

What should I talk about today – my last sermon here at Trinity as your pastor. If I ever preach to you again, it will be as a guest, or in another church where you will be visiting. So this is it. What should I talk about, on my last day? What I want to share with you this morning is what the Apostle Paul shared with a group of Christians on his last day, from Acts 20. There are three things I want you to remember, about me. And there are two things I want you to remember, about Trinity – five things total to remember. I hope that by the time I'm done, you'll have these five points set in your mind, and not forget them for a long long time. Then I can "Make a Graceful Exit"!

Acts 20 is Paul's farewell sermon to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. He had spent 2 years with them in the past, starting a Christian church in that pagan city. And he had spent a great deal of time away from them, traveling. But now, for a moment in his travels, he was able to stop, and meet with them one last time. He feels that this will be the last time they ever see him again. So from his heart he shares five important points that he wanted them to remember."

Twenty three years ago, I was called to be your outreach pastor. At that time it was kind of new type of pastor in our church body. Basically, it meant that I was a regular pastor, doing regular pastor things, but being allowed more time to reach the lost and teach you how to better reach the lost.. I was the 17th person you had called to be your outreach pastor. You had waited for over a year and a half for me. You were so happy to see me when I came and I you. You even had roses on the altar in thanksgiving to God. It was a joyous and happy day.

The call was right up my ally. You see I have a real passion to win the lost. My whole purpose in life is to go to heaven and to take as many with me as possible. So my message to you for the most part was a simple one. Like Paul in our text, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus." The number one, primary reason why God brought me to Trinity the past 23 years is so that you would hear two things from me – law and gospel. My purpose for being here was first of all to share with you some bad news – that you are born sinful, that you keep committing sins in your life every day, that you deserve the eternal wrath of God, and that you ought to turn to your God and ask him to forgive you. My other purpose for being here was to share with you the good news – that Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, has died on a cross as a sacrifice for your sins, that he has risen from the dead, and that God offers you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life freely, because of him. This message is why God caused me to live here, in Bay City, for 23 years. God wanted you to hear these things, and he wanted to work on your heart with his Holy Spirit, either to bring you to faith in his Son, or to strengthen your faith in his Son. I have simply been his tool. This is point number one – remember why God has sent me into your life. I was not here to advance my own interests but Christ's cause. To show you the need for a Savior, and then point that Savior out to you.

I still remember the Contagious Christian class I taught where over 100 of you attended so you would be able to share your faith in Jesus with a friend, the Small Talk to God Talk course that I developed, the Witness Team, and our 8th grade evangelism experience where our 8th graders were taught how to make an evangelism call, and actually to go out and share their

faith with an unchurched person on a call. Then too, every New Life in Christ class started out with the Great Exchange. I wanted to always make sure that everyone was clear on how they are saved. It is not through what we do, but through what Christ has done for us. We are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Point number two is to remember why I am moving. Paul talked to the Ephesians about why he was “moving” in verse 22: “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.” It wasn’t Paul’s choice to go to Jerusalem. It was God the Holy Spirit’s choice. Paul knew that God was directing his steps, moving Paul here, telling Paul to go over there. Paul was simply listening to God’s divine call. Remember why I am moving from Bay City, to The Villages, in Florida. You may be tempted to torture yourself, imagining all kinds of wrong reasons for why I’m moving, such as “He doesn’t like us anymore” or “He wants to have a retirement type call where he can relax more.” or “He’s tired of all the hassles he has at Trinity?” Churches always seem to torture themselves with thoughts like those when their pastor moves away. The reason I’m moving is found right there in verse 22: “compelled by the Spirit.” This is from God, the Holy Spirit, and not from me. He is the one who sent the divine call my way, who made me wrestle with it for a month, and during that process, He is the one who made it very clear to me that now is the time for me to move on to The Villages, Florida. I’m not in charge of my own life, where I live, whom I serve. God is in charge, and it’s his divine call, not mine. That is the second point I want you to remember this morning. Point number one – remember why God sent me into your life. Point number two – remember that it is God who is moving me away.

