

“Creating A Revolution”

Ordination Sermon

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What I have to say today is, for those who will be ordained and consecrated, they are answering the call. But is also for those who are serving, who have already answered the call. But it's my belief that God is constantly calling us. And sometimes God calls us to something different than what we are currently doing that may differ from our current understanding.

I also want to speak to the laity who are present here, because I am fairly certain that among you there are some whom God is calling. Or, indeed, God is always calling; calling each one of us to ministry in some form or fashion in some place at some particular time. So I invite you to listen; to listen for God's call to you.

I want to begin by simply quickly reflecting briefly on my own journey. I can remember going to Annual Conference with my parents as a child. The Delaware Annual Conference would meet at Tindley Temple United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And the big thing about going to Conference for me was, that I would get to see my relatives, particularly my grandfather, because they would show up at Annual Conference on Sunday.

I had no idea, as a little boy, that one day I would be among the clergy. But over a period of years and a quiet voice, God began to call me. And I responded “yes” to God's call.

Be careful how you shut off your telephone; how you silence your cell phone; how you ignore your neighbor's; how you refuse to listen to your spiritual partners, pilgrims on the pathway, the spiritual pathway, because God may be speaking to you in a still, quiet voice.

So often God calls when we are not expecting God to call. I was ordained in the Peninsula Conference. It was my assumption then that I would be ordained in the Peninsula Conference, and like so many elders before me, I would go to the Eastern Shore of Maryland and hope that the superintendents wouldn't forget that I was down at a little appointment in the woods on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. But it didn't happen that way. Through Bishop Prince Taylor, God called me to serve in New Jersey. And I was doing OK, I thought. Until one day Bishop C. Dale White called me in and said I have an appointment. He didn't say I have an appointment that I want you to consider, I have an appointment for you. Well, Bishop, where is this appointment? It's at St. Marks in Montclair. And I'm thinking to myself *St. Marks in Montclair, that's all well and good, but that's another annual conference. That's the Northern New Jersey Conference. I've already transferred once to the Southern Conference, and now you want me to transfer to the Northern Conference.* And so I did to receive that appointment.

Then there was one year when the people who were speculating about who the next district superintendent would be were running down the lists of people whom the bishop would surely consider for appointment to the opening on the district. One of those gurus cornered me one day and said the word is that the bishop called you and asked you to serve as a superintendent, and you said “no.” I said, Oh? I didn't get that call. But the story doesn't end there. I was sitting in the pastor's study at St. Marks church one morning. The secretary said to me, Bishop Neil Irons

is on the phone and wants to talk with you. That was the call to serve as a district superintendent. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that God would somehow consider me to be an Episcopal leader. And yet God did. And the people of God sent me forth.

All of us preachers like to speculate about assignments and appointments. And I confess that I looked at the potential assignments and appointments if I were elected, and I said they'll never send me to the New York Conference. And I got the call that bishops get at Jurisdictional Conference. And I recognized the voice, because it was a voice from childhood. It was the voice of Ernest Swiggett saying we welcome you to the New York Annual Conference. God calls. And God calls in a variety of ways, because God needs you and me to give leadership in God's church.

So then, what kind of leader are you? Have you thought about that question lately? Are you a spiritual leader? I certainly hope so. Are you an administrative leader? I certainly hope so. But I want to suggest that as you exercise your spiritual leadership, as you exercise your administrative leadership, you want to consider the dynamic of partnership; the dynamic of partnership. Because I believe firmly that ministry is a partnership.

Too often some leaders are accused of being loners. Some pastors are accused of being loners. Now one of my favorite characters, I believe, is inappropriately described as a loner. You know who that is? The Lone Ranger. People say don't be a Lone Ranger. And I am saying, oh yes, be a Lone Ranger. Why? Let's go back and take a look at the story of the Lone Ranger. Now I'm a real Lone Ranger fan, because in retirement I am able to watch the Lone Ranger where we live every morning. At nine o'clock there are two episodes, at eleven o'clock there are another two episodes. So I watch the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger character came into being when a group of Texas Rangers were ambushed by the Cavendish Gang. And there was one lone survivor. And that lone survivor was nursed back to health by Tonto, whom he previously had nursed back to health some years previously. So he took the name The Lone Ranger. But now, the Lone Ranger never operates alone. He always had his faithful companion and partner, Tonto. They never operated alone either. They would always partner up with the local sheriff or the local U.S. Marshall. And in turn, as it was appropriate, they would partner up with the local citizens so that they could strive for justice in the Old West. You will never hear me say don't be a Lone Ranger. But I will suggest that you cannot do effective ministry alone. Ministry is not a singular activity. Ministry is a joint activity; it ought to be an activity of partnership.

God calls.

First, let's consider accepting God's call, God's commission. When God calls, I only know one response, and that is yes. Now when God calls, if you would just go ahead and say yes, you can eliminate a lot of heartache in between, because when you say no, that's just putting off the inevitable. You can't say no to God. When God calls you, you can't say no. The only time you can say no is when you think God has called you, and you get it mixed up. And brothers and sisters, some folk get it mixed up. They think God has called them. God didn't call them. Maybe they called themselves, but God sure didn't. When God calls, the answer is yes, because we believe that God calls those that God wants to be leaders in the God movement.

