

## **A Final Address**

4 August 2019

***“... and I applied my mind to search and investigate in wisdom all things that are done under the sun”***

- Ecclesiastes 1:13 (Proper 13 – Year C)

Every year for thirty-four years I have begun the academic year with an opening address that explains why we are here; why we have been here at Purdue since 1956. We're not quite at the beginning of the “fall” semester, but I thought I would do this sermon one last time. It is my valedictory.

We begin, as always, with a paraphrase of Søren Kierkegaard. (I'm going to put the original quote in the on-line version of this sermon.<sup>1</sup>) Kierkegaard carried out a relentless verbal attack on the Lutheran state church in Denmark, even though His older brother Peter was later to become a bishop in that same state church.

He complained that each Sunday the citizens of Copenhagen, dressed in their finest, would come into church and take the seats they had rented as though they were attending the theater. Then as they went from church to home, they would comment on the quality of the music associated with the performance, critique the day's liturgical arts, the minister's message, and perhaps his delivery of his lines. It was as though the speaker was an actor.

Kierkegaard moved the religious professional from center stage. He argued that the priest was merely a minor player, sitting in the wings, prompting, giving a word to the real actors, those who were sitting in the pews. They were called to act out the gospel on those stages where they lived and worked. God, said Kierkegaard, was the critical theatergoer. God was the theatergoer. The congregation is the actor.

That is the point of a ministry in higher education, “the solemn charm of the art”. How do we teach each successive generation to give flesh to the Word on the stage of the world? The endless dilemma of how the Word is to be brought into the world is always at hand.

It is a missionary work.

It is different, not better, than the usual work of our churches. Parishes, parochial organizations, as ordinarily conceived and executed, focus on maintenance and attendance. Listen to how much better the new organ sounds. Our Sunday school has swollen. See all the people here in the pews. We have grown the staff. We have built a home. We have arrived.

All of these are good things.

But our job is to carve out a visible presence in a place that is NOT the church's own. It is a missionary work.

It is an uncomfortable place. It is an uncertain life. Good Shepherd has lived in five buildings; house, church, center, house, church. I have done ministry from three of them under three Bishops. It is an uncomfortable place. It is an uncertain life.

It is a missionary work with a peculiar language.

It is about the journey.

Parishes speak of arrival. You came here to start a job. You joined the choir. You bought a new house. Then there is the arrival of the baby. The babies. "Family" is the metaphor.

Here we are all going somewhere else. The image of the pilgrimage is a powerful one. We are between homes. "Peers" become friends. "Friends" make truth.

It is about the work.

There is no "academic village". We don't have a home. We live above the store. We sleep in the office. We eat at the plant.

Our calendar is not Julian nor Gregorian but "Purduean". Fall begins in August. Our relationships are contractual. Self-worth depends on the utility of our field, and our achievements within that field. No one on any campus has sufficient moral credibility to proclaim what the better life might be other than the security provide by a good income. The campus as moral inspiration is a nostalgic vestige<sup>2</sup>.

It is about an experiment in community.

Parishes are a dependable source of consolation, which enjoy a certain discipline in organization. They have a history.

Here, each year is a Nativity. Can we build a mentoring community, a sacramental community in this generation? Can we then repeat the experiment?

Can we combine the emerging truth of the young adult, with the example and encouragement of a mentor, and ground both in an ideologically compatible social group<sup>3</sup>? Or in the language of an apostle, "can scribes trained for the kingdom bring out of their storeroom the best of the new and the old"? (Mt. 15:32) Can there be a new home? Can there be a new home, a new polity, and a new collective identity?

If this is a missionary work, then who are the natives?

The Students.

Students as they look for love and work.

Students as they continue to mimic their parents religion. Students as they take a hiatus from organized religion. Students as they search, either accidentally or intentionally, for new or renewed religious languages. Most of our church language is a puzzle. "Episcopal"? "Diocese?"

Students as they search for any coherent language around identity, intimacy, and mortality; birth and copulation and death. "I'll be the missionary", writes T.S. Eliot. "... all the facts when you get to brass tacks, birth and copulation and death, birth and copulation and death, birth and copulation and death."<sup>4</sup> Who am I? Am I lovable? What will happen when I fail? When I am broken?

The Faculty and The Staff.

We provide pastoral care. We care for those who work in the educational industry. There is no middle class in higher education any longer. Our members here have often been migrant workers, without place or power. Post-docs, adjuncts are on short-term contracts, with no hope of tenure. Staff positions are reduced or outsourced. Other academics are demoralized by their lack of influence on the business of higher education and its managers.

We prophesy. The successful may see themselves as self-employed entrepreneurs above the churn below. Perhaps most believers are eager for a separate spiritual life, one apart from the corporation for which they work. We challenge these woman and men to say how it is their faith affects their work. How they research or teach mimes their values to the university. You don't have to say a word. Every syllabus is a creed. We say there must be more to this than a contractual obligation to transfer a skill set. The core of teaching is that the teacher lets their disciples take part in their life, and thus grasps the mystery of their life's work<sup>5</sup>.

