

A Life of Grace

General Comments:

This is the talk given by the Pastor which will cover the themes of the final day of Pilgrimage. The theme of this last day is returning to the world after this time of retreat, and responding to God's call to extend God's grace to a hurting world. Hence a strong theme is that of Christian Witness. Talks of this day will focus on sharing and living our faith in Jesus Christ throughout our world. There will be encouragement to share God's love in word and deed. However there is a second theme which is strongly accented on this last day. In order to keep the faith the pilgrims will be encouraged to become a part of reunion groups and to follow guidance offered on the service cards. Hence the pastor who gives this talk is moving in these two directions. The pastor is calling the guests into faithful discipleship in the world (our outer journey) as well as a journey to keep the faith through heeding the service card which is usually passed out at the close of this talk (our inward journey).

I. Introduction.

Discuss the progression of the weekend and the principle of retreat as appropriately leading us to this point: returning to the world. It is important to stress at this point that at an emotional an/or intellectual level this weekend has likely had a different meaning for each person present. We want to affirm that God can and does work through a variety of emotional reactions (i.e. Highs and lows). All the events of this weekend bring us to the point of listening for God's Call to the world. Isaiah 6: 1-6 speaks of a special retreat for the prophet which appropriately led to God's call to "send forth". The Christian lives faithfully a life of thanksgiving in response to God's gracious presence. Reflect on the proper structure of the local church as providing opportunity for worship, learning, and fellowship so that God's people would hear God's call to "go forth" as a response to a gracious divine call. A Church which is not witnessing to the world is a church which has missed the mark.

II. Going into the world (using Jesus' parables in Matthew 25:14-30 & 31-46)

- A. Matt 25:14-30 Using this text talk about Jesus' urging the disciples to offer their talents to the world. All are given talents. The issue is not do we have gifts, but are we willing to put our gifts to work. Reflect on the variety of gifts which Paul articulates in his letters (see Romans 12 & 1 Corinthians 12). If we have any measure of faith, we have gifts to give.
- B. Matt 25:31-46 Using this text talk about extending grace to the world as both recognizing a special need of God's creation, and being able to recognize that in serving God's people in need we are choosing to be with Jesus. Help the guests to reflect on the nature of servanthood, and the manifold ways in which the church has offered the word and the life of grace to a hurting world. Examples should include personal stories of the church reaching to the hurting, lost soul as

well as ways in which we are called to join with Jesus and identify those who are living on fringes of our world; the outcast and the forgotten.

III. Keeping on in the Faith

Introduce the idea that there will be some measure of struggle in our calling to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Review 1 John and the notion that we are not of this world, and that there will always be a real measure of tension between the faithful Christian and the world in which we live. In the name of servanthood and love poured out, Jesus suffered. Jesus expected this same plight for his disciples. Hence there is special need to care for our soul; there is need to hold on to the reality of grace in a world in which darkness often blinds us of this grace. Reflect on John 14-17 as Jesus' parting words encouraging the disciples to be one as those gifted with the Spirit.

At this point use the service card and pilgrim's guide as a helpful reminder of the various disciplines mentioned which help us to hold on to the faith. From time to time the service card has been altered, yet this service card provides each guest with an opportunity to make tangible commitments in a disciplined way for the days ahead. The disciplines will include prayer, worship, celebrating the sacraments, making use of times for self-examination, seeking help from a mentor (perhaps pastor), and giving self to a small group. Foster's book on *Celebrating Discipline* could be used as a backdrop, but it is probably best to stick with the service card. There is need here to accent the value of small group. There is also need here for the pastor to speak more personally. Keep in mind that your sharing is designed to feed into table discussion, and people making concrete pledges for the days to come.