

CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF M & M

August 26, 2001

Ecclesiastes 3:1-12

II Corinthians 6:16-21

Today marks a unique “homecoming” Sunday in the life of this church. After eight weeks of convalescence from open heart surgery, we welcome back to the worship service my esteemed and beloved friend and your beloved pastor, the Reverend Doctor, Chaplain Parker Thompson, who has been in our daily prayers and has been the focus of our love and affection over these weeks of recovery. We thank God for your steady recovery. Your presence and participation in the service today gives a special meaning to the term “homecoming” for the church.

For some in attendance this “homecoming” service marks your first attendance at a North Fork celebration; and for the old-timers you have probably lost count of all the homecomings you have attended.. For my wife and me, who are kind of honorary members of this church family, this marks our fifth or sixth homecoming service, and probably my fifth or sixth homecoming sermon. As is well known by most everyone present, this homecoming weekend coincides with our 50th wedding anniversary yesterday. Married in Baltimore, MD, at the Temple Baptist Church, our home church, we came to Winchester for our honeymoon and as newlyweds toured the Shennadoah and the Sky Line Drive for a week. Fond memories of the Winchester of 50 years ago and the more recent fellowship and friendships we have—from Winchester to North Fork—make this the only logical place to celebrate our anniversary.

This month also marks the 50th anniversary of my resignation as the pastor of the Gwathmey Baptist Church in Ashland, VA, on the outskirts of Richmond (POBox 1478, Tel 804-798-6615). I interrupted my writing this sermon to search the Internet for Gwathmey Baptist’s homepage. Finding it, I called the Pastor, Rev. Butch Actichen, to inquire how the church is doing now that I have been gone for fifty years? And he reported that the church was doing much better after I left. It now has about 90 in attendance (compared to about 25-30 fifty years ago), with a Christian Education Building added a number of years ago. Moreover, this summer marks the 50th anniversary of my graduating from the University of Richmond and starting Seminary. Next week will mark the first time in 65 years that I will not be going off to school in September. For 25 years I was a student, and for 40 years I was a professor. But, as of this past June 1, I have been retired—and with no classes next week I can celebrate my retirement for real.

So today marks a time of celebration: (1) for the successful surgery 50 days ago and increasing strength of the pastor over these past 50 days; (2) celebration for the annual homecoming of present and former members and friends of the North Fork Baptist, with your rich 166 year history, (3) and our celebrating 50 years of marriage(full-time) and ministry (40 years full time, 10 years student part-time). Thus the sermon title: Celebrating 50 years of M&M (Marriage and Ministry)— not to be confuse with the M&M candies (they have been around for only 46 years), and not to be confuse with the Ministers & Missionaries Benefit Board of the ABC, from which we now receive our retirement annuity (it has been around since 1913).

As you recall the OT Lesson contained the familiar words from Ecclesiastes: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven . . . and a time to laugh; . . . and a time to dance . . . there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live.” In the spirit of Ecclesiastes, I would expand the thought a bit by saying, “there is a time to educate, and there is a time to celebrate.” On this homecoming Sunday, I intend not so much to *educate* but to *celebrate*. Over the years in Bible studies and sermons here at North Fork, I have done a good bit to *educate*, but in this sermon I just want to *celebrate*: (1) to celebrate our marriage and ministries, and to celebrate through story and testimony, starting with a word about our family history, our marriage, and then moving to celebrate how our church families have enriched our ministry as we sought to implement Paul’s recognition that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . . and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (II Corinthians 5: 19-20).

First, let me speak briefly about our family histories (and as I talk a bit about our family tree, listen to hear if there are similar patterns in your family histories where love has transcended ethnic and national boundaries. Genealogy was not a big thing in our families. But we know a little bit, and, putting first things first, that little bit permits us to claim a *southern* heritage. Doris’ *paternal grandfather*, John Hudgins, was a sea captain from *Hudgins, VA*, over in Matthews County (where, I discovered on the Internet, one can still “go to sea” by hiring a boat to fish on the Chesapeake). Well over a hundred years ago Captain Hudgins steamed his boat up to Baltimore and settled there, making Baltimore his home port. But he came from Virginia, so coming to Virginia for a honeymoon was kind of a southern homecoming! (But I must admit, we did not stop by Hudgins, VA, to see my wife’s distant cousins while on our honeymoon.)

