Bible to people is gained in the classroom and through the experiences of life. But the unique calling of God to serve as a pastor/teacher is just that: a unique call. A man knows if he has this calling when he cannot shake it even though there are times he wishes he could.

Not only does the called man know that God has called him and equipped him, but God’s people recognize a God-called servant. Paul indicated this to be the case when he challenged Timothy, *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you* (1 Timothy 4:14). It must be that the servant’s calling will be recognizable. In other words, other people ought to be able to tell if a man carries the gift of pastor/teacher. Solomon gave a wisdom principle that might undergird this idea. He concluded, *A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before the great* (Proverbs 18:16). Primarily this means that a man’s bribe will get him an audience with important people. But, secondarily it means that if Christ has given a particular spiritual gift to a person, others will know it.

Certainly the people of God ought to be able to affirm this reality. But often unregenerate people see evidence of the gift as well. Many times I have engaged in conversation with a total stranger in

places like the airport, on jets, in stores or wherever. Often when I have answered the person’s question about the kind of work I do, they reply, “I could tell that you are a minister.” Or they might say, “I thought you were a preacher.” Sometimes they will even ask before I get a chance to say anything. Why is that? What is there about me that looks preacher-ish? I don’t even wear a clerical collar.

That the gift of pastor/teacher is obvious to others is not to conclude that everyone will be delighted to realize that the servant is gifted as a pastor/teacher. Sometimes people will dislike the man because of what Christ has done. Sometimes professing Christians express jealousy, virtually concluding that such cannot be the case because God doesn’t play favorites like that! Would a genuine Christian actually respond like that? Time will tell.

Since God’s calling in a man’s life is identifiable, it must also be true that the servant’s calling should be confirmed. Paul reminded Pastor Timothy that the leaders of the Church (maybe even a particular local church like the one in Lystra?) affirmed the fact that Timothy did indeed possess the special calling of God. They signaled this affirmation of the gift by laying hands on him in public. That is what we are in process of doing to Andrew. The purpose for the public recognition is to send the servant into the gospel ministry, a condition that might also be known as the pressure cooker.

The Cooker.

I would be presumptuous to think that everyone knows what a pressure cooker is, so let’s think about it for a minute. A pressure cooker is a utensil used to cook food more rapidly than conventional cookers. The food cooks quicker because of the combination of the heat and the steam that builds up under pressure as the liquid in the cooker boils. This combination can also seal pressure-sensitive lids in canning or keep the food moist in cooking. The key concept for us here is “pressure.” Hence the term “pressure cooker” is used to describe a highly stressful situation or assignment. A good illustration of the term used this way is the nickname for the Arkansas Razorback’s football stadium. If the hogs are having a good season, the opponents feel like they entered a pressure cooker when they play there.

Serving in Christ's calling to be pastor/teacher brings a pressure like playing in the opponent's stadium. In a way, he is. The pastor/teacher will sense a real pressure from the people. That is because it is simply people's nature to cause pressure. Some people do not intend to cause pressure, it just happens. Paul described that pressure well when He confessed after talking about shipwrecks, hunger, and destitution experienced in the Lord's work, *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28)*.

There are a few examples of that pressure in Paul's ministry. Too many of the examples seem to come from the people in Corinth. Some of them caused division because they liked one preacher better than another and were too immature to allow a brother to disagree with them. Some of the people acted like unsaved people, such as the man who had sexual relations with his father's wife. Some of them refused to lay down personal issues and took their opponent to court. Most of them could not come to grips with the need to give of their resources to God's work. Many of them were quite sure that God had called them to be in the lime light exercising a speaking gift. And Paul had taught and edified these people! That must have been a discouraging reality! People in other churches also added to Paul's anxiety. People like Euodia and Syntyche members of the church in Philippi who squabbled with each other. Or the people in Thessalonica who did not want to work. Or men in Ephesus who would embrace false teaching.

