

It is always a great privilege to welcome a new preacher:

- to have the opportunity to celebrate the preacher's task vital
- but it is an extra-special privilege tonight to welcome Sarah.....

I've had the privilege of being involved in other significant occasions in Sarah's life:

- Welcoming her into membership, officiating at her marriage to Oli, and offering prayers of thanksgiving for Amelia, and also being a part of remembering before God the short life of Aaron.

And it is wonderful tonight also to have the opportunity to affirm the role of preaching in the mix of church life:

- through which Gospel is proclaimed,
- to affirm it as being one piece of what builds a Healthy Church.

Much of this chapter 12 from Romans is about the responses we are called to make as a people grateful for God's grace.

- God's grace explored in such depth in the previous 11 chapters!
- And the Gospel reading reminded us of all our role to bring people to see Jesus
- As Lesslie Newbiggin put it:

"I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross?

I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel— evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community."

Tonight we give thanks to God for raising you up, Sarah, for this task!

And what we need from you Sarah, and what we're commissioning you for, is for you to fulfil your call:

- to preach the Gospel...
- to be who you are - with the great Gifts God has given you
- and to continue to grow in the mind of Christ – to be a living Sacrifice.

Romans 12: 11-12 set out this mandate well I think!

“Never be lacking in zeal, keep your spiritual fervour”

- We celebrate tonight your passion and zeal, Sarah. We need that!
- We need Passion!
- And of course there’s great history for us Methodists – called, in our earliest days: “Enthusiasts”
- So never lose that passion to preach of the expansiveness of God's great love
 - Of a Holy God who
 - Loves an unlovely people
 - With an inexhaustible passion
- Romans 8:28:
I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

“Rejoice in hope”

- Sadly the Church sometimes gets too despondent!
 - As if the Gospel is no longer the power to save!
- We need to keep hopeful in God!
 - And you can preach that for us and to us!
- Set before us HOPE
- The hope described in 1 Peter 1:3-5
What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we’ve been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you’ll have it all—life healed and whole.
- In 2001 an interviewer asked Desmond Tutu:
"How do you remain optimistic in the light of all the problems in South Africa?". Desmond Tutu replied - "I am not an optimist, I have hope, I think that is far better."
- So continue to set out the hope that we see in Romans 4: “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...”
- Continue to preach the hope given its foundation in Romans 5:2 "we rejoice in the hope of the Glory of God."

“Patient in suffering”

- It’s important to note that for the Christian there is no incongruity between “rejoicing in hope” and being “patient in suffering.”
- Indeed in Romans 5:2-5 they are closely linked:
And we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

- Sometimes as Christians we soar like eagles, sometimes we run, sometimes we walk, and sometimes we just – only just – manage to keep plodding forward.
- But our security in suffering is powerful!
- Sarah I've been with you when it's been soaring time
 - and when it's been struggling to plod time.
- And I've been so inspired, as many have, by the security in suffering that you have demonstrated by your faith.
- We need you to hold that for us in your preaching.

“Persevering in prayer”

- We need you to persevere in prayer and to encourage us to persevere in prayer.
- And can I also encourage you, as congregations, to pray for your preachers!
- I know Roast Preacher can have a very nice taste as part of a Sunday roast, but please develop the appetite too for “prayed-for preacher.”
 - Pray before you come to church
 - As you come into church!
 - As the preacher preaches!
 - Praying for God's Spirit to do new thing in yr life
 - To convert someone in congregation

In one region of Africa, the first converts to Christianity were very diligent about praying. In fact, the believers each had their own special place outside the village where they went to pray in solitude. The villagers reached these “prayer rooms” by using their own private footpaths through the brush. When grass began to grow over one of these trails, it was evident that the person to whom it belonged was not praying very much.

Because these new Christians were concerned for each other’s spiritual welfare, a unique custom sprang up. Whenever anyone noticed an overgrown “Prayer path,” he or she would go to the person and lovingly warn, “Friend, there’s grass on your path!”

- Sarah, all of us – let’s not let grass grow on our path.

So, Sarah, thank you for the great privilege of inviting me to preach tonight.

- We are so glad to welcome you and affirm you as a preacher.
- And we look forward to you inspiring us, and many others, too.....

*“Never be lacking in zeal,
keeping our spiritual fervour.
Rejoicing in hope,
Being patient in suffering
Persevering in prayer.”*

May God bless you and keep you as you Preach the Gospel.