

Part 1: OPENING ADDRESS

1

Sound the Trumpet

Dr Jim Bond
General Superintendent

We have just heard the familiar tune, “Called Unto Holiness”, played on a slightly out of tune trumpet. I wish I could have jumped into your mind to know what you were experiencing.

The dissonance of an out of tune trumpet is an annoying distraction - the sound is harsh and jarring to the ear and perplexing to the mind. What am I hearing? Does this guy know the instrument is out of tune? You are embarrassed for him - and all of us? Because of what you were hearing you probably did not think of the text or the melody of this great hymn. The out of tune trumpet caused us to forfeit a moment of inspiration in uniting us afresh in our common cause and challenge. Incidentally Jim Buchanan and Dinah Huff know the trumpet is out of tune. Jim did this at my request - and to his embarrassment! And Dinah agreed to accompany him. It sets the stage for my text: “If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” (I Corinthians 14:1-12).

As you can see, my text is smack dab in the middle of Paul’s address of perhaps the thorniest of many thorny issues that had arisen in the Corinthian Church. The issue is - glossolalia (speaking in tongues).

In addressing the problem, Paul juxtaposes the spiritual gift of prophecy against the gift of tongues. He acknowledges both as gifts of the Spirit: he minces no words in stating that prophecy is the superior gift. He characterizes tongues as edifying oneself. By contrast he who prophesies edifies the Church (v. 4).

Therefore he admonishes the Corinthians to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy” (v. 1). And in verse 12 he says, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church”. How does one “edify” or “build-up” the church through the gift

of prophesy? What does it mean to be “prophetic”?

Historically, prophetism has related to an understanding of God’s role and activity in the human situation. That Divine role has normally been understood, interpreted, and announced by one who is called a prophet. As a prophet one exercises two main functions:

- 1) “Sees - apprehends that which is not normally apparent - that which is revealed by God, and
- 2) “Speaks forth” - proclaims that which he has seen - that which God has shown him.

I view prophets as people who:

- 1) Think critically - reading the times, understanding the Church, listening to God, and
- 2) Act catalytically - speaking for God to move people, particularly the people of God, to accomplish God’s purpose.

Walter Brueggeman in *The Prophetic Imagination* states, “the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us”. The key word is alternative. Prophets provide a different view of things.

As “seers” they see things through Divinely enlightened eyes.

They perceive alternative ways of accomplishing mission.

They live on the edge.

They are risk takers.

They are pathfinders for the Church.

They dare to stand up and say, “Follow me as I follow Christ”.

They persevere, even when misunderstood.

By exercising their gift of prophesy, they “edify” the Church.

Listen to Paul in verse 3, “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” That is the three-fold way the prophet edifies the community of faith. Then Paul gives real insight into how the prophet gets the message and how he/she proclaims it. Listen again to verse 6, “Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?”

Paul gives us a definitive word about how the prophet gets his message - “revelation” or “knowledge”. It may come as a direct revelation from God - the prophet has truth that has been given to him from God. It may come through knowledge - the process of discovering truth through study and human experience which is essentially non-supernatural. So through revelation and/or knowledge the prophet gets the message. How does he communicate the message? Through “prophecy or word of instruction” - through preaching and teaching (kerygma and didache).

Then Paul gives some vivid illustrations regarding **the need for the prophet to communicate clearly the message.**

The flute and the harp were well-known musical instruments but the music from these instruments is senseless sounds unless they are played very precisely, giving careful attention to pitch, tone, and time. “How will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?” (verse 7). And then Paul states almost wistfully “If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” Ladies and gentlemen, it is the responsibility of the prophets in the Church to ensure that the Trumpet sounds a clear call - and we are a collection of the Church’s prophets!

My friends and colleagues in ministry, I suggest to you:

1. Our trumpets must be finely tuned.
2. We must be trumpeting the same tune.
3. Leaders must trumpet the church to action **now.**

I. OUR TRUMPETS MUST BE FINELY TUNED

I’m reminded of Lloyd Douglas telling the story of the old violin teacher.

