

Sermon for Sunday, January 3, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"AN HONORABLE AMBITION"

I Timothy 3:1-13

Text: "There is a popular saying, 'To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition.'" I Timothy 3:1

Today we come to an important time in the life of this church when we ordain and install Ruling Elders and Deacons. This morning I would like for us to reflect on the Presbyterian Church--on the contributions it has made, the things it has stood for, and what it will continue to stand for. There are many today who wish the death of the Presbyterian Church, who wish for the death of its theology, for the death of its form of government. They say her time of usefulness to God has passed and it is time for her to give way to new forms, new ways, new structures. I do not agree with that at all. I believe the Presbyterian Church still has great and significant contributions to make to the world for Jesus Christ. I believe she has the flexibility and power within her to continue to meet the demands of a changing world without compromising her historic faith. There are those of us who are committed to the Presbyterian Church and, under God, we will not permit her to be raped and ravaged and destroyed by those who no longer love her or understand her.

Today, those who belong to the Reformed faith, the faith as set forth first by John Calvin, form the second largest Protestant group in the world. Only the Lutheran Church is larger than the more than forty million men and women around the world who are Presbyterian in their faith. Here in America the Presbyterian Church has made more significant contributions than any other religious group. The form of government of America was largely shaped by Presbyterianism and those who believe in the American system of government owe a great debt to the Presbyterians from whom their form of government came.

In the field of theological thought, John Calvin has made greater contributions than perhaps any other single individual. And the thought of Calvin shaped the thought of the western world and from it sprang the renaissance, the industrial revolution, and much of what we believe and think about life today came from Calvin.

Again, here in our own land, as the frontiers of our nation were expanded in our early history, it was the educated Presbyterian ministers who went with their people and everywhere established schools. They were the men who laid the groundwork of the great educational system of America today and many of our greatest universities were started by Presbyterians.

As a Presbyterian we have much for which we can be proud--we can be proud of the Presbyterian contribution to governmental forms in America, for the impact its theology has had on the world, for the contribution it has made to modern educational systems. But most of all we can be proud of the great laymen of the Presbyterian Church who have contributed so much to our society. In

almost any community in America you will find that many of the key laymen of that community are Presbyterians. In the professional fields of government, medicine, law, science, and the like you will find key figures who are Presbyterians. The Presbyterian Church in America may be relatively small numerically compared to other denominations, but the influence and contribution of Presbyterianism is all out of proportion to its size.

I would venture to guess that in the greater metropolitan area of St. Louis that much of the key leadership of our community is Presbyterian. I would further guess that Central Presbyterian Church with only two thousand members is nevertheless made up of some of the most influential persons in our community. As Presbyterians our influence and impact on the course of human events has been tremendous.

If what I have said is true--and I believe it is--it means that being a Presbyterian officer--and an officer in this church in particular--is not only to stand in a great tradition, but it is to bear a solemn duty and responsibility as well.

It is about this duty and responsibility that I wish to speak. You see, one of the distinctive and unique features of Presbyterianism is that the layman share with the ministers equally in the government and rule of the church. If the laymen of the church fail to function responsibly, the Presbyterian system will not work. In the Presbyterian church we are not ruled by an ecclesiastical hierarchy of ministers as some denominations are. Neither do we have the limitations imposed by a pure democracy of the congregational form of government. In the representative form of church government of the Presbyterian Church, the ministers and the Elders, the elected representatives of the people, share equally in the governing of the church. And if the Elders fail to function it means we tend towards a minister-dominated church. This is exactly what has happened in Presbyterianism today. Because Elders in all of the church courts have not functioned with great responsibility, the liberal ministers have captured the structures of our church, they control the boards and agencies of our denomination. And because these liberal ministers, many of whom are not committed to the Presbyterian form of government, many of whom who are not committed to the history faith, many of whom are not committed to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Yes, because of this, our church has been taken down some strange roads. As a consequence, the average man in the pew has lost confidence in the leadership of his church, he has lost confidence in the boards and agencies of his church, he has in many cases lost confidence in what he hears from the pulpit of his church. Because of these things, the layman has voted in the only two ways he knows how to vote. First, he has voted with his money and he has refused to give the support to our denomination that it desperately needs. Second, he has voted with his feet for laymen are leaving the Presbyterian Church in great numbers. For example, the United Presbyterian Church has lost over 250,000 members since 1965 and last year our own Presbyterian Church, U. S. showed its first numerical decline in recent history. As a consequence our own denomination, as well as most major denominations today, are torn by internal dissent and trouble. If the laymen who share equally with the ministers in the government of our church had acted with

