

Good morning, and welcome to the Laity Session.

Today I am blessed by God and by the Conference who have asked me to bring the message today. I welcome each of you, and as you journey through this three days of conferencing, may be richly be blessed by the presence of God in our lives.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we gather together today to do the work of your church. We come of our own decision, Father, to be honored and glorified by you. Today, we pray for your presence to be with us; to guide and to direct in all that we do, all that we say, and Father, for each of those times when votes are necessary, that we may do your will. We pray your blessings upon each person who is present here this day. And we pray for your guiding power to be with us. Help us, guide us, and direct us, Father, that we may become better and stronger churches for you. And that Father, in this world, where there are so many that do not know what a church is, that we may be the ones to reach out to them. Father, for your honor and glory, for these things we ask in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We will have a PowerPoint from You Tube on the Samaritan woman at the well.

- Samaritan Woman Video – visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sma4o3mCPwA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sma4o3mCPwA) –

I will be reading from the Gospel of John, the twenty-seventh verse and the fourth chapter, through the forty-second.

“Just then his disciples came back. And they marveled that he was talking with a woman. But no one said, ‘What do you seek?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ So the woman left the water jar, and went away into the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Has anyone brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, *there are yet four months, then comes the harvest?* Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, *one sows, another reaps*. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor.’ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him, because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So, when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his words. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’” The Word of God for the people of God. (Thanks be to God.)

I selected this Scripture because out of this Scripture comes quite a few sermons if we take time to sit down and to study them.

The important part that I am going to ask, did you see that as she left, she turned around and she looked at Jesus and she smiled. I believe that that was the moment that deep in her heart she knew that he was the Christ. That he was who he said he was, and she believed.

How is it with us? How difficult is it for us to believe when the Lord calls us to be involved in our church work, to be involved in reaching out to those in the neighborhoods and the workplaces, and in our homes for those that don't know Jesus? Can we with her smile and say, today, I know and I have met that Jesus that is recorded in the fourth chapter of John? Can we say that we have understood the call to each of us?

For many, many years I had the call, but I was stubborn. And I refused to listen, because I had things that I wanted to accomplish in my life. I spent twelve years as a constable for the state of Pennsylvania. I trained many constables along the way. I learned the good, the bad, and the ugly by having that position. And I believe it was God who directed me in that area so that I would understand that not everybody that is accused is guilty.

It was a time when my heart was open to understand and to see that rumors that get started are not necessarily the truth. It was a time of understanding the power of God, and working with people. It prepared me for my ministry. It guided and directed me in what I do today.

I am blessed. I have been assigned to three churches, and every Sunday I have three messages. And I have been blessed by all three congregations with their support, and also with their prayers.

How is it in your church? How well do you do? And this morning I am going to leave a few questions with you. Do you know that a vital church begins with your committees within your church? Your Ad Council; your trustees; the SPRC or the PPRC, whichever you choose to identify it as? Your ministry team? The working of those teams in harmony. Now that doesn't mean that you entirely agree with everything, but you disagree agreeably that God would bless, and make the right decision.

Do you know that that shows forth in your congregation? When they see a church in unity; when they are welcomed into the congregation.

In my past years, I have been in churches where there was no welcome. There was nobody to give me a bulleting. They were put on a stand, and I had to pick it up. And when it came time to pass the peace, and you would turn to your neighbor beside you, they would turn their back to you, and go welcome somebody else.

Many times I've felt unwelcomed. Do we know what it means when there is a new person in church to be able to reach out to them, to welcome them, to let them know that you are thankful that they are there, and to guide them along the way?

There are so many times that we find ourselves being the ones that caused the division. I have been in churches that have been divided down the middle; that they can't agree. I've been in

council meetings where a brother was the chairperson of the council, and his brother was the chairperson of the trustees. They never got along. They argued. They stood up and faced each other. There were times when I thought there was going to be fisticuffs between them.

But you see, those are things that boil over into the congregation, because the congregation feels that separation. And I believe in order to be a vital church we need to come together and to welcome those who come to visit us. And today, just having a beautiful church building is not enough to welcome people into the church to worship. It takes a personal commitment of each of the members. It takes a personal commitment to be able to reach out and to go beyond the walls of the church.

I am convinced that sometimes we look at our worship service and think it's top secret. And when we leave the service, not a word is said; it is not discussed.

I went to see the movie, "God is not Dead." And when the people left that theater, there was conversation all over the place about what took place. When was the last time that we heard that when we left our worship service? When was the last time we shared that with a neighbor? When was the last time we shared it with our family members that don't attend the church? When was it we shared it in the workplace? Those are all things that we as a vital congregation do to reach out to bring souls to Christ.