When God commissioned Joshua, God called Joshua because Moses had died. Go back for a quick moment. God called Moses. Moses, like many of you, was minding his own business, doing his work, but Moses had a quality that I greatly admire. He had the quality of curiosity. So when he saw the bush burning and was not consumed by the fire, he stopped to find out why. Are you curious? I sure hope so, because curiosity and creativity are the stuff of leadership. Moses stopped. And Moses responded to God's call, but he didn't do it without first offering up a lot of excuses. Does that sound familiar? Oh, we know how to offer up the excuses. We know how to say, God, you got the wrong person. God, I am not able. But know this, my brothers and sisters, when God calls you and you say yes, God will equip you for the work of ministry. I don't speak well. Don't worry about it, I'll send your brother with you. How are they to know that I have authenticity? Just tell him who sent you; I AM sent you. Well, suppose they don't believe anything I say? What's that you have in your hand? Throw it down on the ground, you staff, and you will have signs of your authority and your authenticity. Know this, brothers and sisters, as the people of God doing the work ministry, God equips you and God grants you the authority that you need to carry out the work of ministry.

One of the things that God told Joshua is important for us to remember. God told Joshua I will be with you. Friends, you are never alone. You may feel lonely at times, and there are times when you will feel lonely, but God is always with you, because God does not leave us alone. God always shows up on time. And God leads us along the way.

So, then, when God called Joshua, God and Joshua entered into a partnership. And that partnership was based on Joshua's knowledge of God, Joshua's acceptance of God, and Joshua's faith in God. Partnership.

A quick word about partnership. Partnership, I want to suggest to you, is about relationships. In my work of ministry as a pastor and in my years of supervision, if there is one problem that clergy have, it is the problem of relationships. Relationships. The lack of relationships sometimes, inappropriate relationships sometimes. But we are called to be in ministry, and to be in ministry, we must be in relationship with God through God's son, Jesus Christ. And that which Jesus gives to us is love. For God so loved the world, that God gave us the Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for us because of his great love for us.

Another aspect of relationships is trust. And we see this word trust bandied around in the political poles these days. Who do the American people trust more than the other? Who do you trust? Who do you trust? Who do you trust? As people of God, as pilgrim disciples, we can only trust in God.

Now all of you have told us right now that you're in relationship with God, and you trust God, you trust and you obey. But I've got some questions for you. I want you to explore your relationship with God just a little bit. And remember, I suggested to you that we enter into our relationship with God through Jesus the Christ. So then, my first question: Do you know Jesus? Oh, you were quick to say yes. And I affirm that. And that's the answer that I expect from you. That you will say yes, I know Jesus. The disciples knew Jesus. One of them betrayed him. One of them denied him. All of them deserted him. But they knew Jesus. The disciples came to know Jesus, however, as their friend. And when they came to know Jesus as their friend, they literally

were able to turn the world upside down. They came to know Jesus as their friend when they realized that all that Jesus had taught them was coming into fruition. That even though they had deserted Jesus, Jesus still loved them, and that Jesus had given them the power of the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of ministry. Jesus was their friend.

You have affirmed without reservation that you know Jesus. So now, that takes me to my second question, which I have already been exploring: How well do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus as your friend? Be careful, now, because you really don't have many friends in this world. And friends are those people who believe in you, who love you, people whom you can count on in any moment. And you know that they will respond to your need. Now, how many folks are like that in your life? We don't have many friends. Do you know Jesus as your friend? Are you able to join with the poet when the poet says: What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear. Why? All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. People of God, why do you go around carrying all these burdens? Turn 'em loose. Turn 'em over to Jesus. If you know Jesus as your friend, turn 'em over to Jesus. Turn them over to Jesus.

A dear friend of ours, who passed away almost a year ago now, he was a trucker by profession, but really his first profession was auto mechanics. One of our cars had broken down. The timing gear had gone, and we took the car to the shop. And they wanted an extortionate amount of money. And I told him what the status of the vehicle was, and he said to me, tomorrow we'll go and get your car. We towed the car to his house, and he repaired it. A friend who responded in a time of need. A friend whom I trusted dearly. A friend whom I know loved us. Do you know Jesus as your friend?

Now I said I had three questions. Do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus as your friend? Now here's the third question, listen up: Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? See, there are a lot of folks who intellectually can talk about Jesus, but they don't know Jesus yet in their heart. John Wesley was one of those people who intellectually could talk about Jesus, but he realized that there was something lacking. We talk about a come to Jesus moment. Well, we all have to come to Jesus. We all have to have that experience when we accept Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. Then when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we can sing together, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the Solid Rock I stand. Why? Because all other ground, all other ground is sinking sand. Stand on Jesus, the Solid Rock, and you will be able to move forward with the ministry that God has called you to.