But Paul is not the only servant of the Lord to experience that stress people caused. There are examples from typical ministry in every age. The pastor/teacher has to work with people who are unsaved but religious. Because they are devoid of the Holy Spirit, correction is seldom accepted and spiritual growth is non-existent. It is not that such people won't change, but that they cannot change. And yet they are very religious and happy with their religion. He has to work with people who are spiritually immature. They will respond in ways that a person who loves Christ and keeps His commands should not respond. Yet, because they are teachable, there is some progress and always hope.

Not only that, but the pastor/teacher must work with people who suffer the effects of sin in their lives. Born again people often carry

much baggage from past sins—habits difficult to break. They will mourn to be free and cause you to mourn with them. These effects include sickness and death. Funerals that involve unsaved relatives are always stressful. These are folks who do not try to cause stress. It just happens.

Sadly the pastor/teacher will sometimes work with people who actually choose to cause pressure. They want to cause anxiety and act to intentionally cause pressure. After Paul admitted that he had to deal with the anxiety of all the churches, he asked a couple of pointed questions. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?" (2 Corinthians 11:28-29)*. Paul understood anxiety (distraction in the heart) that intentional troublemakers caused. For example, he warned Pastor Timothy, *Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds" (2 Timothy 4:14)*.

The idealist thinks the servant of the Lord ought to be able to magically cause everyone to like him. They would suggest that if Paul and Alexander would just sit down over a cup of coffee and discuss their differences everything would be fine. That is not always a possible solution. I don't think it was with Alexander and Paul. In fact, Paul knew there are limitations in such relationships as is obvious from his teaching, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Romans 12:18)*. He understood the relational limitations because he was well aware of Solomon's wisdom. Solomon, being inspired by God, concluded, *Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge (Proverbs 14:7)*. *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion (Proverbs 18:2)*. *A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul (Proverbs 18:7)*. *A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both (Proverbs 27:3)*. *Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him (Proverbs 27:22)*. Solomon and Paul understood the pressure that results when they must wait on God to deal in a person's heart.

John also felt this anxiety as it was caused by a foolish person in the church. *I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority (3 John 1:9)*. Some folks are so out of sorts with God that they will try

to do ministry in a way that could cause anxiety to God's servant. *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry (Philippians 1:15a)*. How does one even preach Christ out of envy—which is sin? There is indeed pressure or anxiety in working with people.

But, compounded with the natural and expected pressure of working with people, the pastor/teacher also learns that there is pressure from God. That comes partly because God has called the servant, and, therefore, the servant must preach. Paul admitted as much when he wrote, *For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16)*.

Also, the pastor/teacher experiences pressure because the Master determines the ministry. He issued the call to serve Him as a vocation. He gave the ability and the desire to carry out the duty. He has already established the message and it does not change. And He determines where, when, and why the servant will minister. Therefore, the servant of the Lord must be under this pressure all the time. It is not out of fear of punishment that we serve. Rather we serve Him who called us with an eye on that moment when we will stand before Him and give an account about how we carried out the stewardship He laid on us.

The Master tells us where to go and what to say, but the servant's message is not always warmly embraced. Paul described the reaction to Bible teaching like this: *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). People do not like to be told that they are an offense to God because of their sin. People do not like to be told they need to submit more to the Bible principles in order to better reflect Christ's character. In short, no one likes to be corrected. But because the Bible sets the perfect standard of holiness, and because all people are infected with the sin principle, we will be corrected every single time we open the Bible. And the correcting has to start with the guy who reads the Bible first in order to tell other people what it says (i.e. the preacher).

Growing Christians appreciate the Word of God, even though we do not enjoy being corrected, because we know that it makes us

more like Christ. Unsaved people hear the same truths from the Bible and it sounds like death to them. Normal people do not savor death-sounding stuff and they react negatively.

Sometimes the work of the pastor/teacher will feel very much like the picture Paul gave of the servant of God being a soldier. He asked who serves as a soldier at his own expense (1 Cor. 9:7). He called Epaphroditus "my fellow soldier" (Phil. 2:25). He told Timothy to share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). He warned Timothy that no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits (2 Tim. 2:4). He also called Archippus "our fellow soldier" (Philemon 2).