The University and The Church.

We work with the corporate person that is the university, to whom we are usually invisible, as it proclaims to society's next generation what is valuable. Is it only the security that can be achieved by a high-paying job? So it seems. Are there any higher obligations a student might have to the world beyond the campus?

In 1884 a friend told Cornell's Andrew White that he doubted that any of Cornell's graduates could be elected to office in an America that so distrusted expertise. White responded, "nobody expects to get a majority of the men (sic) educated as I propose into office at first, but if we only had plenty of them to stand outside and fire into the people, and especially into those in office, they would certainly be obliged, sooner or later, to surrender."<sup>6</sup> If only . . .

We work with the body that is the church, which looks at us with both suspicion and lust, so that it may better know the wideness of the world into which the gospel is to be taken and within which it is to be preached; the world outside its aesthetic, its linguistic bubble.

In the turbulent 60's then Presiding Bishop John Hines, a heroic figure, wrote:

*"Against even the worst of possibilities, must be set the inescapable obligation of Christians, that the Body of Christ must be prepared to offer itself up for the sake of the healing and the solidarity of the whole human family, whatever its religious or racial identities. Especially must the Body of Christ risk its own life in bearing and sharing the burdens of those who are being exploited, humiliated, and disinherited!"<sup>#7</sup>*

Campus ministers applauded. Hines forever changed the Church's definition of "domestic mission" to "social engagement".

And Hines wrote this:

*"I did say, and I still conclude, that ministry in higher education is the last, best hope of the Episcopal Church in our time. I believe that because I believe that the university and college chaplaincy is the most difficult, and the most rewarding, of the responsibilities of this Church. Nowhere else, in comparable fashion, is the clear presentation and the effective interpretation of the Christian gospel more likely to bear fruit than on the college campus, where ideas in conflict and embattled Truth attempt to capture the best minds of this generation. Nowhere else is the Christian faith as likely to be seriously challenged – or as gratefully received."*

At the same time money for higher education ministries was cut from the national church budget. (Hines was also considered, unfairly, the chief cause of the church's shrinking population and the loss of confidence in its national structure.) In my colleague Sam Portaro's excellent phrase, campus ministry was "disappointed".<sup>#8</sup> Good Shepherd left its church building behind and moved into the Wesley Foundation.

That irony continues to dominate campus ministry's life in our evolving church.

Like St. Paul, we mark out the grace to be found in the transition of the ages.

To the fearful and the anxious, to those on pilgrimage, we proclaim God's loving, faithful word. We proclaim it to those often never exposed to the vitality and the richness of that word, particularly as it is expressed in the Anglican tradition.

We preach the Incarnation.

We proclaim God's prophetic and righteous word to those so satisfied with their lives that they seem to have no need of God's mercy and forgiveness.

We preach the Cross.

We proclaim God's life giving and animating word to individuals and institutions, to personalities and corporate persons. We proclaim love and friendship to each one. We proclaim community to all.

We preach the Pentecost.

Finally, the next year or so will resemble, I think, Good Shepherd's experiences between 2004-2005. Then, we moved from the Hayes St. house and Good Shepherd Chapel to Meridian St. and Good Shepherd Church. In November 2004 Steve Shook jumped out of his Audi and tried to sell me this building. In February 2005 the diocesan approved buying the Frist Church of Christ Scientist. Thanks Steve Fales. On March 30 2005 we closed on the property. Thanks Tom Wood. On May 1 2005 we moved in and held our first service. Thanks to so many of you. On September 18, 2005 Bishop Waynick dedicated the church. Thanks Bishop Cate.

Then, you switched buildings. Now, you switch priests. August 4, 2019 was Father Peter Bunder's last Sunday, and then . . . . .

Let me predict that the new person you select will be younger, sleeker, and far more pious. I bet you buy new vestments. They will stay less than 34 years.

But they cannot think university work more important than I have thought it. All the more important because college, and then grad school, made me very much who I am today.

They will not have had Ted Jones for their bishop. Ted married a co-ed. You can't do that anymore. Ted and Anne were the definition of grace. They cannot have the same commitment to the community outside these doors I have had, an involvement I thank you and Peder Berdahl for facilitating. (That's a good story. Mayor Jan Mills asked me to run for city council. I called the diocesan office to ask if I could run for city council. Bishop Cate was on sabbatical. Peder Berdahl, then Canon to the ordinary, said I guess so - just don't put any campaign signs on the church lawn!)

They will not have been married to Katy O'Malley; who, as it has happened, is more important to this larger community than I am. Katy left beautiful Lexington, VA and swallowed all the ugly that came with mid-north central Indiana to let me be my own boss and get a corner office with not one, but two, windows. I love you Katy. I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you. Thanks too to Molly and Emily who kept me "cooler" longer than I had any right to be. Molly, thank you for "Friday School". Emily, who can forget our "Drink Beer, Make Love? Be Episcopalian!" t-shirt? I hope you both liked growing up here.

