

PRESBYTERY OF SANTA BARBARA

Theme for May 19, 2018 Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara
Joining Together – Worshipping God – Loving People

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This will be my last “Moderator” letter to you before Tamara takes the helm with her capable hands. And I must say this has truly been a “fun” experience. I’m not saying there hasn’t been challenges, because anything worthwhile has that.... what I am saying is that the position of Moderator has shown me just how loving and caring you are regarding the necessary, Christ centered work we seek to do together.

I am aware of the fact that people who take on position of Moderator are expected to extend some profound insight through the service we give. So I thought the most important insight I could share comes from Rodney Dangerfield.

Addressing his ol’ high school class at graduation, he said: ***“as you go out into this cold, cruel world, you will suffer terrible heartaches. You will be double-crossed by your enemies and your friends. You will be humiliated time and again. You will have an absolutely awful time, and my advice to you is 'Don't do it. Go home and live with your parents. You'll get used to it and hopefully they will too.'”***

I remember when I was first ordained and brought into the life of Presbytery. I wasn’t aware of all the politics that went on behind the scene. I got to know other ministers who had been there for a long time....they welcomed me...they “pranked” me, they invited me to join their “prayer” circles to be encouraged by the camaraderie of like minded folks. They showed me how to have “fun”. The world seemed like an entirely different place in those days. But we did have fun....and that’s what I think has made a difference in my life in the church and in this Presbytery. I have always been encouraged to have fun.

Now let me say this.....There isn’t anything frivolous about having fun. For me, learning how to have fun has always been serious business. Think about it....with out fun.....nothing works. Without fun, marriages don’t work. When jobs aren’t fun, they become intolerable and dehumanizing. When friends aren’t fun, they are heartbreaking. (we’ve been through a season of that). When church isn’t fun, religion becomes a drag and caustic. When life isn’t fun, it’s hard to be spiritual no matter what the Book of Order says.

I’ve met a lot of people, after finally acquiring what they think they want in life, find that their “heart’s desire”, their “calling” fails to deliver the gratifications promised. Let me share with you what I mean. After I graduated high school there was the question of attending college, getting a job, going off to the military....my parents didn’t just assume a direction for me. Some how....life was supposed to be fun if I just would pick the right choice to make. (once when I was in Disneyland, I saw a woman shaking her little boy and screaming at him.... *“You wanted to come, and now you’re going to have fun whether you like it or not!”*)....It seems to me that too many church people are just like that little boy...they are supposed to be having fun (“make my joy complete”) once they made a decision to follow Christ...but instead they feel like crying. It doesn’t do any good forcing yourself to have fun....it can’t be forced but I do believe it can be learned. I think that’s what I’ve found out in these past few years in Presbytery. I found out that if I want to get the most out of Presbytery life, I need to give priority to those things that are really important in ministry. Things like being connectional, things like saying “yes” when asked to serve at the Presbytery level. Too often, we miss out on the best that life has to offer because we are distracted by what is of little consequence while ignoring that, which is most, deserving of our time and energy.

Can I tell you a story: When I was a boy in Denver, October 30th had special significance. The night before Halloween was designated as Mischief night. On that night, the adults of our neighborhood braced

themselves against all sorts of petty “crimes” at the hands of the younger generation. Windows were soaped, air was let out of tires....all the annoying mischief an adolescent mind could conjure up in the 1960’s.... we did. One year, my best friend, nicknamed “Bug”, and I devised what we thought was a brilliant and creative plan for mischief. We decided to break into the basement of our corner grocery store. We didn’t plan to rob the place (Sunday School boys would never do that sort of thing)instead, we planned to do something that, as far as the owner of the store was concerned, was far worse. Our plan was to get into his grocery store and CHANGE THE PRICE TAGS on things. We imagined what it would be like the next morning when people came into the store and discovered that radios were selling for a quarter and popsicles were priced at \$5 each. With diabolical glee, we wondered what it would be like in that store when nobody could figure out what the prices of things really should be. Sometimes I think the world has played the same kind of trick on the church. Sometimes I think the world has broken into our lives and changed the price tags on things. Too often, under the influences of a malicious ploy, we treat what deserves to be treated with loving care as though it were of little worth. On the other hand, we find ourselves tempted to make great sacrifices for that which, in the long run of life, has no lasting value and delivers very little gratification. Sometimes I think that one of the worst consequences of the age in which we live is our failure to understand what really is important in life. The life of this Presbytery really matters. You matter to me. We matter to each other. Our mission and ministry truly makes a world of difference....so my advice is “lets have fun!”

Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [12] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. [13] You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. [14] I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Dennis