

UN-Believable

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

October 31, 2010

I am seldom at a loss for words. I confess, though, that I find myself at cross purposes this morning. Although you have received (I hope) my letter announcing that I will be leaving South Church, this is hardly a goodbye sermon. I will be here for three more months and there is much yet to say and do. Nevertheless, there are one or two things this morning I would like to say about leaving. At the same time, this is a sermon, a proclamation of the Good News that God has for us in challenging times and I do not wish to dwell long on my news. There is so much to say and do as a people of God that reaches beyond today and any particular circumstance!

So let me first say this. With Paul in the letter to the Thessalonians this morning, I give thanks to God for you, my sisters and brothers, for “your faith is growing abundantly and your affection for one another is increasing.” You have become a unique community. You are not here because your friends from the neighborhood come here. You are not here for status or business contacts. You are not here because others here sound like you or look like you or do life exactly like you. You are here because you have heard a call to know God and yourself and your neighbor differently – with compassion and hope. Never underestimate how important this call is – or how blessed you are that you have heard it and answered it. We live in times that sneer at compassion and use the word “hope” without meaning anything by it. In this South Church “body,” compassion has “hands” and hope has “legs.” Your heart is open and pumps out joy and appreciation, not blame and judgment.

So why leave now? Because my part in his work is nearly done. I have always believed that my work has been to bring the heart of this church back into the heart of the city. By God's amazing Spirit, this work has been accomplished. Many years ago it occurred to me to start calling South Church, a church 'where the city takes heart.' Those words came from a wisdom far beyond my own and they have led me and kept me going through some tough times. I am deeply grateful to God to see the heart of the city and the heart of this church become one!

Now it is time for new adventures, yours and mine! As for you, there is a process being set in place by your leadership to find an interim minister to take over when I leave. And I will be happy to turn over my responsibilities to an interim because I know that you are just fine and, as Paul says this morning, that the power of God is alive in you and will "fulfill every resolve and good work." Do not be afraid in this process. God is working a purpose out in you! Trust and let it unfold!

As for me, I look forward to new adventures as well. Although I do not have another job to go to yet, I believe God has a purpose for me as well. I have learned with you about compassion and hope, and I take my lessons with me. I may take a part-time church because I love preaching and the beautiful shift that happens when we all come to the table of the Lord's supper to be reminded that we have always been loved and forgiven. At the same time, I will start a practice of life coaching, first of all with ministers. I have learned, often the hard way, how to love and lead. I believe that I can help other ministers do the same. The coaching practice, which I will undertake with my partner Susan, is called BeLove in Yourself.

I am not leaving yet. We have several months ahead of us before we need to say goodbye. There will be Sundays and Bible Studies and Rejoice Nights and holidays and maybe a wedding or funeral or two and, of course, the inevitable church committee meetings. There will be some sort of celebration in January before I leave, I'm sure, full of tears and joy.

So let us stay in the present moment. And remember why we are here and what our good news is. The other day I happened to catch up with a short video on the Internet. The video stopped me short and moved my heart. It starts with the premise that we live in an "un-world," a world full of negatives. Or so we tell ourselves. With changing pictures of individuals, families, job sites and community events, the video describes the story of an "un-world." In challenging times we feel often "unable" to accomplish the very good we believe in. We find ourselves "unfamiliar" with our role in the world and "unconnected" with former sources of strength. Our political season feels at best "unkind." Our economy is "unstable" and our jobs are "unprotected." Our future seems "unpromising" and our leaders "unhelpful."

Yet, there is another way to tell our story, startlingly different. You see, we have never been *unloved*. Nor have we ever been *unforgiven*. We have a God who *unfolded* life out of nothingness. We have a God who is never *unavailable* to us. We have a God who is *unfazed* by our fears and *unmoved* by our *unbelief*. We have a God whose spirit is *unstoppable* when we truly *understand* who God is. We have a heart of faith that is *unconquerable* when we remember who we are.

I don't know why it's so hard to tell ourselves the good news of Jesus Christ. Have you ever got up in the morning, looked in the mirror, and said to yourself: "You know, I have never been *unloved*?" Have you ever reminded a friend who is

struggling that he or she has never been *unforgiven*? How often do you link arms with a sister or brother and say, “You and I and a heart of faith are *unconquerable!*?”

Is it really so *unbelievable* that you and I have a job to do – to be Good News in an *unhappy* world?

I believe in God and I believe in you! Together or apart, like Paul, I ask God that we may continue to be worthy of this great calling. South Church: *be the heart of the city!* And I will take a piece of that heart wherever I go!

Grace and peace and all love you, now and forever. Amen