The honeymoon took us from Baltimore, through Frederick, to Winchester. But we did not look up my distant relatives in Frederick, either. On my side of the family there was also a southern connection. My *maternal great grandmother*, Harriet McKey of Frederick became the wife of Dennis Shoemaker, also of Frederick, Maryland, who was a Confederate veteran. (Although Steve Rochelle two years ago at a Bible Study dinner at Valerie’s home, presented me with a RC Cola and a Moon Pie and thereby recognized me as “an honorary southerner,” he really had to make only 75% of me an “honorary” southerner. Doris and I both can claim to be one-fourth authentic southerners.

As for the other 75%, my paternal grandfather, William McDaniel, was a Scotsman, who traced his roots back to the small a cross-roads “town” named McDaniel, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where indentured servants from Scotland were deposited in the eighteenth century. Doris’ maternal grandfather, Martin Albert Julius Klisches, was from Leipzig, Germany, and had been a tailor for the Kaiser. On September 28, 1900, in Baltimore, he renounced all allegiance to the Emperor of Germany and became a US citizen.

What a mix! Scots-German Marylanders-and-Virginians (and heaven only knows who else made up the other 50% in the family tree) came together in one new nuclear family in 1951. Now, 50 years into our marriage, we look back and — despite only fragments of knowledge and some knowledge of fragmentation in the families — we *celebrate* our families, with all of their poverty /industry, with all their simplicity/complexity, with all of their love/limitations. We trust we have taken only the best qualities of our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents and passed them on. In their

honor, we have tried to build on the *best* of their legacy and make worthy our contributions —now in our time and in our own nuclear family which includes our son Jim, our daughter-in-law Kim, and our four teenage grandchildren whom I affectionately call “my angels”: Erica, Ian, Owen and Lauren. They planned to celebrate with us here today, but just could not pull it off because of schedule conflicts.

“A time to celebrate, and a time to remember.” How well I remember! Do you remember how in 1947 Chuck Yeager in the X-1 airplane named Glamorous Glennis [now in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum] broke the *sound barrier*. Well, while Yeager broke the *sound barrier*, in 1947, I finally broke the *age barrier*. In my early teens I was just the buddy of my wife’s younger brother, Tommy Hudgins. Then it was impossible for me to get the *attention* of my buddy’s big sister, Doris, let alone get a date. But finally in 1947, once I became a mature 16, I finally broke the *age barrier*. While Chuck Yeager was in the clouds with Glamorous Glennis, I was in seventh heaven on a date with Doris. Remember how the “Big Bang Theory” made the news in 1948? The “Big Bang Theory of ’48” was nothing compared to the “Big Ring Decision of 1948”— for we decided to exchanged highschool rings in ’48 on the night before I went off to college. Remember also, 1948 was the year that “Long Playing” records came out? Well, in 1948 I was more interested beginning in a “Long Term” relationship than I was in playing the new LP records. But I got the best of both worlds: over the years we slowly collected our 50 LP records, and in time—which has gone quite quickly—we have consolidated a 50 year long term relationship.

Back in 1950 when we became engaged and the DOW was closing around \$235, we thought we had enough money so we could both go to school once we were married.. The plan was that I would go to seminary and Doris, having become an RN, would go on for a BS in Nursing. But, we learned that math in marriage is different than pre-marital arithmetic. After the 1951 wedding, when it came to write the checks, there was only enough money for one of us to go to school, and then only if one of us went to work. Guess who went to work. And guess what happened to my “theology” that a woman’s place was in the home not in the work place? You guessed correctly! I changed my “theology”! I became a liberal so that Doris could join the work force and pay my way through seminary. (In theological jargon that is called “situational ethics.”) Without a fuss she did it for four full years. And I celebrate still this gift from my wife who supported me for those years in which I studied full-timed for my Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Arts degrees. Her BS in Nursing became a casualty, though my Ph. D. eventually became a reality. Ordained Ph.D. Professors get a lot of recognition in the church. But we did not get our education for free. Much of we learned and know was paid for by our wives’ working *inside* and *outside* the home. So as I celebrate my 50 years of marriage and 50 years of ministry, I express my indebtedness and appreciation for all the labors of love from my wife who as a “lowly RN” on shift work made it possible for this doctor-to-be to fulfill his love of learning.

