

The Need For Leadership In The Church

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Date: 12 February 1989

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] I want to begin by saying what a great delight and pleasure it is for me to be here in St.

John's Church this morning and to thank your rector, Harry, for his very gracious invitation to preach here. Preaching in St. John's, I feel right now, is a little bit like being a lion entering a den of Daniels. So, did I get that right or not? But that story turned out well, and I hope mine will also.

For three and a half years, I've been principal of Wycliffe College in Toronto. We are one of eight or nine centers that trains men and women for the ordained ministry of the church.

We are also a place where a large number of people come to do advanced theological studies, and we are equally a place where many lay people are currently studying for the enrichment of their own lives and ministries.

[1 : 14] We are 111 years old this year, part of the University of Toronto, and together with six other colleges, all within walking distance, we form part of the Toronto School of Theology, with about 105 faculty and well over 1,200 students.

The best thing I can say about Wycliffe College here in St. John's is that we are attested to by our graduates, a considerable number of whom serve in British Columbia, in this diocese, over in the Diocese of British Columbia on the island, and including, of course, Harry Robinson and Ernie Eldridge, who are known to many of you, I suspect.

Currently, we have students from 17 out of 30 dioceses in Canada. We are not, contrary to popular opinion, localized exclusively in southern Ontario.

We have three people currently at Wycliffe from the province of British Columbia, and one of whom particularly, Brian Campbell, along with his wife Janice and Megan, whom some of you may have met when she was here with her parents, she's about five or six months old, send you their special greetings.

The Campbells are doing very well indeed, and we at Wycliffe shall be proud to have Brian as a graduate in two or three months, and you, in turn, ought to be proud of him as well.

[2 : 47] And I would simply say that if you have other students of Brian's faith and competence, please put them on the next plane east, certainly before September.

My reasons for being in British Columbia this week are several. I unabashedly hope and have met some people who may well be potential new students of our college.

It's also been an opportunity for me to meet again several of our graduates and other friends of the college in order to bring them up to date on the priorities and activities and current issues that characterize Wycliffe in the 1980s.

I've tried to share with them and to articulate three central convictions about our college as it currently sees itself.

First, we are an evangelical, scripture-centered college. We were founded on those principles more than a century ago, and we do our best with the grace of God to maintain that position and to live it out effectively and sensitively in these years.

[4 : 06] Second, we are a school with a concern for mission, for evangelism, and for outreach. We do our best, and we are hoping to improve our ministry to our students to enable them to be people who not simply maintain an ecclesiastical status quo, but are people who, through their ministry in parishes and in other kinds of ministry, are seeking to bring the good news of Christ meaningfully and significantly and clearly into the lives, into the hearing of men and women in our culture and beyond.

And third, we are an institution that is committed to working in partnership with the wider church. And while the largest number of our students are Anglicans, a good many come from other traditions as well because of interest in our programs and in working with our faculty.

My fourth reason for being here in British Columbia, as I have already been in the Maritimes in the past few weeks, is to inform our friends and supporters about a major financial development that we have undertaken entitled Commitment for Tomorrow, Leadership in Ministry.

11 years ago, Wycliffe carried out a major second century campaign. It got the college well through the 80s.

But now we are facing a \$3 million program for the 90s, intent to develop and strengthen the base of support for our faculty, to significantly increase our bursary aid fund for students, and, for better or for worse, to put back our old building in more usable and suitable repair.

[6 : 15] And we are praying and asking for financial support from parishes, from alumni, from trustees, from students, from faculty, from corporations, from foundations.

The four archbishops, as well as the primate of our church in Canada, have each given us their blessing, their support, and their patronship. And I hope that there are some in this province, as well as in the other regions of our country, who will pray for Wycliffe and support us in a variety of ways. People who care about the training of men and women for leadership ministry in ways which exalt Christ, which center on scripture, and which nurture a sense of mission into all the world.

So remember us in your thoughts and prayers. Let us pray. Father, help us now to hear your word and understand it, to believe it and to obey it.

