

## #9 Parting Words of Counsel—A Farwell Sermon

sermonaudio.com

*Parting Words of Counsel*

By Albert N. Martin

**Bible Text:** Acts 20:17-38

**Preached on:** Sunday, June 15, 2008

### **Trinity Baptist Church**

160 Changebridge Road  
Montville, NJ 07045

**Website:** [www.trinitymontville.org](http://www.trinitymontville.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tbcnj](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tbcnj)

The following sermon was delivered on Sunday morning, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey.

---

Now, I would invite you to turn with me in your own Bibles to the book of Acts and chapter 20 and I shall read beginning at verse 17 through to the end of the chapter. Speaking of the activity of Paul the apostle Luke writes:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build

you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified. I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more. And they brought him on his way unto the ship.<sup>1</sup>

As I prayerfully reflected on what to preach to you in this my last sermon preached in this place as one of your pastors I am sure it does not surprise many of you that my mind was drawn to Paul's farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders recorded for us in summary form here in Acts 20:17-35.

However, the more I looked at the passage it became very clear to me that in many ways there are so many things that were unique to Paul's situation that had no parallel in my situation that I could not expound this passage as a farewell sermon. Not the least of these discrepancies is this was Paul's final farewell. He said in verse 25, "I know [that you] shall see my face no more."<sup>2</sup> And he says it another time later on in the passage. "They...wept sore...sorrowing most of all for the word he had spoken that they should behold his face no more."<sup>3</sup>

Well, that's not so with me. God willing, in four months I will return for the 25<sup>th</sup> annual pastor's conference to be held in this place in October. God willing, next Spring in the will of God I will return for the fourth pastoral theology module. And if I behave myself, the elders may just invite me to preach here in this pulpit in connection with those visits.

Furthermore, pastor Dave will have a formal installation service some time in the coming weeks or months and I would like to think—maybe it is self flattery—that I might just be asked to share in that service as well.

So it just doesn't fit. Paul knew he would see these people no more and much of the whole flavor of that passage is conditioned by that reality.

I am relinquishing my place among you as an elder, but there still will be these visits. And not because I feel that I have got to be there in the wings and periodically come back in order to check up on you. That is not the motivation at all. But rather, I leave you under the canopy of undiminished mutual affection and respect and with the convictions that there are yet ministries in which we can still labor together for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 20:17-38

<sup>2</sup> Acts 20:25

<sup>3</sup> Acts 20:37-38

So if I can not force Paul's farewell address into the mold of my farewell address, why in the world have I read it to you?

Well, I have read it to you because it contains a principle that I want to extract. And based on that principle I want to bring my farewell address to you. And the principle is this. Without any carnal, self serving, Paul reviewed before the men who had sat under his ministry both the spirit and the substance of his three plus years among them. Thus, demonstrating the legitimacy of such an activity when a man of God is among the people of God to whom he has ministered the Word of God and he is leaving them.

It is not wrong for that man to speak out of a good conscience before God and man concerning the spirit and the substance of his ministry without in any way indulging in carnal, self serving.

So I begin my farewell address by setting before you six realities that have been at the heart of my 46 years of labor among you. And as I do so, I remind you of the text that I quoted when I gave my testimony a couple of weeks ago and then gave a history of the church, when Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am."<sup>4</sup> And then with respect to his labors he said, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."<sup>5</sup>

And I am able to say what I am about to say as the first part of my farewell address with a good conscience before God only because of the grace of God to me as a man and the grace of God that has been operative in my ministry among you.

So the first of the six things that comprise the bulk of my farewell is this. For 46 years, by the grace of God, I have sought to live before God and before you as a man of God, embodying in my life that which I have preached to you. For 46 years I have sought to live before God and you as a man of God embodying in my life that which I have preached to you.

The men in the academy often quote the saying that I quoted again and again to them. I first found it in Bridges book on *The Christian Ministry* where he says, quoting someone else whom I have forgotten, "The life of the minister is the life of his ministry. The life of the minister is the life of his ministry."