Here is a young man whose nation is at war. One day he receives a "greeting" from his Uncle Sam. This greeting invites him to visit the local draft board to sign up. A few months after he signs up, the man gets a message telling him to report to duty. He goes through intensive training. He learns what he needs to know to war a good and successful warfare. He learns to take orders and carry out duties without question. Then one day he finds himself with his fellow soldiers pinned down by enemy fire. He is in the middle of a heated battle like his teachers had tried to explain to him. Just when he is thinking he will not survive, the captain comes to him and says, "Soldier, you are going to have to hold this position at all costs. I am going to get reinforcements and I will be back later." That task sounds impossible to the young man. Will he survive? Will the captain actually return? I believe he might feel anxiety at that point.

And so Christ who calls the pastor/teacher and equips the pastor/teacher and trains the pastor/teacher and appoints the pastor/teacher tells him to hold the position because He will be back. Do we have any motivation to obey?

The Compensation.

Paul fought the fight, kept the faith, and endured all the anxiety that came from all the churches because he knew that God our Master will reward faithful service. The servant will enter the Master's joy. Jesus ended a story about a master's relationship with his servants with this point: *His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.*

Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23). Jesus illustrated this principle well with the parable of the master who gave his servants talents. The Master gave each servant a responsibility according to each servant’s ability. The Master did not say anything about a reward but only implied that each servant needed to be faithful with what he had given them. When he returned, the Master rewarded each servant according to faithfulness.

Our Master is not keeping a score that determines success or failure. Faithfulness is success. Lack of faithfulness is failure. God is not concerned with how big or how well known or how influential our ministry is. God is concerned about what we do with what He gave us. When we stand before our Master to give an account, we will be glad that we were motivated to hear the simple words, “Well done good and faithful servant . . . enter the joy of your Master.”

Furthermore, there is the promise that the Chief Shepherd will reward the under-shepherd. Peter taught, *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4).* The Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ appoints the under-shepherd and entrusts to that shepherd some of His sheep. The under-shepherd often feels compelled to force the flock to get bigger as if his fellow under-shepherds were responsible to reward him with their compliments. The Chief Shepherd is not concerned about the size of the flock since it is He Himself who determines that. The Chief Shepherd is concerned about the health of the flock. A healthy flock is always becoming more and more like their Chief Shepherd.

At the end, the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ will reward faithful under-shepherds with the unfading crown of glory. We cannot be completely sure what this is. The reward is promised to only under-shepherds. Isaiah promised that God Himself will be future Israel’s crown of glory. That is pretty good motivation toward faithfulness, but does it not sound a bit selfish?

Our motivation will not be self-centered when we understand that God our Master will receive all the glory. God will present the servant blameless in the presence of His own glory. Jude promised, *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy (Jude v.24).* We learn that any “success” in ministry is due only to God who keeps us from stumbling. We will realize that we will arrive safely in

the presence of God who called us, equipped us, and assigned us due to His grace alone. We will stand in the presence of God’s glory with great joy. It is likely the English word joy in this statement hardly begins to express what we will experience. How wonderfully faithfulness will be rewarded.

Thriving in the pressure cooker results in God’s glory. *To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude v.25).* God who saves us through Jesus Christ deserves all the glory. His majesty, dominion, and authority are rightly praised. He who controls all things in all eternity does an amazing thing in calling, equipping, and appointing His servants to do His work for His glory.

In light of the fact that this whole ministry and minister thing is about God, we should realize what a wonderful pressure-relief valve this is. A safe pressure cooker has a relief valve that lets out the pressure when it goes too high. The pastor/teacher’s confidence in God’s calling, God’s purpose, God’s plan, and God’s reward is our pressure relief valve. Will there be challenges and disappointments along the way? Of course. We whose flesh is infected with sin are working with sin-infected people in a sin-infected world. Of course there are going to be problems. But God is faithful in all circumstances to bring all things out to His own glory. Remembering that all ministry is about God’s glory, as He proves to be faithful to the Word He already gave us, makes the pressure bearable.