

Bishop Edmiston's Sermon from Pastor Hardy's Farewell Service

A Service of Farewell & Godspeed

Saturday, January 16, 2010

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

John 1:1-9

Joy and peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, and other friends of God who are with us this evening for this occasion.

On an occasion such as this the preacher prays to be led to a biblical text that will somehow gather the hearts and the minds of the congregation gathered here and speak to the deepest feelings within our souls. So it is that the Spirit of God has led me to words within our gospel for this evening. "There was man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world."

The writer of this gospel passage, of course, was speaking about John the Baptist who had been called by God and prepared by God over the years to preach and to teach and prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. For the one, who John said, would come after him, the thong whose sandal he was not worthy and able to untie.

But I would say to you tonight, my friends, and I would make a case for you, that one John Stewart Hardy twenty years ago was sent by God to Trinity Lutheran Church in Camp Hill. Now I know that John Stewart Hardy prefers to be called Stew, and he always has this J. Stewart stuff, you know, in front of his name. But I also know that he is willing to accept the name John which I assume mom and dad gave him. And I know that he is willing to do this because he showed me the certificate that he got from the Camp Hill Fire Department when he completed and was certified as a Fire Policeman. Two very nice certificates, and they both have on them John S. Hardy. So I think I can get away tonight with this particular text, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John," over twenty years ago to this congregation in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.

Would anyone here find cause to deny that John Stewart Hardy was sent to us by God? Anybody want to stand up and give me a cause why that is not true? Oh, you'll say, "Well, didn't some former bishop who shall remain unnamed present his name to a call committee who then interviewed him and recommended him to our council. And then the council recommended him to the congregation. And we voted to call him as our senior

pastor. True – that is true. But we need to remember, my friends, and we need to think deeply about this in our present reality that in our church, in our beloved Lutheran Church, we believe that this call process, this recommendation by a bishop, the interviewing, the calling, the recommendation – all of these things when entered into with prayer and with the highest spiritual expectations for what God will do in our lives – that this process is led by God's spirit. And the call of a pastor is much, much more than a human exercise. John Stewart Hardy was sent to us by God. And let the people of God say, Amen.

Now like John the Baptist, John Hardy knew that in him was not the life which would be the light of the world. He acknowledged that he was not the Messiah. Although – not too many years ago when he and Barbara came back from Florida from a Senior Pastors Conference, there was a rumor going around. It was a pretty wild rumor, that while in Florida they had visited some great art museums and that one John Stewart had become quite enamored with the paintings of Michelangelo and Leonardo DaVinci. You know – where they portrayed God with this white beard. Well, these rumors, I can assure you, were soon put to rest as we continued to experience with John Stewart Hardy, the love and the compassion and the realities of what it means to be a human being.

We remember how he shared with us in so many different ways – the human experience of illness, of the loss of beloved family members. The joy that he and Barbara knew as they rejoiced with Mark and Azure at the birth of grandchildren. These very human realities that all of us have experienced one way or another in our lifetime. And John Stewart shared those with us as a human being. He knew he was not the Messiah. But we knew him as one who understood the realities of our human existence as he cared for us in our difficult days and rejoiced with us in our days of joy.

As did John the Baptist, John Stewart Hardy knew that his call was to testify to that light that we know as Jesus the Christ, so that all people might know the peace of God which passes understanding. And this he did. He proclaimed this truth of God in Christ from this pulpit, from the pulpit in the Chapel, from the altar in Fellowship Hall, and from many other pulpits and community settings where he was called upon to share the faith. He testified to the light of the world. His sermons and his teachings spoke to our hearts. We were inspired, we were uplifted, we were educated. I know a lot more about New Zealand now than when he came. I remember that little train ride you took,

John Stewart, with your parents up to see your grandparents. We know a lot more about New Zealand.

We were comforted by this proclaimer of the faith in our times of grief. We were challenged to move beyond our apathy. Our eyes were open to the mission and the work of our Lutheran Church in far off reaches of the world. And we grew in our understanding of the common humanity that we share with people of different religious persuasions.

The preaching and teaching of John Hardy was like an octave of music on a piano; 8 white keys and 5 black keys. Thirteen notes with different pitches as the scales run up and down the key board. Every piece of music ever written, whether it be classical, jazz, pop, rock, country and western is a combination and a harmonization an expression of these 13 sounds – these 13 notes. So, the well over thousands of sermons – think of the number of sermons John Stewart preached to us in this congregation over the years he was with us – the thousands of sermons that he preached, the lessons that he taught, the times he was with us personally in our need for pastoral care, all of those proclamations have been rooted in that message we call the gospel. All of his stories, all the ways he opened the biblical text to us, were all rooted and drove us to consider what God had done in Jesus the Christ.

Just like that octave of music, and from it expanded the great music of our lives, so his preaching, rooted in the truth of what God did in Jesus, expanded our horizons and gave us new insights and new joys as we left the places where he preached. John Stewart Hardy has been faithful to his call to testify to the light of the world, Jesus Christ, and let the people of God say, Amen.

It remains, I think, for us, my friends, to consider the legacy that John Stewart Hardy will leave to Trinity as he and his helpmate Barbara go on to new adventures. Much more important than a major building project – and certainly that was important – but much more important than that, much more involved than leaving a strong structure of committees and programs and mission-consciousness, much more than that, rather his legacy will be a community of women, men and children who are committed to growing in the understanding of God's love and of God's grace. His legacy will be a community of people committed to deepening our human relationships with one another, and with those beyond our congregation. His legacy will be a community of the people of God dedicated to sharing the blessings of Trinity Lutheran Church with others in our world. That is Stewart's legacy. And let the people of God say, Amen. Amen