And one of the most formative texts in my life that took its place deeply in the theater of my conscience before God was Acts 24 and verse 16 where Paul said, "Herein," in the light of the coming day of judgment, "Herein I also exercise myself..."<sup>6</sup> And he uses a strong verb, the verb one would use for Olympic discipline, "Herein I also exercise

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 24:16

myself...”<sup>7</sup> I place myself under strict spiritual discipline, “...to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always.”<sup>8</sup>

And for 46 years I have sought to live before my God and before you his people embodying in my life that which I preach to you. In secret when there have been thoughts and desires and attitudes that are sinful and contrary to the law of God I have sought to mourn over them, to repent of them, to plead for deliverance from them as much as if those thoughts had given birth to deeds. No one in this church has confessed sin publicly more frequently than I. I thank God I have never had to confess sins of gross moral deflection or doctrinal deflection or outbursts of temper or anger in congregational meetings, but I have many sins of injudicious speech to confess.

James, as a writer of the book of James says, “In many things we all offend. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man”<sup>9</sup> I have not been a perfect man, but I have stood before you and acknowledge my sins and I have sought your forgiveness for my sins and I have sought to walk before God with a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. And I can look every one of you in the eye and say there is not a one of you whose goods I have coveted. There is not a woman among you, not a girl who can say there has ever been a leering look, an unchaste touch. As physical and warm and affectionate I am, not a one of you who can say, “That man looked at me in a way that was unclean. That man touched me. That man held me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable.”

For 46 years I have sought to embody, by God’s grace, what I preach. The four great giant pillars or preachers—money, pride, unbridled ambition and women—have killed their thousands. By the grace of God they have not slain me. And over the years when I have anticipated the fact that at some time there would be a farewell sermon my mind has gone, again and again, to 1 Samuel chapter 12. And I have said, “Lord, I want to be able to do what Samuel did in the great congregation.

1 Samuel 12 verse 1:

Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you; and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my youth unto this day.<sup>10</sup>

I came to north Jersey as a 28 year old young preacher. And I have walked before you to this day in which I am now an old man.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> James 3:2

<sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 12:1-2

Here I am: witness against me before Jehovah, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand. And he said unto them, Jehovah is witness against you,<sup>11</sup>

And I thank God that I can stand and make that challenge without any fear that I can be justly charged with those sins that have killed their hundreds if not their thousands.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to say that by the grace of God—and it is the grace of God—but when God's grace has worked it we do not honor him by denying it to say with Paul, “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe.”<sup>12</sup>

While confessing my sins, yes, not sinlessly, but blamelessly. And I have sought so to live before you that, you, the people of God could say to any skeptic who denies the reality of the Christian faith that you would be able to say, “If the gospel is not real, explain the life of that preacher.” And with all my heart I have wanted to give you that as my greatest gift to you.

Do you think that has been easy? You have no clue the secret wrestlings, the temptations. You have no clue. But I thank God that I stand before you and can make that statement.

Secondly, for 46 years by the grace of God I have sought to minister the whole counsel of God to you, not fearing the face of any man. I sought to minister the whole counsel of God to you, not fearing the face of any man. And I take that language from the Acts 20 passage where Paul could say, first of all, in verse 20, “I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable.”<sup>13</sup> The indication being he was tempted at times to shrink back. But he said, “I did not shrink. When I felt the temptation I resisted it and I held back nothing that was profitable to you.”

Then in verse 26, “Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For...”<sup>14</sup> Here is the same language. “I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.”<sup>15</sup>

In Galatians 1:10 Paul said, “If I should yet fear men I should not be the servant of God.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 12:3-5

<sup>12</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:10

<sup>13</sup> Acts 20:20

<sup>14</sup> Acts 20:26-27

<sup>15</sup> Acts 20:27

<sup>16</sup> See Galatians 1:10

And in 1 Thessalonians chapter two Paul gives a similar emphasis, verses four and five.

As we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts. For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others.<sup>17</sup>

The apostle was unashamed to say, “I preached to you the whole counsel of God without fear of your faces.”

And if God should take a naturally sensitive boy who felt sick to stomach when scolded by a teacher and make me bold to fear none of your faces, it is the grace of God. Left to myself I would be a wimp and two little frowns or pouts on your faces when I preached would turn me into mush. And I have seen the looks that some of you have given me even in the previous hour. Some of you teenagers, you didn’t like the things I was saying about your relationship to your parents. I could see it written all over you. I will not cower before your face.

For 46 years I have sought to minister the whole counsel of God to you, not fearing the face of any man whether preaching unpopular doctrines, unfashionable practices, opposing fads in worship, moral compromises to accommodate current consensus, again and again and we have said, Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, for 46 years by the grace of God I have given myself to you with unsparing passion and earnestness in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. It is one thing for a man to preach things that are a matter of life and death. It is another thing to preach them in a manner that convinces people that if no one else believes they are matters of life and death, the preacher does. That is earnestness and passion.

