

July 1, 2007

Rev. Anne M. Rosebrock

## MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### **Elevating the Essentials**

2 Corinthians 5:16

I became acquainted with a retired diplomat in one of the churches that I served in California. He had lived in exotic places all over the world and his home was filled with fascinating treasures from around the globe. I could listen to him tell stories for hours. I remember one of his stories came from a time when he was stationed in Southeast Asia. One of his jobs included shipping to America gifts that had been offered to high ranking government officials who toured the area. The gifts had been given not only to such officials, but also to the President of the United States. It was part of this diplomat's job to get the gifts back to the States and in the hands of the proper authority. One day, the diplomat gets an urgent call and his presence is required at the airplane that will be taking the gifts back to America. The diplomat shares that all the gifts have been verified and registered and they just need to be crated and delivered. However, the voice on the other end of the phone line becomes more and more intense and demands the diplomat come to the airport immediately. So, the frustrated diplomat gets in his car and drives to the airport to resolve what he is sure is not a problem at all, but rather a misunderstanding of standard gift procedures. You would have to know him the way I did to know that he was a stickler for standard procedures.

When he arrives at the airport, there stands a gift that was on the list, but not at all what he expected. He assumed the gift would be a figurine, possibly large, but inanimate. What stood before him was a live elephant 10 feet tall and weighing at least 10,000 pounds and the crew was trying to decide how to crate the animal and load him onto the transport airplane.

Ah, the life of a diplomat – filled with surprises and opportunities.

The Apostle Paul considered himself a diplomat, actually the chief of diplomats, an ambassador. Paul was an ambassador for Jesus Christ. As I read this passage in 2 Corinthians, it seems to me the model for living out our discipleship.

*Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-20*

Like Paul, you and I are claimed by Christ to speak and to act on his behalf. Knowing myself the way I do, I personally think Christ could have found someone better qualified, someone more articulate, and certainly someone more disciplined. I would not trust this most important mission to one like me, yet I am not in charge. God is in charge and God sees in us the potential to be great ambassadors. Selecting one like me as an ambassador for Christ is but one of the many decisions I might challenge should I reach the gates of heaven. However, I decided long ago that should I reach the gates of heaven, I am going straight in, no questions asked, no delays, no opportunity for St. Peter to reconsider. I am going to be completely focused on getting across that threshold.

We--you, Danny, Kevin, me--are all ambassadors of Jesus Christ. We represent Jesus not only in this sacred space, but everywhere we go. We represent Christ when we are standing in line at the grocery store, when we are driving up and down Meridian Street, when we are at the PTA, when we are paying for a cup of coffee, when we are seated at the symphony, when we are eating at McDonalds. We are ambassadors of Christ and that is an all day, every day reality. It is a reality for us as individuals and for us collectively as a community of faith. We are ambassadors for Christ even when it is difficult, even when it takes patience, even when we are confronted with a 10,000 pound elephant.

2 Corinthians 5:20 is the foundation upon which we shall continue to build our ministries, our outreach, our mission, and our lives. We will not merely engage a committee to be the ambassadors for Christ at Meridian Street. No, you and I are fully empowered as ambassadors for the Kingdom of God. You are I are fully expected to live out our faith, live out our days as Christ's ambassadors.

### *Prayer*

Business consultant Steven Covey has written repeatedly about the difference between that which is urgent and that which is important. He writes that what is urgent can become the enemy of what is important. We all know about the urgent. The urgent is made up of unreturned phone calls or aging unanswered emails. The urgent may be a deadline nipping at your heels or projects promised that have yet to be started. The urgent is that which keeps us busy and distracts us from what is important, that which is essential; the urgent demands action. The urgent keeps us very busy and often makes us feel efficient and even effective as we cross off items from our "to do" list. Urgent demands require our time and energy, but how many of those urgent demands are actually essential to our well-being, to our long term vision, to our faith development?

As ambassadors for Christ we are called to focus on what is ultimately important. Jesus spent his entire ministry pointing people toward the love of God. Our ministry as ambassadors of Christ is focused on sharing the love of God with and for others. The question we will ask over and over and over again in the next days, weeks, months and, I pray, years as we discuss mission and ministry is, "How will this program, this ministry, this outreach share the love of God with others?"