And in the area that I live, if everybody in that community of Amberson and Spring Run were to show up, there would not be enough seats in all of the churches throughout that community. But we find many of them with just a low number attending. Why is it? What have we not done as a congregation? What have we not done as pastors to reach out to save souls? Why is it that we look and say, well, that's their job to do? No, I believe it is the job of everybody that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ to reach out to souls. And let me tell you, the most important part, I think, for all of us is, we hear the call but we don't respond. And there are times that we are needed so often to be able to respond so that people can see that we take our stand. And we're kind of ashamed to do that.

When I lived in Mechanicsburg several years ago, I was out on the Carlisle Pike. And I was singing along with a Christian hymn that was on the radio. And I heard 'clap, clap, clap, clap, clap.' Well, I was embarrassed. I put my window up. Is that not how we react? We don't want the world to see that we do believe and trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? When we come together and pray together and work together and support each other, we are part of the blessing. We are part of the joys that we have been called to be a part of God's kingdom.

It's difficult, isn't it, sometimes to be able to shake the hand of the person that you don't care for?

Many years ago before I got involved in the ministry in my church, there were two families that were friends. And one day they got into an argument. There was a fight. And all of a sudden, they started sitting on separate sides of the church. They no longer talked to each other. But you know what that did? That caused the rest of the congregation to take sides. They couldn't agree any longer. They didn't show that they were unified as brothers and sisters in Christ. And we see

so much of that today. Why? Why is it that we can't hear the call of God to reach out to love even the unlovely?

It's hard. It's hard when somebody offends you. But why can't we be the ones to take the upper hand and to seek out forgiveness; to seek out a relationship? Those are the things that people notice when they come into our churches; how well do they get along. Do they talk to each other? Do they welcome me as a stranger?

When I first started my ministry as a certified lay speaker, I went throughout the conference dressed as a hobo. And I would come into the church and sit down with all of the tattered clothes, and dirty and filthy as I was. And I would sit down in those congregations. And do you know, I believe I did fifteen of those throughout the years that I was part of that. And I went as far as Lancaster to bring the message of coming together in love. Not one person moved when I sat beside them. That spoke well of those congregations. And I was welcomed and invited to come back.

The only bad part about that was, that when I left Middletown at the one church where I was, I stopped at a diner for dinner. And I was dressed like a bum. And across from me was a young boy about three years old. And he sat there and he kept waving to me. And I would wave back. And his mother would say, "Don't you wave to that dirty old man." And the boy kept doing it. So, when we left, I was behind her at the line to pay the bill, and he put his hand over her shoulder and shook my hand. And she said, "What did I tell you about that dirty, filthy old man. You don't bother with them." If I would have told her that I had just done a presentation in a church, I don't think it would have meant any difference to her, because she would have said you are telling a lie about this.

And so the journey goes on. I did other ones, and then I was graciously blessed. And I've sat in restaurants dressed like that, and I was always treated well. I think a lot of it has to do with our attitude and our disposition toward others.

And in my closing thought, I want to share with you. It's a lot of years ago, but I was invited to speak at a men's group. And it was on a Friday evening. And they asked me to tell my name, my occupation, and what my plans were for the future. Well I identified myself. And I said I am employed as a stripper. The man sitting in the front row lost his false teeth. They bounced across the floor, and he got up, put them in his pocket, and when he walked by me at the podium he said, "I can't understand why we asked a Christian to come here to speak to us." And I thought to myself, I really feel sorry for that man, because whether he realizes it or not, we are all sinners saved by grace. So what was his complaint?

But it's something for you to think about. And for those of you that are contemplating getting involved in your church in the lay servant portion, or a certified lay minister, or a licensed local pastor, and for those that are young enough to go on to become an elder, hear the call of God. Listen to what he has for you.

Do you know, for everybody gives us gifts; separate gifts. We're all different. Just look at us today, and the difference in every one of us. Our bodies, our minds, our souls, we're all different.

But there's one thing that brings us together, and that's the love of Jesus Christ and God's mercies extended to us. May God add his blessings, and may you have a blessed Annual Conference. Amen.

Let us join together in prayer. Heavenly Father, this day we have felt your presence with us. We ask now that you would lead, guide, and direct us as we journey through this Conferencing time. That Father, and as we return to our churches, our endeavors may be, Father, to serve you. And for those that are seeking the call, or those that have the call, Father, help them to respond in accordance to your word and will. Father, I come as your servant this day. And I come because, Father, I love you. And I come because I love those who this day are sitting in the audience. And today I pray your blessings upon each one. For these things we ask in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.