As much as we celebrate our marriage and our families, we celebrate our ministry and the churches that nurtured us along our spiritual and professional pilgrimage. It really began in the Temple Baptist Church in Baltimore where the Hudgins family had been active for two generations (a bit like the generations of the Rose family here in North Fork Baptist). After seminary we volunteered for overseas mission work and ended up in Yokohama, Japan, in 1956, where we taught in the College and Junior College of Kanto Gakuin University, which was founded in 1884 by Baptist missionaries.

We moved our membership from Temple Baptist to become members of a Japanese Baptist church (Kasumigaoka Kyokai). In 1961 we returned to the States for a furlough, which, in my case, lasted for five years during which time I earned my Ph. D. from Johns Hopkins University while pastoring the First Baptist Church of Hurlock, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore east of Easton. The bonds of love between that church and me and my family were unbelievably strong, and when that love was tested during the local race riots and civil rights struggles of the 1960's, the bonds of love flourished and the ministry of reconciliation went from the church to the larger community. And that love in the 60's lingers to this day, some forty years later.

But in 1966, when the furlough came to an end, we returned to Japan for another three years so I could share with young Japanese scholars what I had learned in my doctoral program. Perhaps the most significant ministry I had during those entire three years was to mentor a young Christian scholar, Mr. Yuki Onodera who had graduated from International Christian University, in Hebrew and Semitic languages to prepare him to study, as I had, at Johns Hopkins University. My mentoring worked and Mr. Onodera studied for four years at Johns Hopkins and then returned to Japan, not to teach, but to become the personal traveling secretary to His Highness Prince Mikasa (the brother of Emperor Hirohito). In addition, Mr Onodera became the Director of the Near East Cultural Center and Museum, the patron of which was Prince Mikasa (a scholar of Near Eastern Studies in his own right). How things had changed in fifty years! In the 1920's a Christian could not even be a lowly servant in the Japanese imperial household, but by the 1970's the brother of the Emperor selected a Christian biblical scholar as his traveling secretary and the director of the museum he endowed.

Fifty years of ministry of reconciliation involved not only two pastorates (Gwathmey and Hurlock), and two terms as a missionaries in Japan (1956-61 and 1966-69) but also thirty-two years in Philadelphia as the professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Eastern Baptist Seminary. Before closing with some brief comments about my teaching at Eastern, in celebration I need to acknowledge the generosity of so many good folk who in the churches and in the communities who opened doors and contributed to or ministries. For example:

When in college, Maryland Baptist and Virginia Baptist gave me financial support.

When in college, the Masons gave me a an interest free loan of \$250 (=1950 DOW).

When I was looking for a job after seminary, the American Baptist employed me.

When I needed to learn Japanese, Buddhists as well as Christians taught me.

When I needed a job while on furlough from Japan, a Southern Baptist church called me.

When working on my MA and Ph.D., Jewish professors and rabbis and taught me Hebrew.

After I wrote my doctoral dissertation, the Jesuits in Rome published it.

And having become the friend of an Army Chaplain who was once my student

I was invited to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, to Round Hill, to Jerusalem,
to Winchester, and to North Fork.

In closing this 50th anniversary sermon I would like to share my key for interpreting the Bible and my interpretation of 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

To state simply, "The Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God," is to make an incomplete sentence. The complete sentence needs to include prepositional modifiers which affirm that "the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God (1) *about* the way and will of God and (2) *about* our human condition." The Bible includes countless case studies about human sin and pathologies — including the sins and pathology of some very religious people— as well as case studies of God's therapeutic intentions and saving activities.

The human pathologies evident in the Bible are revealed, in the words of Timothy, for our "*reproof*" and for our "*correction*." There are case studies of bad behavior and bad religion revealed in the Bible which should never be followed, lest we suffer the same consequences as did the biblical characters. On the other hand, God's will and ways are revealed for "*training in righteousness*" and for "*every good work*."

The guideline for distinguishing between the human pathology and the divine therapy in the Bible is to note first that whatever *blossoms* in the light of the Cross is the word of God about the divine will and the divine way. Secondly, whatever *withers* in the light of the Cross is the word of God about our human condition. Christ, the *Living Word*, clarified the ambiguities in the two parts of the divinely inspired *Written Word*. Anyone having difficulty distinguishing between our human pathologies and God's will and saving acts must simply come closer to the Cross. The Cross demonstrated the difference between the therapeutic "loving enough to die" in contrast to the human pathology of "loving enough to kill." When we approach the Cross, we become "equipped for every good work" to fulfill God's will.