responsibility and integrity, this would never have happened. If the conservative, evangelical ministers had had the support of the knowledgeable and committed layman, this condition could not have come about.

The point is this: if the church is to be returned to her historic task; if the church is to return to the primary mission of holding up Jesus Christ to a lost world; if the church is to begin again to proclaim that men are lost without a personal, redeeming relationship to Jesus Christ, the laymen--the Elders--must begin again to assume their role in the government of the church with integrity and with responsibility.

Let me relate this entire business to those of us here at Central Presbyterian Church. This congregation has determined to stand for the historic faith of the New Testament as set forth by John Calvin and the Westminster Confession of Faith. This congregation has determined to stand for the historic form of government where the minister and Elder share equally in the governing of the church. This congregation has determined to stand for the truth that a man must have a saving relationship to Jesus Christ and that a man's heart must be changed before his society can be changed in any significant and permanent way.

These decisions have many implications for us today. It means we must first of all have officers who are committed to the Presbyterian faith and the Presbyterian form of government. They must be knowledgeable men who know and understand and believe what these are. We must have educated laymen in the things of the church. They must be officers who are willing to invest their time and energies and resources in the various courts of the church to stand for what we believe and who will refuse to be frightened off by the onslaught of liberalism.

It means second that the officers of this church must give us strong, prayerful, dedicated leadership right here in our own congregation. It means quite simply that we must become a church that is great in every way. We must be a witness to the whole denomination, we must be an example to Presbyterianism across our land as to what a congregation can do and be when it has great lay leadership that is committed to Presbyterian faith and practice.

When we began to plan our program here in this congregation for 1971, we said to the people we must have more money and more resources to do what we must do to raise up a mighty witness for Jesus Christ. The people responded. They gave more than they had ever given before. They responded to the challenge that we laid before them. Now that the resources we have asked for have been provided, it is incumbent upon us to be faithful to fulfill the programs and plans that we laid out. It will not be easy. It will be hard and demanding and difficult. It will demand our time, our energies, our best thing, our most ardent prayers, our total commitment. If we give less than that we will have not kept faith with one another nor will we have kept faith with that we claim to be committed to.

This morning I call upon our officers, both new and old, to give us that dynamic spiritual leadership we need to fulfill our potential. The eyes of the whole denomination are upon us and they are looking to us to see if we will make

good on our claims. The eyes of our Lord are upon us and he is watching to see if we will be faithful to our words. I beseech you in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up now and give us dedicated and committed leadership; give us imaginative and creative leadership; give us exemplary lives that we can follow your examples. I call upon you in behalf of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light to make this church a church that is great in witness as we lead men who are lost to salvation in Jesus; I call upon you to lead this church in new deeds of service and outreach as we minister to the fantastic needs of this community in which we live; I call upon you to tap the tremendous resources of this unusual congregation that the magnificent potential we have here might be fully realized for Jesus Christ.

To you, the congregation, I beseech you to remember him to whom you have committed your lives and who has saved you for heaven and given you eternal life. Support your officers, give them your prayers, give them your resources, offer them your support of time and abilities. Together let us commit ourselves afresh to Jesus and to his church and let us raise up such a witness here in this congregation that all men might see our faith and that the world might be led to him who alone can save them.

No one of us nor even one group of us can alone do what must be done. We have made a good start, we have given ourselves the financial resources we need, we have given ourselves the ministerial leadership we need, now let us give ourselves to the task of the church that for Jesus' sake we raise up a great witness for him.