There are too many people to note as I close. Each gave me, and all of us, some special joy. Let me single out Ruth Dowden who was on that search committee in 1984/85 that called me here, and is still around to evaluate what sort of choice I turned out to be. I did well here, I think. This career, as I said in January in my annual chaplain's report, has been a privilege. I leave, happily, with a sense of satisfaction, confidence. To quote Winnie the Pooh, how lucky I am having something that makes saying goodbye so hard.

God bless you.

Amen

## NOTES

*#1 What goes on between the speaker and the hearer in a genuine edifying discourse? It is so on the stage, as you know well enough, that someone sits and prompts by whispers; [he is hidden;] he is the inconspicuous one; he is and wishes to be overlooked. But then there is another, he strides out prominently, he draws every eye to himself. For that reason he has been given his name, that is: actor. He impersonates a distinct individual. In the skillful sense of this illusionary art, each word becomes true when embodied in him, true through him—and yet he is told what he shall say by the hidden one that sits and whispers. No one is so foolish as to regard the prompter as more important than the actor.*

*Now forget this light talk about art. Alas, in regard to things spiritual, the foolishness of many is this, that they in the secular sense look upon the speaker as an actor, and the listeners as theatergoers who are to pass judgment upon the artist. But the speaker is not the actor—not in the remotest sense. No, the speaker is the prompter. There are no mere theatergoers present, for each listener will be looking into his own heart. The stage is eternity, and the listener, if he is the true listener (and if he is not, he is at fault) stands before God during the talk. The prompter whispers to the actor what he is to say, but the actor's repetition of it is the main concern—is the solemn charm of the art. The speaker whispers the word to the listeners. But the main concern is*

earnestness: that the listeners by themselves, with themselves, and to themselves, in the silence before God, may speak with the help of this address.

*The address is not given for the speaker's sake, in order that men may praise or blame him. The listener's repetition of it is what is aimed at. If the speaker has the responsibility for what he whispers, then the listener has an equally great responsibility not to fail short in his task. In the theater, the play is staged before an audience who are called theatergoers; but at the devotional address, God himself is present. In the most earnest sense, God is the critical theatergoer, who looks on to see how the lines are spoken and how they are listened to: hence here the customary audience is wanting. The speaker is then the prompter, and the listener stands openly before God. **The listener ... is the actor, who in all truth acts before God.***

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart*, pp. 180-81 (SV XI114-15); reprinted in *Parables of Kierkegaard*, Thomas C. Oden, ed.

#2 "Moral Dimensions of University Economies" – William M. Chace President Emory University  
*Emory Magazine Summer 1998*

#3 p.89 Sharon Parks *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment*

#4 FRAGMENT OF AN AGON – T.S. Eliot

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: SWEENEY. WAUCHOPE. HORSFALL. KLIPSTEIN. KRUMPACKER.  
SWARTS. SNOW. DORIS. DUSTY.  
(All PRESET IN SCENE)

SWEENEY: .....I'll carry you off  
To a cannibal isle.

DORIS: You'll be the cannibal!

SWEENEY:  
You'll be the missionary!  
You'll be my little seven stone missionary!  
I'll gobble you up. I'll be the cannibal.

DORIS: You'll carry me off? [To a cannibal isle?](#)

SWEENEY: I'll be the cannibal.

DORIS: .....I'll be the missionary.  
[I'll convert you!](#)

SWEENEY: .....I'll convert you!  
Into a stew.  
A nice little, white little, missionary stew.

DORIS: You wouldn't eat me!

SWEENEY: .....Yes I'd eat you!  
In a nice little, white little, soft little, tender little,  
Juicy little, right little, missionary stew.  
You see this egg  
You see this egg

Well that's life on a crocodile isle.  
There's no telephones  
There's no gramophones  
There's no motor cars  
No two-seaters, no six-seaters,  
No Citroën, no Rolls-Royce.  
Nothing to eat but the fruit as it grows.  
Nothing to see but the palmtrees one way  
And the sea the other way,  
Nothing to hear but the sound of the surf.  
Nothing at all but three things

DORIS: .....What things?

SWEENEY: Birth, and copulation, and death.  
That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all,  
Birth, and copulation, and death.

DORIS: I'd be bored.

SWEENEY: .....You'd be bored.  
Birth, and copulation, and death.

DORIS: I'd be bored.

SWEENEY: .....You'd be bored.  
Birth, and copulation, and death.  
That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:  
Birth, and copulation, and death.  
I've been born, and once is enough.  
You dont remember, but I remember,  
Once is enough.

*#5 p.102 Parker Palmer To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education*

*#6 p.85 Laurence R. Veysey The Emergence of the American University.*

*#7 <https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/leadership/clergy/hines>*

*#8 p. Portaro/Pelosi Inquiring Minds and Discerning Heart: Vocation and Ministry With Young Adults on Campus.*