I have no illusions about the journey we begin this morning. We will not agree on all issues of theology, worship style, administrative practices or how to live out our faith as a disciple of Christ and a United Methodist. We will not always agree on the best kind of donuts to serve at Fellowship Time. We will not all agree on the color of the new paint going on the walls in Fellowship Hall. You will shake your heads when I preach myself right into a dangling participle and you will wonder how I ever made it through preaching 101. You will laugh with me at times because I love to laugh and you will laugh at me other times when I say something absurd. We will have disagreements, differences of opinion and you will be disappointed in me now and again. Of all that I am confident. But today we enter into a holy conversation. That conversation is not just between congregation, staff and clergy, but rather our holy conversation

finds its foundation within the presence and love of God. Yes, we will disagree, but we will explore our differences as we listen to each other. We will move through disappointment with respect, honoring not only each other, but more importantly honoring the purposes of God. We will move forward even in the midst of differences, because we are all ambassadors of Christ and we will keep that before us as job one. All other distractions will become secondary. Though the urgent will do its best to distract us, we will keep centered on the important, on the essentials as we live out our discipleship.

Together, we will hold onto old traditions and celebrate our history as the Meridian Street United Methodist Church. We will remember and reflect on the long held traditions of hope and outreach from the over 185 years of ministry as a community of faith. Having said that, we cannot drive forward effectively while keeping constant eye contact with the rear view mirror. We will scan that rear view mirror, we will look back occasionally to remind ourselves about the ground we have covered, but our gaze today, tomorrow and in the years to come will be focused on what is before us. What will be, the future of this great church is in Holy hands, God's hands and your hands. Danny, Kevin, and I are members of the South Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is our privilege to serve this congregation, but you are the members of this fabulous congregation. You are the ones to carry forward the legacy of the past and build the ministries of the future. You are the ambassadors of the Meridian Street United Methodist Church. As the pioneer of the Methodist tradition, John Wesley would say, "Take thou authority." Add your voice to shaping the direction of the ministries of this congregation and participate in making those ministries reality.

This is a new day at Meridian Street. We begin a new leg of our journey of faith. Ready or not, the time has come. It is of course just one of many changes in your life. Change happens in life all the time. One day you have a great job, you're loving it, it is the perfect job and the next thing you know – you're the senior pastor. It is a significant change for all of us. Dr. Wantz is missed this morning and he will be missed. He has chosen to create a new chapter in his life. He begins a new leg of his faith journey today. Danny Walker and his wife Amber have moved from serving two churches they loved in Lebanon, to become a part of the ministry at Meridian Street. They begin a new leg in their faith journey today. Kevin Reed and his wife Julie have left the church in Ohio that Kevin served as a student pastor; he graduated from seminary and moved to Meridian Street to share in ministry with you. Change is inevitable, ready or not. It is a new day and together we begin a new chapter in the life of this church. This new day propels us toward a future we have yet to fully imagine.

We are the people of the Resurrection. We are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. I say, let's act like it. Let's live like it. Let's worship like it. May we continue to grow as a people of joy, a people of compassion, and people of action all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Strap on your helmets because this is going to be a wild and wonderful ride. Your energy, both spiritual and physical, your commitment, your investment, your love for God will continue to breathe life into Meridian Street. From this moment, we will go out on a variety of limbs to build ministry not only within these walls but also well beyond them as we extend in ministry in our neighborhood, in this city and as we enter into mission nationally and internationally. Look

around--this is not only a house of worship, this is a community of power and grace. We have potential beyond our wildest dreams.

We will step out for justice even when we are criticized. We will offer compassion even if we are taken for granted. We will stand with the poor, the marginalized, and the forgotten as we continue ministries of healing and hope. We will do so because we are ambassadors for Christ and our future is not rooted in what is best for us, but rather in what is best for the Kingdom of God.

Danny, Kevin and I will begin our ministry together by listening to you. Coffee with Clergy is your chance not only to meet with us, but also to share your wisdom, your passion, your hopes for this church and your concerns with us. I pray that you will sign up and participate. As we grow ever more connected, we will elevate the essentials and focus on what is ultimately important, living as ambassadors for the Kingdom of God.

Peter Mose, the Austrian Ambassador to the United States is quoted in an article in the Washington Diplomat as saying, "Unless everyone in the world starts loving each other, I think there are always going to be ambassadors." Our work is cut out for us. We are called to focus on the essentials and share the love of God, even when it is difficult, even when we come face to face with an enemy, even when we are afraid, even when it is dangerous. We are not alone, our God is with us and we are people of the Resurrection, we are the people of Meridian Street United Methodist Church and we are ambassadors for Christ. Know this: our lives, our journey of faith will be filled with God's surprises and opportunities.