I don’t know how to pace myself. My two fellow elders met with me to pray in the back room after the Sunday school and they said, “Pastor, do you have anything left after the first hour?”

No, I didn’t. I left it all in the first hour. I might be dead before the next hour.

Spurgeon said, “Every time I stand to preach I empty the barrel to the last dark drop and then I bring my empty barrel to God and say, ‘Oh, God, fill it up again.’”

And God knows I have not spared the energy of mind, of soul, of body. The current that has run over my emotional system, I have no question, is what has contributed, perhaps to some of my neuropathy in my feet and my legs, perhaps even the neurological problem that has caused me to lose about 80% of my hearing. But I would do it all over again.

---

<sup>17</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 8:20

For 46 years I have given myself to you with unsparing passion and earnestness in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And, again, Paul is my model for he could say in verse eight of 1 Thessalonians chapter two, “Even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear to us.”<sup>19</sup>

Fourthly, for 46 years, by the grace of God, I have sought to labor among you with respect and proper appreciation for all my fellow office bearers and my many fellow workers. I have sought to labor with respect and proper appreciation for all my fellow office bearers and my many fellow workers. I stand before you this morning and bring this farewell message conscious that I, Albert N. Martin, by the grace of God have been privileged to have a significant role in the founding and the development of this congregation. I would be an irrational fool not to know that. It is the grace of God, but that’s reality.

However, however, Trinity Baptist Church is not Al Martin’s church. If it were, may it die and be buried. It is a fulfillment of Christ’s promise who said, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”<sup>20</sup> And Christ has built this church and he has done it by gifting many men, many women for specific roles and functions without which you as a people would not be what you are nor do what you do. And no one understands that and believes that more firmly than I.

I have never allowed myself to be called the senior minister or the senior pastor of this place. Advertising blurbs must put me down as one of the pastors of Trinity Church.

Some people haven’t liked that I insist it be that way wherever I have had anything to say. I don’t like the term, never have used it, no sympathy.

Many of you do not know that in 1976 I was made a doctor. I received an honorary degree, a doctor of divinity degree from Geneva College out near Pittsburgh. Before I went out to receive that degree—having sought counsel from my confidants who said I should receive it and accept it—I said to the congregation, “I am pastor Martin standing before you. I am going out for a weekend to Pennsylvania to get doctored. But when I come back if any of you call me doctor,” and remember 76, that’s 32 years ago, I said, “I’ll take you out in the back alley and when I’m done with you if you call me doctor you are going to need a doctor.”

I don’t know if there are any of the witnesses to that. But that is what I said.

Why? Because I wanted, by the very way I am addressed, pastor Martin, pastor Smith, pastor Carleson, pastor Blaize, pastor Robert Fischer, pastor Robert Martin, by those things to make it evident that I was one among many whom Christ had given to this place.

---

<sup>19</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:8

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 16:18

And I believe my fellow office bearers, the deacons, the secretaries who have worked with me can bear witness that they have always felt appreciated and affirmed in their significant role in the life of this church. By the grace of God, by the grace of God I have lived and labored with respect and appreciation for my fellow office bearers and the many fellow workers.

Number five: For 46 years, by the grace of God, I have labored to help you, to help you make sure that you are satisfied with nothing less than a vital, spirit wrought, heart and life transforming union with Jesus Christ. For 46 years by the grace of God I have labored to help you make sure that you are satisfied with nothing less than a vital, spirit wrought, heart and life transforming union with Jesus Christ. In other words, to be nothing less than a real Christian. For my Bible says, "If any man is in Christ a new creation, the old has passed, the new has come."<sup>21</sup> God is not in the business of patchwork. He is in the business of making new creatures.

"We are his workmanship created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works."<sup>22</sup>

One of the first series I preached back in that denominational framework was preaching large sections from the book of 1 John under the title, "The Birthmarks of a true Christian." And then when I moved into my first verse by verse exposition, the Sermon on the Mount, I came to verses 13 and 14, "Enter ye in by the narrow gate...for narrow is the way and constricted is the way that leads unto life. Few there be that find it."<sup>23</sup> And while God's aggregate of the redeemed will be a multitude who no man can number, in any given place at any given time, even in the midst of a lot of truth and religion, few find the narrow way. And I pressed that issue.