Point number three is to remember what I’ll be doing over there. Paul told the people of Ephesus that he would be facing all kinds of trials in Jerusalem, but his main reason for going over there is found in verse 24: “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” What would Paul be doing while was away from the Ephesians? He would be testifying to the Gospel of God’s grace. He would be doing what we had just talked about before – he would be sharing that message of sin and grace, pointing people to Jesus as the one and only way to heaven, the only Savior for all of mankind. Remember that this is what I’ll be doing after I leave. For me, the work doesn’t end. The only thing that changes for me is the setting – I’ll be in a different town. Like Paul, I will have trials in the Villages. I have a group of people there who are used to a traditional liturgy, aren’t familiar with visual technology in worship, have some set ideas on how they think outreach should be done. I am sure that there will be challenges as I gently try to help these people build bridges to the unchurched. But the same Lord who helped Paul in Jerusalem will help me in the Villages.

These are the three main points I want you to remember about me... 1) Why did God send me into your life? So that you would hear that message of sin and grace through Jesus Christ. 2) Why am I leaving? Because God the Holy Spirit is compelling me to move. 3) What will I be doing? The same thing I’ve been doing over here – testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

Besides these three main points, there are two other points I want you to remember about you, about Trinity. Point number one – protect your doctrine. In verse 27, Paul told the Ephesians, “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” Paul had made sure that they had their doctrine down – the whole will of God. Paul had shared with them everything they needed to know about the Bible – that’s doctrine. Right after saying that, Paul told them to “keep watch!” “Be shepherds.” He goes on to talk about savage wolves, false teachers, coming in to their church, and attempting to water down or change the Biblical doctrines they had learned from the Apostle Paul. “Be on your guard,” Paul told them. Protect your doctrine.

When a church really wants to grow today, there are temptations out there. That is to compromise what the Bible says, to actually try and be more user friendly to people in the community. The temptation is to water down or change your doctrine. “Pastor, don’t talk about that part of the Bible. If you do, people might not come. Pastor, why don’t you skip over that one part of the Bible, or just change it – just a little bit – then our church will grow.” That’s the temptation – to not “proclaim the whole will of God” but just parts of it. This is point number one I want you to remember for yourself – protect your doctrine! Without the truth of Scripture – the whole truth and nothing but the truth – you have nothing to offer here. You won’t be the church that God wants you to be, and your faith will eventually disintegrate. Protect your doctrine, because here is where you find your strength, your comfort, and your reason be a church in the first place.

And this leads into the last point I want you to remember this morning – “recognize your treasure.” Paul told the Ephesians in verse 32: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” I also commit to you the word of God’s grace – this is your treasure, this is what can build you up, and give you an amazing inheritance that goes beyond anything you could possibly ask or imagine. This Word of God is what I commit to you. Recognize your treasure, Trinity. Sure, you don’t have thousands of people coming to worship on Sunday. And sure, you don’t have all kinds of programs and support groups that mega churches are able to offer. But I am leaving you with a treasure in your midst, a treasure that can do far more for you than a cool children’s program or cutting edge social club. I’m leaving you with the Word of God, and it is a valuable treasure. This is what will build you up as Christian men and Christian women. This is where God will give you an inheritance – the inheritance of eternal life, and all the joys and wonders that happen in eternity after you finish out the few years you have left here on this earth. More than anything else, this is the most valuable asset you possess as a church – the word of God’s grace. Recognize it for the treasure that it is. That is what will take care of you after I am gone.

I have many fond memories of Trinity. The first year we did Living Christmas card, where we had bumper to bumper traffic for two days, with police assistance for traffic control. The parades we had for VBS, one of which where the police shut down Broadway, while the bikes, strollers and wagons of children crossed. The dramas we had before the sermons. Zero the Hero. Bible Basketball. But now I have to go. I’m going to be alright, and You’re going to be alright too. The Word of Grace allows us both to Make a Graceful Exit from each other. Amen.