

Chapter 12

I Deliver My First Sermon

Immediately after the awesome experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, I began a weekly prayer meeting and Bible study class in my own home among my neighbors. However, this project did not last very long. Many who were Christians longer than I seemed to resent a novice telling them things they had never before seen or heard, making it very difficult for them to receive and believe. Yet, we always remained friends and at various times during the succeeding years, different ones in the group would declare that they were proud and happy that we had continued “in the Way.”

At this time the Great Depression had arrived, and besides teaching a Bible class in the Methodist Church and then in an interdenominational work, we set ourselves about feeding the hungry and clothing the poor among those families who were feeling the pinch. We had found in the Book of James:

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world.”
(James 1:27)

The Lord blessed this work among the poor, and it developed into quite a neighborhood commissary effort. We set up a shoe repair center by going down to the Dodge Plant for salvage belting in gunny sacks. We used the unemployed fathers of the children to sole the shoes of the neighborhood boys and girls so they could remain in school. Often when shoes were brought to us for repair, it looked as though they were asking us to put a pair of shoes on some shoelaces, but we managed somehow.

We also went out and begged for food, vegetables, soup bones, and the like. We kept people fed, who otherwise would have been hungry, while they waited for investigators from relief agencies so they could be established on relief. One day the principal of the school called and asked if we could get some food over right away for a little girl who had

fainted in class from hunger. This was a typical example of the work that was sent our way. I was a member of the Relief Council Committee in my section of the city and, of course, the schools and other groups who had heard of our work among the poor sent many people our way for help. It was through our efforts that the city had the vision to set up shoe repair shops to assist the needy.

We also had clothing drives – collected, washed, and mended clothing. We had them cleaned, sewed on buttons, and shelves were filled with clean, useable apparel so we could clothe children with warm dresses, underwear, coats, hats and mittens; everything they needed. Through this ministry to the temporal needs of the people, we were also able to minister to their spiritual needs. Many who were won for Christ during the Depression years faithfully followed the Lord. Others, of course, just as they did with Jesus, followed only for the loaves and fishes. Yet we felt that little by little, we were entering into the ministry that God had planned for us before the foundation of the world.

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A short time after my baptism in the Methodist Church, one Sunday morning our regular minister was ill. There were two men in the church who acted as local preachers, whose function it was to substitute for the pastor in case of emergency. While the congregation was waiting for the appearance of the regular minister, one of these men came down the aisle and whispered to me, “We would like to speak to you for a moment.” I accompanied him to the vestibule. They told me that though they were the local preachers with the duty of substituting for the pastor in his absence, they both felt I had the message for that morning.

At this time, I had never spoken in a church in my life other than to teach a Sunday School class. I was simply petrified with fear at their suggestion. I told them I was certain they were mistaken, as I had no message and would not know the first thing about delivering a sermon before the congregation. However, they prevailed upon me to go with them to the basement to pray. They said “Whichever one of us God will give the text to will have to do the preaching.”

I did not know then even what a text would mean, but I just knelt down and prayed that somehow God would help these men take care of the service as they were expected to do. When we arose from our knees, one elder said to the other: “Have you got the text?” and he replied,

“No, I haven’t. Have you?” The first elder shook his head, and then both looked at me meaningfully and questioningly. I said;

“I certainly don’t know anything about preaching a sermon, nor do I know anything about a text, but while I was kneeling there, all that came to me was ‘Whosoever will, may come and drink of the Water of Life freely.’”

I did not have the remotest idea that this was a text, but they both smiled and said, “Well, you have the text.”

I tried to persuade them that I didn’t, but they insisted. When we went back upstairs the first elder opened the service. When the time came for the sermon, he announced they had a guest preacher, and that I was to bring the message. As he called me to the platform, I shook with fear and self-consciousness, but he had found the text for me in the Bible and presented me with it to read the chapter containing the text.

Strange to say, when I began to read the Word a calmness came over me I could not explain. I felt perfectly at home on the platform. God filled my mouth with the overflow of the love and burden of compassion with which He had been filling my heart since the day He saved my soul. It seemed that everyone in the church that Sunday wanted to “come and drink.” It seemed that everyone wanted to partake of the Water of Life. It seemed that everyone wanted more of Him and His love. It was an experience I shall never forget and which I love to remember.

The first elder said to me after the service, “We can understand why God baptized you in the Holy Spirit, for certainly He has called you to the ministry.”

God’s gifts and callings are without repentance, and surely we have found His callings His enablement. You will remember the covenant I had made with the Lord when I was in the hospital in Ann Arbor; that if He would permit me to go home to raise my family, I would do anything I could for Him – that I would give Him my life. So, I felt I could never say no to anything He asked me to do.

“It may not be on the mountain’s height
Or over the stormy sea;

It may not be at the battle’s front
My Lord will have need of me;

But if by a still, small voice He calls
To paths I do not know,

I'll answer, dear Lord, with my
Hand in Thine:
I'll go where you want me to go.”