By faith, as we submit ourselves to its truth, we may find Jesus, who is its source and its life. We pray in his name.

[7 : 31] Amen. Amen. The question of good leadership in the church is not by any means exclusively a contemporary one.

Issues of the leadership of the church, while they preoccupy people like myself in theological colleges, are issues which have been of primary and paramount importance down the ages and through the pages of the story of the church in action.

Jesus himself spent a disproportionately large amount of time working with a small group of people who would be leaders of the earliest church.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see examples of concern to raise up those who would be faithful proclaimers of the word and those who would work with them in a helping, subsidiary way.

The Apostle Paul, above all, was preoccupied with matters relating to the leadership of the church. And nowhere is Paul's preoccupation more evident than in his epistle to Titus.

[8 : 49] Well, we've already had a great introduction to Titus this morning. Peels of my thunder have been stolen and have rung out much more effectively than they would possibly have trickled out from my tentative lips.

I especially appreciated seeing the pen. I am reminded of those two apostles, two disciples, two Christians in the book of Acts.

Priscilla, who must have been a pen pal with Aquila. And those of you who are going to come back for more next week will find Ernie and Harry subsequently leading you through the three chapters of the epistle to Titus.

Let's just recall a little bit of what was said earlier to the children and center for a moment on some of the backgrounds surrounding this very small, very short, and yet significant letter because I believe it has things to say to the church today.

One thing to start off with about the letter to Titus is that it forms a part of a trio along with 1st and 2nd Timothy. They're commonly known as the pastoral epistles because they contain so much emphasis on the proper care and nurture and ordering of the life of the church.

[10 : 22] So if you're reading Titus, you'll want to also read 1st and 2nd Timothy. 1st Timothy particularly echoes some of the themes in Titus and perhaps it's the other way around.

And 2nd Timothy follows that up as well. Well, we've heard a little bit about Titus. He was a colleague of Paul, a Greek convert to Christ, in many ways a rather minor character in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, but he is there and he plays his role.

However, the letter which bears his name and which was sent to him was not written to him during the period described in the book of Acts. You remember how Acts ends in chapter 28 with Paul having arrived at Rome.

We find him under house arrest, able, however, to preach, to teach to those who came to him openly and unhindered. And that's where Luke ends the story of Paul, the story of Peter, Paul, and the others foundational in the life of the church.

But you can't fit into the Acts of the Apostles any of the narrative which is clearly behind the Timothy letters or Titus.

[11 : 43] Some people, for that reason, have said, aha, somebody else must have written them and simply attached Paul's name to them to gain credibility. possibility. On the other hand, if we use our imagination, it seems quite within the realm of possibility that Paul was released from that first Roman imprisonment, a house arrest that it was, and he may well have been allowed to resume his ministry.

And on the assumption that that is the case, we can presume that he traveled further, including spending a significant time on the island of Crete, which prior to that he had only visited for a very brief period, certainly not likely time enough to establish a group of followers in Jesus. Several months later, while he is now away from Crete and settling in for the winter in the town of Nicopolis in Asia Minor, he finds himself continuing his concern for that particular congregation in Crete.

Crete. And what has he done? He has left his friend and his junior partner, Titus, there on Crete in charge of the local congregation.

And the letter that he wrote to encourage and give directions to Titus is the epistle that we have now in our New Testament. Paul had left Titus in Crete to work with the church, asking him first to amend what was defective and secondly, hand in hand with that, to appoint reliable elders.

[13 : 31] The problems in the church at Crete, and Paul knew what they were, he had not settled them entirely by the time he had to leave. The problems had to do with false teachers who were spreading heresy.

with a spirit of divisiveness and quarrelsomeness that was fracturing the church and weakening it in the process. And, as is so often the case, when there is theological inaccuracy and a spirit of quarrelsomeness, there also developed patterns of personal and social immorality.

Paul's directions then to Titus are to seek out and to appoint mature leaders who will be first of all faithful to the gospel and equally will be exemplary representatives of the Christian life.

