

Mark 12:28-34

Philippians 1:1-11

November 13, 2016

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

The Stewardship of All of Life

A THANK-YOU NOTE

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

*Philip, minister of the gospel and servant of Christ Jesus,
to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in the Wallace Presbyterian Church, to all of you who have been called by God and set apart to do God's work and to be witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ, with the elders Rick, Zach, Harriet, Dottie, Joell, Wayne, Vera, George, Brenda, Jim, Nick, Ann, Nell, Joe, and Susan,*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do thank my God every time I remember all y'all, because you are family. It is a privilege and joy to serve as your pastor and to be on this journey of faith as we seek to discern God's will for our lives and for this church.

I do pray for all y'all with thanksgiving and joy, even in the hard times — not with a joy that comes from my own will and emotions, but with a joy that comes from our shared faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now — In April 1997, I filled out a Personal Information Form for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In the narrative section, where I described my pastoral work to date and my hopes for the future, I wrote, "It is exciting to think about being called to a church in which the members are willing and eager to engage in a shared ministry with the pastor. I am always willing to share the leadership in the congregation, because I am convinced that this is the model of ministry set forth in the scriptures, in which the minister, elders, deacons, and members of the congregation are all responsible for and serious about the ongoing ministry of the church. I also greatly enjoy working with people who say to me, "This is what we want to do, this is where we want to go as a church — help us get there!" That's the kind of church I serve as pastor!

A couple of weeks before we moved to Wallace near the end of March 1998, I received a copy of the March 1998 newsletter in the mail. On the cover were "Reflections" from Margaret J. Glasgow about the new minister coming to town. Margaret Hall wrote, "I like to think that the covenant between Dr. Gladden and our church will be characterized by patience, endeavor, and commitment as we proclaim together the majesty of God and the promise of the risen Christ." I hope and pray we proclaim together the majesty of God and the promise of the risen Christ.

All these years later, I am indeed thankful because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. . .

. . . and I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

For a number of years, I have used this tagline on my e-mails: Ask yourself this question: Where is God already at work in this situation? A couple of years ago I thought about changing the tagline, just for variety's sake. When I happened to mention that to some folks in the church, they all said, "Don't you dare!" It's been surprising and gratifying how many people have commented on that question over the years.

Sometimes it's not always easy to see where God is already at work in a particular situation, but we are called to put our trust in the God who is already at work in our lives and in our church, and who will complete that good work by the day of Jesus Christ.

The great 20th century Reformed theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote, "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness."

Read the history of our church, walk around in the buildings and read the plaques on the walls, look at the pictures in the Currie Building and the historical room, and you will see in the names and faces of the people who have gone before us in this place the truth of Dr. Niebuhr's words. The group of Presbyterians who left the Rockfish church to start this church in 1884; the Building Committee that led this congregation through a seven-year campaign in the midst of the Great Depression to build the Currie Building for Christian Education; the ministers who have served through the years; the elders and deacons and Sunday School teachers and youth leaders and Presbyterian Women and Men — so many faithful people, "saints," have come before us, who never saw the good work of this place come to completion. Nevertheless, they remained faithful to their God and laid the foundation for us to build upon — even if we ourselves do not see the completion of the good work God has begun and continues to do through us in the Wallace Presbyterian Church.

It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart (and I hold you in my heart) . . . For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

There is not enough time this morning for me to catalog all of the ways you show that you hold me in your heart (and I hold you in my heart). It is a high privilege and a humbling experience to pray with you, to be in hospital rooms and surgical waiting areas with you, to stand at the graveside with you and to celebrate life here in the sanctuary, to baptize your children, to officiate at your weddings, to enjoy fellowship around the tables in the Fellowship Hall and when we gather at our Lord's table, to teach our children the faith, to preach God's Word and lead God's people in worship, and to laugh and cry and wrestle with the deepest questions of life and faith. Through it all,

I know that you hold me in your heart — and I hold you in my heart — and we can put our trust in our one true God who, through his amazing grace in Jesus Christ, holds us in his own heart.

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless . . .

They are not my **favorite** Bible verses, but when it comes to providing a vision and guide for ministry here at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, I look to Paul's encouragement to the Christians at Ephesus. Paul wrote, "But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Ephesians 4:7, 11-13)

Worship. Grow. Go. That is the motto our session adopted last year to describe what we think is most important in the life of our congregation. The financial commitment and the personal investment of our spiritual gifts that all of us are being asked to make are, first and foremost, intended to bring glory and praise to God. The ministry and mission catalog you were given explains how we try to "build up the body of Christ" and bear witness to God's love in Jesus Christ, here at WPC, in our community, and beyond.

. . . to help you determine what is best, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, "You will know them by their fruits. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, not can a bad tree bear good fruit." Using different images, Jesus taught the same lesson, "You are the light of the world. . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:16, 18; 5:14, 16)

We have been using some of the apostle Paul's words in our Stewardship emphasis and education this fall, words he wrote to the Christians in Corinth as he encouraged them to fulfill their commitment and make good on their pledge to participate in God's work as they helped Christians in need in Jerusalem. Paul reminded them, "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God." (2 Corinthians 9:11-12) May our church be known by the good fruit we bear, in a harvest of righteousness for the glory and praise of God.

As you prayerfully consider how you will support the ministry of this church in the coming year and how you will live out your faith and use your God-given gifts in our shared mission, remember the words we heard back on October 12, words that are the foundation of all of our stewardship in all of life: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of

works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

This is my thank-you note . . .

* to God, for his gift of grace that saves us and prepares us for the good works he calls us to do

* to you for your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now

* and for your support of, commitment to, and involvement in the ministry and mission of the Wallace Presbyterian Church in the days to come.

I thank my God every time I remember you . . .

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Let us pray: (from Clement, said to have been consecrated by Peter himself, served as bishop of the church at Rome from 88 AD to his death in 99 AD)

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us. Deliver the oppressed, have compassion on the despised, raise the fallen, reveal yourself to the needy, heal the sick, bring back those who have strayed from you, feed the hungry, lift up the weak, remove the prisoners' chains. May every nation come to know that you are God alone, that Jesus is your Son, that we are your people, the sheep of your pasture. Amen.