

Sermon for Sunday, June 18, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"THE CHURCH AND HOW SHE FARES"  
Ephesians 2:11-22

Text: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the  
dividing wall of hostility..." Ephesians 2:14

I have just returned from the 112th meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. In reporting to you on this meeting of the highest court of the denomination, I want to do three things. First, I want to give you a bit of background information so that you can understand the nature of the struggle that characterized this meeting. Second, I want to share with you some of the things that happened. Third, I want to share with you some of the hopes and dreams many of us have for the Presbyterian Church, U.S.

I suppose all denominations have people in them at both ends of the socio-theological spectrum that we ordinarily call liberals and conservatives. Most people, however, fall somewhere between those two extremes and they make up the great body of the church. In our denomination, the control of the structures of the church for many years was in the hands of leaders who represented the great middle of the church. They were men of great conviction, deep commitment to Jesus Christ, steeped in the Reformed tradition which is our theological heritage, and who were progressive in the social and ecumenical leadership they gave the church. Under their wise and able leadership, our denomination was truly a great institution and made significant contributions to the southland. Under their devout leadership our denomination grew and its benevolent works expanded at a breath-taking rate. Men and women were proud to be a part of what we lovingly called the "Southern Presbyterian Church."

But during the decade of the fifties things began to change. Men on the liberal end of the socio-theological spectrum began to organize and to make a concerted effort to gain control of the boards, the agencies, and indeed all of the structures of the denomination. These Christian men had deep convictions about some of the social issues that faced our world and they had theological beliefs that were beginning to be radically different from our traditional heritage and our historic interpretations. Because they did feel deeply about these things, and because they held their particular views with passion and conviction, they banded together to lead the church in new directions. By the early sixties they had fairly well succeeded and by the mid-sixties they were firmly in control.

At the other end of the socio-theological spectrum the conservatives were reacting. Unfortunately, their reaction was un-coordinated and lacked political finesse. Again, their tactics were sometimes of such a character that many of those actions antagonized the church and often caused conservative leaders to lose credibility in the eyes of many. Often they were viewed as maintainers of the status quo and obstructionists to the progress of the church. It appeared that the great middle of the church--which had historically produced the leadership of the church--was asleep or at least was oblivious to what was happening.

As a consequence of this state of affairs, the church began to polarize between the two extremes. Bitterness developed, division intensified, animosity sowed its awful seeds. A group of men who had given leadership in the past got together and addressed a message to the denomination which was called "an Open Letter to the Church." In this message they pled for healing and reconciliation. One of the signers of that open letter to the church was Dr. J. Layton Mauze, Jr., former pastor of this congregation.

However, the liberal leadership in control, like a horse with the bit in its teeth, would not be headed. Like a run-away team, they belted in directions of their own choosing. And things began to bounce out of the denominational wagon as it jarred over rough and wild terrain. Membership fell off, benevolence giving began to decline, church attendance tapered, church school attendance plummeted, interest in the church waned. Worse, the direction the run-aways pulled the wagon was a direction many did not wish to go and in the pew there began to simmer hostility, bewilderment and anger. Many felt the church was betraying them and they did not understand what was happening. The man in the pew felt betrayed. He felt the church was on a tangent and his own desperate spiritual needs were not being met.

Worse still, those on the conservative end of the socio-theological spectrum--out of power, unable to regain control of the programs, the policies, and the direction of the church--began to make noises of schism. They began to say that they would pull out. They would form a new church that would be pure in doctrine and whose emphasis would be on the historic mission of the church.

It was in the midst of this polarization and threatened rupture of the denomination that a group of us began to work. We created an organization that we called the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians. We had many goals, but the primary ones were to moderate the direction of the denomination, to restore the church to her primary mission, to restore a balance of power to the leadership of the church so that all factions would have a voice in the decision-making process, to make room for the variety of priorities that different groups brought to the life of the church, and to seek to bring about healing and reconciliation within our denomination. The wounds in the church were deep, but we believed they were not fatal; and that while indeed desperately stricken, the church was not mortally wounded.

