

Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
May 22, 2016
July 13, 2008 (Overture)

John 8:12; Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 6:22-23;
1 John 1:1-9; 1 John 2:9-10
“Postlude – Part II”

This sermon is the second and last of my “postlude” sermons. The sermons follow the announcement of my retirement from my current ministry and fulltime ministry at the end of August this year.

In considering this move and sermons, I read my candidating sermon of eight years ago. As mentioned last month, the title of that sermon was “Overture,” thus, I chose “Postlude” for this two-part sermon series.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “Postlude” as,

- 1 : a closing piece of music; *especially* : an organ voluntary at the end of a church service
- 2 : a closing phase (as of an epoch or a literary work)

This describes this period of my ministry at Redwoods. It is the end of my service with you and the closing phase of my work. It is good to see ministry as worship (the overtly sacred dimension) and as literary work (the artistic aspect infused with the spirit).

My candidating sermon contained two parts and was longer than usual, so I broke the sermon into Sundays.

In my earlier sermon, I mentioned that in musicals, an overture consists of segments from the more popular songs in the musical. In light operas, the overture is a *potpourri* of airs based on the tunes of songs that follow. The overture sets the mood for the production. This applied to my sermon back then.

I said then, “The sermon communicates the good news of the Gospel as ways to follow Jesus in ministry and highlights in segments the nature of our partnership in the years come. It will touch on some of the themes that will take place in our ministry together. I hope that we will hear some of what God is already doing in the church and in what God intends to do. Some is prescriptive as per the goals and strategies in your mission vision study and some is yet to be as we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit in our midst.”

We see in this sermon series how the music still plays and will play until I leave and continue with similar and different notes in the future. Along the way, notes were added with the arrival of new members, Mari in the church office, and Stephanie.

“Today’s overture,” I said back then, “is told through the Gospel texts and a story, which has two parts. The first story, which I told last month, involved our VW Beetle breaking down in the Hluhluwe Umfolozi Game Reserve in South Africa and a ranger towed us out.

The car went completely dead and we could not figure out why because we could not check the engine. We were not supposed to get out of the car because wild animals surrounded us. The strange thing is that we did not see animals going in but when the ranger towed us out he pointed to many animals camouflaged and hidden in bushes.

The ranger was Jesus for us in that when we follow Jesus he helps us see things we would not normally see and this happened through ministries of the church during the past eight years. It has been a lovely ride, although some things are still hidden which we (I) did not see but you will in your future as you continue to follow Jesus in partnership with your new pastor.

Today, I pick up the second part of the story. It would not surprise you that “light” is the theme since it is the subject of every Bible passage read by Debbie. I will not give the scriptures justice so I encourage you to reread the excellent passages at home and meditate on their messages.

The ranger left us outside the gate but we still had to travel to our accommodations another 40 minutes away from the park. For this we had to travel along a small road to the highway, then along the highway to another small road leading to our cabins in the bush.

Our car was still stone dead and the day was ending fast. We looked into the engine and saw a badly torn battery, cracked open down the center. We were told that it could have exploded and set the car alight. I quickly disconnected the battery and learned that we could get the engine going without the battery but we would have no lights.

Someone started the car for us and we sped off to our accommodations. The day was ending and darkness descending. When we reached the highway, it was a darker moonless night. Before long, it was pitch black and we pulled off to the side of the road and sat in a black hole. Cars sped by.

This presented another opportunity to pray. Only a miracle could save us. Unlike being in the wildlife reserve, I could now stand outside the vehicle and wave to passing motorists.

Cars whizzed by when suddenly a convoy of trucks appeared on the horizon coming our way. It turned out to be a bunch of military vehicles returning from the northern border.

The lead truck stopped and the driver, an officer in uniform, enquired about our situation. We told him we were trying to get to cabins about five miles down the road and about a mile off the road but we had no lights.

He said, "No problem, follow me." He told the others that he would drive in front of us and they were to follow behind us. He drove his huge truck in front of our car and turned on massive beams of light on top of the truck, which rotated 360 degrees bathing us and 20 yards circumference in light. The truck was a wilderness reconnaissance vehicle. We followed in the light as the driver took us off the road to our cabin in the bush. He wished us well, and took off.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). Jesus enables us to see what we normally do not see and he leads with his light. Our family could not travel in the dark. We could not go without the light that took us home. Jesus is light for all whom live in darkness, whether it is a fearful place, a closed mind, or just a dark place. The light of Jesus leads all into the light of life.

There are tremendous implications of this for the church.

The first is that of critical thinking. Christian Education is the logical place for this light but every department in the church and the expression of the church in the world enables us to be enlightened in Christ. It is wonderful to share with each other how God enlightens each of us for the sake of our own growth in Christ and for the sake of the whole. Presbyterians learn daily. We are the church reformed always reforming under the Word of God and the call of the Spirit. In other words, we are not stuck. We belong to the dynamic Presbyterian-Reformed tradition, which means we are always seeking new ways of thinking and living the faith.

Second, those who follow Jesus will have the light of life, with emphasis on life. For me, this connotes in part an appreciation of Christ's healing ministry. Ministries for whole health and healing run deep in Christian history. This is the other side of the coin, with the "light" of critical thinking on the one side and the "light of life" healing ministry on the other. Light is life! There are Christians who are so rational in their thinking that they abandon affirmations of life through the efficacy of prayers for healing. Why are some people healed through prayer and others not?" they ask. This is a valid question but double blind studies in medical settings show that healing does take place through local and non-local prayers, more so for those prayed for than for those not prayed for. We do not know how and in what way this happens but it does,

as God's people are faithful in prayer and other forms of healing ministry. Jesus was a healer and he encouraged his disciples to be engaged in ministries of healing. We affirm healing today with sound, enlightened medical practices and with spiritual practices. We cannot ignore the spiritual expressions of healing.

I am grateful that Jesus called me to follow him. I was thankful then, and I am now, to be among you to share the challenge of that call. I look forward to hearing how Jesus calls each one of us and I am excited to see how the Spirit calls and leads this church in danger and joy, hurting and healing, light and love into the ministry that God sets before us.

Thus concludes the postlude series. I am happy to have walked into the light and love of this church and look forward to the way Jesus Christ calls you in the future. Amen.