Now, you could look at the letter to Titus and the Timothy letters and say, well, Paul is being very autocratic here. He's setting up an ecclesiastical hierarchy or pyramid with himself at the top with Titus second in command or Timothy if it was Ephesus where Timothy was in a similar situation and then with elders or leaders within the church lower down and then finally everybody else.

and sometimes the church looks to be that kind of pyramidal organization. And is Paul and our Titus responsible for that kind of pattern of leadership that sometimes is effective but equally often is less effective?

[15 : 18] Are they responsible for that style of church leadership? leadership? I believe that there is a sense in which leadership in an apostolic way has significance and importance.

But in another and equally significant way we can imagine that the people whom Titus will choose will be those who emerge naturally emerge under the leadership and at the prompting of God's spirit and that Timothy's or Titus' rather role will not simply be arbitrarily to put so and so in charge but to recognize the work of Christ in bringing to maturity those individuals that God has raised up and confirming them appointing them authenticating validating their ministry so that the natural sense of leadership that is given to those who are elders will be able to be expressed and united and established in an orderly effective way.

What will these leaders look like? Well they will be fully committed to Jesus Christ. They will not be people whose faith is secondary. People who are ignorant of the gospel. People who are preoccupied with ecclesiology and not Christology.

They will be people who have renounced competing religions and philosophies. Individuals whose awareness and understanding of the gospel will enable them to distinguish between true Christ-centered faith and all of the pressures of competing philosophies and values that permeated that society as well as this today.

and thirdly they will be individuals men and women whose lives will reflect the love and the purity which is seen best in Jesus.

[17 : 25] That's what the elders in Crete will look like. That is what leadership in our churches today must exemplify. In other words you see leadership in the church emerges from among those who are growing and maturing in Christ.

There must be nothing arbitrary or high-handed in being a Christian leader whether it is a bishop or a Bible study leader a rector or a hospital visitor for you see leadership in the church is not simply a matter of one or two or half a dozen who dress differently or are paid for what they do. that leadership is significant but so is the kind of leadership in which one person and another person exercise significant ministry in which modeling the gospel teaching the faith living out the good news of Christ effectively serves as a stimulus and an encouragement to others around. And when natural leaders like that emerge in the church and the designated leaders recognize and commission those natural leaders then the church will prize and God will be honored. So yes there is a pyramid dimension in which Paul assigns Titus the responsibility of Crete and Titus in turn establishes leaders elders from among the congregation and yet that pyramidal configuration while it looks as if it starts to the top and goes down is underneath the surface constructed upon leadership which emerges from those who are faithful and is recognized and deployed effectively and efficiently in the service of Christ.

[19 : 23] one avoids chaos the other inspires and enables vitality. Good leaders are found among those who know and love our Lord and those who are committed to serve him.

God grant that we may in our lives as Christians in our own lives as Christians which have a leadership dimension to them in so many instances God grant that we may be those kinds of people who you will hear and see described in the epistle to Titus and that as God equips us for ministry and calls us to whatever role that ministry takes we may respond with joy and renewed dedication.

God grant his blessing upon this parish God grant that men and women may be raised up here to live for Christ and to serve the needs of the gospel that God in all things may be honored.

Let us pray. O God we commit to you our place in your church church we pray that we may be open to the leading and calling of your spirit that we may be conscious of the advice and direction of those who minister around us and among us and those who are called to specific positions of leadership grant to us O God special sensitivity to the leading of your spirit and deep and firm conviction to the truth of the gospel.

I pray this day especially for Wycliffe College for its ministry of equipping and teaching and discipling those who would be leaders in your church.

[21 : 30] may your grace sustain us for this ministry and for all those centers which are called to teach and to exemplify and train.

We offer ourselves to you now and rejoice in Jesus Christ who is our Savior and our Lord. Amen. hymn books and we sing hymn 29 as pants the heart for cooling streams in parched and barren ways so longs my soul for you O God.

Hymn 29 time. He is as he Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.