“What is the good news today, my friend?”

Putting his violin down, the old man stepped over to the tuning fork suspended on a silk cord and struck it a smart blow with a padded mallet. As he did so, he said, “There’s the good news today. That, my friend, is A. It was A all day yesterday. It will be A all day tomorrow, next week and for a thousand years. The tenor next door flats his notes and the piano across the hall is out of tune. There is noise all around me but that, my friend, is A.”

When the gospel trumpet is out of tune, we must bring it to the tuning fork. What is our tuning fork? The everlasting truth of God revealed to us in

Jesus the Son of God - the Living Word - And the everlasting truth of God as recorded for us in the Book of God - the written word.

I suppose that for us Wesleyans, the tuning fork is truth made known through the composite of tradition, reason, experience, and, of course, of supreme importance, the Holy Scriptures (the Wesley quadrilateral).

Are our trumpets sounding a clear call today? Are our trumpets making uncertain sounds? Are they out of tune? If so (and I fear some may be), we need to bring them to the tuning fork to make sure that they are sounding a clear call. The prophets' trumpet can get out of tune so subtly, so easily and one can keep blowing the out-of-tune trumpet, unaware that he is not sounding pure, crystal clear notes.

Let me illustrate. You've seen the popular bumper sticker - "Christians Aren't Perfect, Just Forgiven". Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy* challenges this because he contends that it says that forgiveness alone is what Christianity is all about - It says you can have a faith in Christ that brings forgiveness "while in every other respect your life is no different from that of others who have no faith in Christ at all". He questions - "Can we seriously believe that God would establish a plan of forgiveness that leaves human nature untouched? Can we believe that being saved is all forgiveness and has nothing to do with the kind of persons we are? Are we to suppose that in fact Jesus has no substantial impact on our "real lives"?" So, for Willard, the Gospel has been reduced to the "Gospel of Sin Management" - We have come to the place where the Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned only with how to deal with sin. And Willard lays the blame at the feet of the Church's prophets - This condition is "the natural consequence of the basic message as it is heard today". The trumpet is not sounding a clear call. The trumpet is out of tune. To be sure, forgiveness and justification are a vital aspect of the Gospel message. But the problem is, for Willard, that justification has taken the place of regeneration.

How well are we doing? Is our trumpet well tuned? Are all the valves working? What can we Wesleyan prophets reasonably expect to happen in the lives of people who actually hear and believe the message we proclaim? Forgiveness only? Transformation? Is the trumpet hitting clear, distinguishable notes from our pulpits? If so, it is trumpeting intelligibly the full-orbed Gospel message which includes justification and

regeneration.

I suspect that we are doing fairly well in our proclamation of initial salvation. I hear wonderful reports of conversions at District Assemblies. At the Central California District Assembly - Doug Samples reported that he asked a new convert from Bakersfield First Church "How much has Jesus changed your life?" His reply was, "Darn near total". Miracles - Signs of the power of God in Jesus Christ to transform human life.

That great Quaker woman who lived a century ago, Hannah Whitall Smith, gives a marvellous testimony. After she came to discover that Jesus becomes for us our "wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30,31) that God in Christ has been implanted in our hearts and lives so that God's qualities become our qualities: This is the way she describes it. "What had come to me now was a discovery and in no sense an attainment. I had not become a better woman than I was before, but I found out that Christ was a better Saviour than I thought he was".

We are doing fairly well proclaiming initial salvation.

If the trumpet is not sounding the **full** gospel message - prevenient grace, justification, regeneration, entire sanctification, - all for the purpose of shaping us into God's own moral image - and enabling us to live Christlike lives in this present world -then we need to bring the trumpet back to the tuning fork. Anything less than the full gospel message is not enough - we must be utilizing all the valves of the instrument and they must be accurately tuned. Our trumpets must be finely tuned.