And then we were soon into verse 21 to 23.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.<sup>24</sup>

And I pressed the issue. I have brought series of sermons. Some of you will remember them. Are you for real? We have looked together at passage after passage where God presses the issue. Be not deceived. Let no one deceive himself. And for 46 years by God's grace I have labored to help you to make sure that you individually are satisfied with nothing less than a vital, spirit wrought heart and life transforming union with Jesus Christ. That is why Paul could say to the Ephesians in Acts 20 and verse 21 he kept back

---

<sup>21</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>22</sup> See Ephesians 2:10

<sup>23</sup> See Matthew 7:14-15

<sup>24</sup> Mathew 7:21-23



nothing that was profitable testifying both publicly and private what was the center of his message, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> He pressed the issue of the absolute necessity of deep and thorough evangelical repentance saying no to self and sin and the world. No, no, no. I will now be God's possession. I will now belong to Christ, casting oneself upon Jesus Christ in all the glory of his person and the perfection of his work.

Dear people, if you go to hell under my preaching my hands are clean of your blood. How many times have I stood here with tears and begged you to be sure you are in Christ? Your conscience affirms what I say. When I say these things there is none of you who has been under my ministry and say, "What in the world is he talking about?" You know exactly what I am speaking about.

And then, sixth, for 46 years by the grace of God I have labored to see you become enamored with Christ and passionate to know him and to please him more and more. I have labored to see you become enamored with Christ and passionate to know him and please him more and more.

Paul could say as a mature Christian his great passion, Philippians three, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings."<sup>26</sup> He could say in 2 Corinthians 5:9, "Wherefore we are ambitious to be well pleasing unto him."<sup>27</sup>

He could say in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ."<sup>28</sup> Christ is central, foundational, circum... whatever it would be, around and in and under and over. He said, "For to me to live is Christ."<sup>29</sup>

I have called you to obey the imperatives of the gospel based upon the marvelous provisions of the indicatives of the gospel. And I have sought by God's grace to see you become enamored of Christ and passionate to know him and to please him more and more.

Well, then, you might say to me, "Well, pastor, if you can say those six things with a good conscience before God and know that you carry the conscience of your people, then surely you must come to this day with unmixed joy and gratitude looking back over 46 years of such a ministry."

But that's not the case. As I think of 46 years of ministry I also think of two major sins of omission. The thought of this would drive me to despair did I not believe that I am in Christ with a righteousness comprised of his perfect obedience to the will of God as well as his perfect sacrifice under the anathema of God. And those two sins of omission are

---

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 20:20-21

<sup>26</sup> Philippians 3:10

<sup>27</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:9

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 1:21

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

these: my failure in the realm of intercessory prayer for you. When I read the letters of Paul and see the breadth and the depth of his intercessory prayer ministry for all the churches, I am ashamed. I have taught the men in the academy on ministerial intercession. I have made many, many fresh starts with renewed determination to be more fervent and frequent and passionate and regular in praying for every one of you by name and your children. But God knows I cannot say by the grace of God I have lived up to the standard that I know. And I must confess to God my failure and I confess to you and to whatever degree your struggles and your disappointments have had some relationship to my prayerlessness, I can only ask your forgiveness and trust by the grace of God to do better in the days to come.

And then the second area of the sin of omission is in the area of more direct, frequent, personal pastoral dealings with you as God's people. I have never turned anyone away who has sought to come to me with a need. When you have called I have made time for you. But I am talking about being more assertive in one on one hands on invasive pastoral involvement. It is in that area when I read the apostle's in Acts 20:20 where he says not only publicly, but house to house. Colossians 1:28, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."<sup>30</sup>

When I read 1 Thessalonians two and verse 11 where Paul could say of his dealings with the Thessalonians, "As ye know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging you, and testifying."<sup>31</sup> My conscience smites me that I have not been the faithful pastor that I ought to have been. And so I ask your forgiveness to the extent, again, that there are issues in your life that would have been addressed and could have been addressed had I been more assertive in the one on one pastoral dealings. I can't go back and make it up, but I can confess it and ask your forgiveness.

And the one good thing that comes out of facing these realities is it draws me back again to the fact that though I could say those six things of my ministry by the grace of God, they do not enter into the ground of my acceptance before God. The only ground that I want to stand on in the presence of God is a perfect righteousness made up of the perfect obedience of my Savior, an obedience even to the death of the cross. Not one thread in that robe of righteousness has been constructed on the loom of Al Martin's ministerial labors.