At the 112th General Assembly, three years of labor and effort and prayer began to bear fruit. For the first time, the strangle-hold of the liberal leadership was loosened. For the first time in many years, more moderate voices began to be heard and began to dominate. Let me share with you some of the victories won at this Assembly. The tremendous import of these victories may not be immediately apparent or obvious to you, but let me assure you that they were of tremendous significance. Taken together, these victories represent a new direction for the Presbyterian Church, U.S. Taken together, they represent a shift in direction. Taken together, they represent a new mood, a new spirit, a new attitude in our denomination.

First of all, many within the group of which I am a part--the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians--worked to elect the moderator for the coming year. Our unofficial candidate (and I use the word "unofficial" because as an organization we do not officially endorse anyone) was Dr. L. Nelson Bell. Dr. Bell has for years been an acknowledged leader of the conservative element in the denomination, but when they announced that they intended to withdraw from the church, being the great churchman he is, Dr. Bell refused to be a part of schism and disassociated himself from that element. The decision to nominate Dr. Bell for the highest office in our denomination was made by a group of us on our knees in the pastor's study of this church. Everybody said it was impossible for him to win, especially since he had been defeated before on two different occasions but we believed God was leading us in our decision. Our prayers were answered last Sunday afternoon when Dr. Bell was elected in a stunning upset. Under his deep spiritual leadership, under his wise guidance, and through the appointments he will make as moderator, we will see our church move in exciting, new directions.

One of the things we accomplished was to put through a resolution establishing what

we have called a Moderator's Cabinet of Reconciliation. It will be composed of five men who will be commissioned to go throughout the denomination during the next year as representatives of Dr. Bell to work for healing and reconciliation in our church.

Another accomplishment was to broaden the ecumenical stance of the church. Under liberal leadership we have for years belonged to the National Council of Churches--but liberal ecumenicalism faces in only one direction! A history making change occurred when we succeeded in putting through a resolution by which our denomination will send official observers to the conservative counterpart of the NCC, the National Association of Evangelicals. (You may remember reading about them several months ago when their national meeting was held here in St. Louis.)

I am sure you have been reading about the big meeting in Dallas, Texas called "Explo '72" which has been sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ and which some of our own young people have been attending. We successfully put through a resolution which endorsed this effort and the Assembly was led in prayer for that meeting. Now, that may not seem significant to you but let me tell you why it is. Our denominational leadership has consistently criticized, put-down, laughed at, belittled and attacked Campus Crusade. Our own student work program on many campuses across the southland has been a miserable failure under some of our Presbyterian campus ministers and they have branded Campus Crusade--who has been doing the job most of us wish our own campus ministers would do--as "simplistic", "pietistic" and "fundamentalistic." By adopting the resolution about Explo, in effect our denomination has endorsed a new mood, a new spirit about the campus ministry.

These are just a few of the positive things we did in attempting to make progressive and creative contributions to the life of the church. There were some other accomplishments that are tremendously exciting because they represent a stopping, a blunting of the liberal direction of the church. They represent a shifting of direction, a changing of attitude for our denomination. The steamroller has been stopped! Let me share one or two things.

We beat back an effort to change the Presbytery voting system that if passed would have further strengthened the liberal control of the church. We rejected a proposed new chapter in the Book of Church Order on the commissioning of Lay Workers who would then be given a vote at Presbytery. We felt this would tend to strengthen the liberal voting power and was a departure from our historic Presbyterian understanding of ordination.

However, the most crushing blow dealt the liberal leadership came in the report from the Committee on Church and Society. They presented a program to the Assembly on the subject of peace and the main part of the presentation was a speech by Dr. Al Wynn, President of Louisville Seminary. Many felt the speech was inflammatory, unfairly one-sided, biased in favor of North Vietnam and some even felt it was treasonous. My personal feeling was that a communist would be hard put to improve on the speech. The liberals tried to start a standing ovation for the speech but that sputtered and failed miserably. A motion was made that the speech be printed and distributed to the denomination and the General Assembly refused even to print the speech. The added significance of this is that Dr. Wynn is chairman of the committee to write a new Confession of Faith for our denomination--a committee that is composed almost entirely of liberals--and now his credibility has been seriously damaged.