II. WE MUST BE TRUMPETING THE SAME TUNE

"How will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes" (verse 7). I assume we would concur that our most important treasure is the doctrinal truth which John Wesley labelled "Christian Perfection" or "Perfect Love". This is, to quote Wesley, "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up". If that is true, then the proclamation of this doctrinal truth is why we exist and ultimately, the spreading of the gospel of Christian holiness should be more important to us than any of our denominations individually or all of us collectively. Our doctrinal truth is more important than growing or preserving denominations. We do not exist to perpetuate

denominations but to proclaim the liberating message of full salvation and to do it in language that is understandable so that its truth may be grasped and lived in this present generation.

The message and its proclamation must be our primary purpose and if it is, then I pray that God will restore to us prophets a fiery passion in its proclamation so that we might be God's instruments to ignite a mighty conflagration of holy fire among the holiness people around the world.

The importance of theologically literate pastors and laity and the enfleshment of holiness theology in our lives is not simply an ideal or luxury - it is essential in preserving the integrity of the gospel and the fidelity of the church and enabling us to be true to our God-given mission.

How well are we doing in our proclamation? I am confident that in many quarters we are doing quite well - but frankly, I am a little apprehensive about how well we are doing generally. I fear that we are not all trumpeting the same tune. My concerns are based primarily on three issues. 1) Everything I read, hear, and observe about modern culture informs me that people today eschew doctrinal preaching. It is not popular to preach doctrine, which means that for our pastors, it is easier and more acceptable to preach a nice, genteel, non-offensive gospel - a "kinder, gentler" gospel - the "gospel of sin management". No one is immune not even Holiness preachers from this subtle temptation to preach to people "what their itching ears want to hear" (II Timothy 4:3). But if that is the tact we choose, if we fall victim to this temptation, we forfeit our doctrinal distinctiveness.

2) There is confusion among us as to what constitutes authentic holiness preaching. I suspect that one could go into many of our churches today and hear an old-timer say, "Our pastor never preaches holiness" and the pastor would say, "Why I preach holiness almost every Sunday". Truth is that both may be correct - The old-timer is talking about entire sanctification as a second definite work of divine grace and its instantaneousness in experience. The pastor is talking about the process of Christian holiness and advancement in Christlikeness. My concern is that in earlier days we probably emphasized the (secondness) crisis experience to the neglect of the process and realizing our error, the pendulum has swung to the other pole. The fact is we need both kinds of preaching. We must have balance in solid, sound, practical, biblical, doctrinal preaching / teaching which

emphasizes both crisis and process. 3) The discussion among our scholars as to whether we should adhere to classical Wesleyan theology or follow the Wesleyan holiness traditions that have come out of Early American Methodism. Now I do not think that the discussion is bad for us. There must always be a place for open and honest debate among our scholars. I will defend that. My concern is the ultimate impact of this discussion upon our preachers who come from our educational institutions and enter our pulpits. It hit me with tremendous force that through my “growing up” days in the Church of the Nazarene, through my college and seminary training, my thought was shaped largely by the Wesleyan holiness tradition. Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS) was founded in 1945 with no courses focusing exclusively on Wesley and his theology - and that continued for 23 years! We had no such courses until William Greathouse became president of NTS in 1968. I attended NTS 1959-1962 so I was schooled largely in the Wesleyan holiness tradition / early American Methodism. Frankly, this is essentially the way I believed and preached though I have been profoundly influenced by Wesley studies since my NTS days.

Let me say that I think it is prudent to allow for both traditions in our theology, recognizing that it may make for some differences in the way it is preached. The Church of the Nazarene “Articles of Faith” makes such provision. In 1984 the Board of General Superintendents ruled that either view may be taught. My concern is what effect is this having on our preaching. I doubt that anything is more critically important to us today than the Proclamation of this glorious doctrine.

I believe in this glorious doctrine.

- 1) Biblical
- 2) Greatest saints of the church testify to it
- 3) It meets the deepest need of the human heart.
- 4) I believe I have experienced it.