Every time Jesus should be praying he was praying and not preaching. Every time he should be preaching he was preaching and not praying. Every time he should have been speaking to a crowd in the synagogue or from a boat or in some other setting, he was preaching to the crowd. Every time he should have been with an individual whether a woman by the well or Nicodemus by night he was with the individual. Jesus had a perfectly balanced ministerial light that was part of the righteousness of his obedience. And I, Albert Martin, hide in that righteousness for my acceptance with God. And there is

---

<sup>30</sup> Colossians 1:28

<sup>31</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:11

nothing I have done or not done that enters into that righteousness, perfectly provided by my precious Savior.

Now I have given you those six areas in which, by God's grace, I leave you with a good conscience; the two areas in which I believe I have been guilty of sins of omission. And now before I am done there are several things I want to say to you, God's people.

In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul could say of the Philippians these words which by God's grace I can say of you:

I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now.<sup>32</sup>

This is what I want to say to you my dear people. For 46 years by the grace of God you have demonstrated an obedience to the Word of God which has made my labor a joy and a delight. Your faces would be red if you know how I have bragged about you all over the world. When I have been in various places ministering and often in pastor's conferences in many places throughout the world and the matters come up in discussion, what do you do when people won't follow the Word of God? You teach and preach it and they buck against it. I have been able to say, "Well, I can give you some principles from the Word, but I thank God that's not the context in which I minister." That I have been able to do for you and of you and concerning you what Paul did. He boasted of the Corinthians. He boasted of the Macedonians. He writes about it in 2 Corinthians 7:14 and 8:24b. He boasts of the people of God. And he was boasting of the grace of God that was operative in them.

And as I often would tell the men in the academy: In the work of the ministry if you are committed to a biblical ministry you have no back up system. You lay out the Word of God. If people don't follow the Word, then you back it up and go somewhere and find some people who are ready to follow the Bible. You have got no backup system. If they are not ready to do what Christ says through the Word, then you have had it. And I think God that for 46 years you have shown yourselves to be essentially and obedient people, ready to embrace and believe whatever has been established by responsible exposition, ready to embrace and obey in obedient faith what God has revealed.

That is why the writer to Hebrews could say in verse seven of chapter 13, "Remember them that had the rule over you, men that spake unto you the word of God."<sup>33</sup> That was their distinguishing trait. They spoke unto you the Word of God. They spoke it out of a context of a validating life, yes. But they spoke unto you the Word of God.

I am standing here after 46 years and commending you. If the Lord tarries and spares Jeff and Bart, pastors Carleson and Smith, pastor Janski, will you give them the privilege

---

<sup>32</sup> Philippians 1:3-5

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 13:7

of saying what I am saying? I trust you will. They are men who will speak unto you the Word of God. Prove your love to Christ by being obedient to his Word.

Secondly, for 46 years by the grace of God you have loved me, tolerated my idiosyncrasies that Mr. Heist so beautifully captured in his poem. I have them. I have my quirks. I know it. I am still wearing my wing tip shoes. I will be buried in them. And my blue oxford shirt. The deacons won't let me wear anything else. I can't wear... did you know that? The deacons dictate my wardrobe.

I have heard heavy handed shepherds, but they are heavy handed. They told me I can't wear white shirts up here because they just blend in and all people see on the videos is my hands and my face. I don't know if they are going to mandate that I am buried in one as well. I don't know.

But seriously, you have loved me. You have prayed for me in my manifold trials, my dozen or so surgeries over the years, the lengthy trial of two of my three children. Two children at one time sat in this church as young adults, members in good standing professing Christians. You have wept with me, you wept with Marilyn. You stood with me through Marilyn's losing battle with cancer. You rejoiced with me when at age 72 I was like the silly teenager with his first crush when God brought my dear Dorothy into my life.

This is reality, folks. I am not imagining these things. By the grace of God you have loved me, prayed for me in my manifold trials, my surgeries, the trials with my children, Marilyn's losing battle with cancer. You have generously provided for all of my temporal needs. For these things I thank you with all of my heart and I know you will continue to pray for me as I seek to know how I can do the most good for Christ's kingdom in whatever time is left for me. I know you will pray God will help me to live with this affliction. You do not know how I have struggled even this morning with my ears. You, perhaps, have seen me fooling around with the volume on them and times when I just can't figure out where my voice is or whether I am speaking too loud, not loud enough, et cetera. And unless God performs a miracle, this is going to be one of my companions to the end of my days. If you saw the report from the latest MRI on my back you would marvel that I am even standing before you with a herniated disc and arthritis and all other kinds of stuff going on in my lower back.