The Assembly refused to invite to speak to the Assembly next year a radical Roman Catholic Archbishop from Brazil even though the Executive Secretary of the Board of

World Missions in a sense laid his prestige on the line to get him invited. A radically liberal paper entitled "A Pastoral Message...on Some Moral Lessons from the War in Indochina" was rejected in favor of a very mild substitute. An effort to get our denomination to adopt another radical paper about the war in Vietnam that had already been adopted by the United Presbyterian Church was also rejected. A resolution calling for commending the President for his bold efforts for peace was passed over the liberals' agonized protest. Overtures asking for amnesty for draft dodgers were rejected. A report entitled "Freedom of Information" having to do with government secrecy was radically altered when the paragraph accusing the government of "excessive secrecy and deception" was deleted.

Well, that will give you a sample of what happened. This is the first time in many years that such a smashing defeat has been handed the liberal machine of our denomination. I do not mean to infer that the moderates won all the battles--we did not. I do not mean to infer that the liberals are no longer in control--they are. I do not mean to infer that the battle is over--it isn't. But a new day has come; a new mood has been created; a new direction has been taken; a new spirit has emerged. I am tremendously excited about the future of our church.

Let me add this word about this Assembly. I would be remiss if I did not tell you that the man who has done the most, who has given the leadership, who has given the spiritual impetus to this new direction at great personal cost has been Dr. Ben Lacy Rose, the immediate past moderator of our denomination. History will show that at the most critical juncture in our denomination in this century, this one man has done more than any other to change the course of events. He deserves our gratitude and our prayers and our support for some of the liberal leaders have already indicated that they will do all in their power to discredit and to "get even" with Dr. Rose.

I am sorry to be so long this morning. I have not begun to cover all of the things that happened at the General Assembly this past week. In the beginning I said I wanted to do three things: to give you some background (which I have done), to share some things that happened at this Assembly (which I have done) and to share with you some of the hopes and dreams many of us have for the Presbyterian Church, U.S. May I take just a few moments to do that.

In our scripture this morning St. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were gentiles who were at one time separated from God's chosen people, the Jews, and even from God himself. He uses such words as "separated", "alienated", "strangers", "no hope", and "without God." He says there has been a wall between the Gentiles and God's people, the Jews. In many ways Paul's description would fit our denomination today for we are characterized by separation, alienation, and by a wall of division. But St. Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians that the blood of Christ has brought that division to an end. He tells them, speaking of Jesus, "for he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility..." He goes on to say, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end." This is my prayer and this is my hope for our beloved church, that through Jesus we might have peace; that through Jesus we might all be reconciled to one another; that through Jesus that the hostility might be brought to an end. I commit myself to continue to fight against those things I do not believe in or agree with. I commit myself to continue to seek to break the strangle hold of the liberals on our church. But I also commit myself to reconciliation in Jesus. I have been accused of making a grab for power across the denomination but the only power I long for in our church is a fresh, new outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit that will bring renewal and revival to our

denomination. I believe the liberals have a valid and a prophetic role to play in the church. I believe the conservatives have a valid and necessary witness to give the denomination. I believe we would all be the poorer without either or both of them. I pledge myself to work for a church where the hostility is gone, where we have peace in Jesus, where all of us have a place, where all of us have a voice, where all of us have a share in determining the direction of our programs and plans and policies. Above all I pledge myself in Christian love to my fellow Presbyterians to work for reconciliation and healing within the body of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.

Under God I call you to join me in such a commitment. This great church can do much, this great congregation can bring tremendous influence to the life of our denomination for healing and reconciliation. As your pastor and spiritual leader I invite you, I urge upon you--laymen, laywomen, youth, Elders and Deacons--let us join together in prayer; let us lock our arms together in unity of purpose as we recommit ourselves, our church, our leadership, our financial resources to Jesus who is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.