Now we haven't forgotten about Joshua. Joshua was called to lead the people, God's people. And God wanted Joshua to lead the people across the river. And God told Joshua, I am with you. But Joshua, I want you to be strong and I want you to be courageous. Brothers and sisters, God wants you to be strong and God wants you to be courageous. And remember, that in all that you do in ministry, God is with you.

A second thought I would share with you is doing ministry in partnership. When Jesus called his first disciples, he was out there by the lake, and he was preaching, and he saw some of the guys

fishing. And he decided that their boat would make a good preaching platform. So he got them to move out a little way from the shore so that he could finish preaching. And then when he finished his preaching, he started to meddling. He got into the business of these fishermen, and told them to launch out into the deep water. Can you imagine that? A carpenter telling these professional fishermen where to fish. He said launch out there into the deep water, because out there in the deep water, I am going to make you fishers of men and women. It's out there in the deep water where you are going to catch, have the big catch. Well, Peter, in a sane moment, which was sometimes rather rare for him, he said if you say so. Have you ever said that to God? Well, God, if you say so, I'll do it. So they launched out into the deep. And Peter did as he was instructed. The catch was so great, so great, that their boat was about to sink. So what did they do? They called for their partners, and their partners came and helped them.

Do you have partners in your ministry? If you don't, hurry up and find some. Get some partners. Don't be a loner in your ministry, because you can't do it alone. It takes a team in order to do the work of ministry effectively. Launch out into the deep.

Now quite frankly, that scares some folks. And I know we have some fisherpeople among us here. And those of you who like to fish know that you can stand on the bank of the river, on the bank of the stream. I mean, you can even wade out into the stream, and you'll catch what you catch. But if you really want to catch a lot of fish, you've got to get out into the deep water. Friends, we've got too many pastors, too many lay people, hanging around in the shallow water. Get out of that shallow water. Launch out into the deep water. In other words, I'm saying to you, go where the people are. If they are not in your church, go to the places where they are. I don't know of any fish that just jumps up out of the water into your net when you're standing up there on the shoreline. You've got to go out there into the water; you've got to get the right bait; and you've got to be there at the right time in order to have a great catch. Don't be satisfied with just standing on the shoreline. There is no room for shallow water ministry. We need to have some deep water ministry. And don't worry, when you get out into the deep water, sometimes it gets a little stormy. Sometimes the water gets rough.

I remember one day we went fishing on a charter boat. We went out thirty, forty miles out into the Atlantic Ocean, and it started to get rough. And that boat started to rock. And one by one, folks started to getting sick. But there was one person on that boat who didn't get sick. You know who it was? It was a little boy who had come with his father. He walked around the deck looking at the men as if to say what is wrong with you? And that's the question that we have for the church: What's wrong with you? Get out into the deep water. For when the storms of life are raging, we simply pray with Tindley: O God, stand by me. When the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, O God, stand by me, stand by me. Whether you're on the shoreline or whether you're out there in the deep water. Whether it is calm or whether it is stormy weather, God is with you. And God will sustain you and lead you through.

Now I suggested that you need to be in partnership. And you need to be a deep water Christian. Who are your partners? Well, your first partner is God. Your second partner is Jesus. And your third partner is the Holy Spirit. But you've got a fourth partner. Pastors, who is your fourth partner? Who is your fourth partner? Who is your fourth partner? Pastors, who is your fourth partner? The laity.

Some pastors don't seem to understand that. They think that they are the loner. That God has sent them there with all knowledge, all expertise. Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! When you go to the congregation, you are one among many Christians. Take time to listen to the laity in the congregation, and learn from them. But not only do you want to learn from them, give them the opportunity to share leadership in the life of the congregation. Get together, then, and go out into the deep water, where Jesus told the disciples, when you follow me, I'll teach you to be fisher of people.

I've titled this sermon, "Creating a Revolution." Friends, a revolution in the church doesn't require an army. A revolution in the church doesn't require a sneak attack. A revolution in the church requires women and men who are in partnership together with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Two quick examples. First, what's happening in the community where you're serving? And if you're not yet serving, ask the question when you get there, what's happening in the community where you're serving. Because too often, what we discover when we ask the question what's happening in the community where you're serving, the answer is, as far as the church folk is concerned, not much. In the story of Paul and Silas, we meet a character named Jason. And as the community grapples with Jason, they declare these people who have been turning the world upside down have come here, too. Bishop Park will be greatly delighted if somebody calls up and says that the Methodists in our town are turning this community upside down. Now how are you going to do that? By proclaiming the name of Jesus. They went to and fro all around town talking about the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and people listened.

Then there was Peter and John making their way one day to the temple at prayer time. They met a man with a handicapping condition who wanted them to give him some alms, to give him some money, and he told him, you know sir, we don't have any money. Now if we confess, we've all done that, but we weren't telling the truth. They said, we don't have any money, and we say we don't have any money. And that's the end of the conversation, and we go on. But that was not the end of the conversation with Peter and John. They said, we don't have any silver and gold, but what we have, we give to you. What did they have? Jesus. What do you have? Jesus. Give it to the people of God, and you'll create a revolution in the place where you serve. Amen.