I say that not to get maudlin sympathy, but just to let you know the fact that this old man stands up here and preaches with energy and vigor, I am not the 40 year old man that used to do that. I am an old worn out man in many areas. But I want to serve Christ to my last breath.

As I have told people, I don't want to fall off a rocking chair, break my neck and go to heaven. I want to be shot out of my saddle. So when people say, "Oh, I hear pastor Martin is retired," jump all over them. Say, "You heard wrong." Tell them, "You heard wrong. I don't know where you heard it. You heard wrong. I got it straight from the old horse's mouth. He ain't retiring. He's changing where he lives, changing what he is

going to be doing, from being a primary leader in the pressure cooker of the manifold ministries of Trinity Church.” And whether God wants me to be primarily and encourager of younger men, whether he wants me to write I don’t know. But I am confident as long as he gives me life and breath he has work for me to do and I thank you that I have the confidence of your love and of your prayers.

I have two verses with which I want to close this morning: 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 19.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye,  
before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy.<sup>34</sup>

Dear people, you are my life’s work. It is right here. The man that helped build a cathedral can walk with people and say, “Here is the cathedral. I did all of the stonework here. I did all of the roofing work. Or I did this.”

You are my life’s work. And I thank God for the privilege I have had to labor in that work. And as you cling to Christ and continue to abide in him when the verse of the archangel sounds and the trumpet blows and Christ returns, you will be my joy and my crown of glory.

I want to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.<sup>35</sup> That is the language of the apostle. And if that is to be so, then the second text is Acts 20 and verse 32. We go back to Paul’s farewell discourse, Acts 20 and verse 32. “And now I commend you to God.”<sup>36</sup> I commend you to God, the triune God, “and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.”<sup>37</sup>

I have confidence that God’s Word ministered by God’s servant in this place in days to come will be the means by which you will be kept, by which you will continue to grow and by which you will have usefulness as a church that you have never yet known. I believe with all my heart that God intends blessing upon his people in this place and it is my prayer that God will get glory to his Son even until the day of the Lord Jesus himself.

I know there are people waiting in the wings saying, “Ah, yeah, you watch. Al Martin goes. Trinity Church goes down the tubes.”

Yeah, there are people that have that naysayer mentality. By the grace of God prove them wrong. Prove them wrong. Prove by your attachment to Christ and by your obedience to his Word of grace that Christ is the Lord and head and life of this assembly and will continue to be so in the days to come.

---

<sup>34</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

<sup>35</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:2

<sup>36</sup> Acts 20:32

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Now, just this Word for the many visitors among us who might not be aware of how we close a service. I will in a moment lead in prayer and after I have prayed there will be a couple of minutes of silence in which we trust you will take that time to reflect upon the things you have heard and pray them in. And then when the piano begins we are formally dismissed.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, what thanks can we give to you for all that you have been pleased to do with poor, unworthy sinners in these years together. How I thank you for the privilege that has been mine to stand in this pulpit, in the pulpits, in the schools through the many years of our wandering, the initial days in that church in North Caldwell and to open up your Word and to have a people ready to hear, to receive, to believe and to obey all that you have revealed. We thank you for your grace that has preserved us through times of disruption and difficulty. And you have kept us to this day. You have given us the privilege to be useful in your kingdom here and to the ends of the earth. We thank you and we just don't know how, Lord, to express our gratitude for your grace and for your mercy. And now we commend your people to you and to the Word of that grace that is able to build them up and to keep them until they come into that inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us. We commit to you your servants who will continue their labors in this place that you will come upon them with fresh and ever increasing measures of the spirit of grace and of power, of utterance, of wisdom and all that they will need to guide your people well in the days to come.*

*Bless the servants who serve as deacons. Thank you for each of them and all of their labors. We pray that you would continue your grace upon each one of them as they seek to so labor that those men set apart to pray and to preach will be able to give themselves without distraction to those labors. We pray especially, Lord, for those who have withheld, resisted all of the overtures of your grace. We pray that you would be merciful to them, that even this day you would come forth to conquer their rebellious, unbelieving hearts and take them captive unto yourself.*

*Dismiss us, then, with your blessing we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*