As a 5-year-old child, I opened the door of my heart to Jesus. As a 15 year old, I gave my whole life to Jesus. I believe that I was entirely sanctified at that time. How do I know? My knowledge obviously was very limited but I was walking in the light that I had and I yielded my whole life to Jesus to the best of my knowledge. True, the witness of the Spirit within has ebbed and flowed like the ocean tides over the years. True, that the commitment

in the depths of my being has often been flawed (less than perfect) as it was lived out at the surface of my life. But I testify tonight that for 50 years now, my soul “has been rooted and fixed in God” - and it is my faith this moment I am being cleansed by the blood of Jesus and I am being filled by the very Spirit of God Himself in Jesus Christ. I testify to it to the glory and honour of the One who is my Life. If you are living in this glorious relationship you want to proclaim to the world so that all may know the joy and life and hope that is ours in Jesus.

How do we proclaim this glorious message of full salvation? I do not believe that this perfection language is well suited to grab the attention of a post-modern (post Christian) era that is supposedly doctrinally disinterested. That’s not the “up-front” language that will attract, in fact I fear that it will repel. Perfection language may be utilized effectively in the discipling process but probably not in evangelism. We have to get the attention of the worldlings. It is an incomparable challenge. How do we do it? How can we best communicate the doctrine of Christian Holiness? By the proclamation of our best message - the winsome, wonderful, irresistibly compelling Jesus who is the true light that gives light to every man coming into the world -Jesus who is already faithfully witnessing in every heart through the Holy Spirit. “We preach Jesus” - The Jesus who came to reconcile the world unto Himself, who said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself”. We preach Jesus “who has become for us wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:31).

We preach Jesus! And I believe the best way to communicate holiness today is to preach holiness as Jesus likeness. That is the message that people can understand in every age. Jesus came into this world for salvific purposes but he also came to model and teach the life for which we were created - Christlikeness is the essence of holiness.

We believe this involves an experience in initial salvation, a second definite work of grace in which the sinful self / ego bias is cleansed and Jesus is enthroned as Sovereign Lord and we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We spend the rest of our days in obedience and faith, daring to believe with the Apostle Paul that we “are being transformed into the image of Christ with ever - increasing glory” (II Corinthians 3:18).

When the trumpet is finely tuned, all the valves are functioning, and we are

all playing the same tune, the trumpet flows with the most incredible music this world has ever heard - it is glorious, melodious music - Music that vibrates with living hope because it addresses the deepest needs of empty lives, smashed dreams, and broken hearts. I believe the trumpet must blast forth the glorious good news of Jesus, His power to save from all sin, to sanctify wholly, restore within us His own blessed image, and enable us to live Jesus-like in this present world. We all need to be trumpeting the same tune and I believe that is the tune we need to be playing!

III. NOW IS THE TIME TO TRUMPET THE CHURCH TO ACTION

The trumpet in the Bible is often engaged to sound the call to action. Judges 6:34 “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet, summoning the people to follow him”. Gideon reduced his warriors down to 300 to go against the “Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples who settled in the valley, thick as locusts. The camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore” (Judges 7:12). But in the middle of the night, Gideon and his little band surrounded them, broke their pitchers and blew their trumpets and God routed / destroyed the enemy before their very eyes.

And how about Joshua and the battle of Jericho?

“When the trumpets sounded and the people gave a loud shout, the walls collapsed”.

Folks, it is time to sound the trumpets, calling the people to follow us. We are the leaders; it is our responsibility to lead. How?

- 1) Make sure the trumpet is finely tuned.
- 2) Make sure we are all playing the same song.
- 3) And we must do it now.

We can no longer tolerate dissonance in the trumpets. We can no longer tolerate confusion over the tune we are to play. If the trumpet is not sounding clearly our message, then our prophetic ministry is muted - To put it in the context of I Corinthians 14 we are no better than those who publicly speak in tongues without interpretation - they feel good themselves but they do no one else any good. We may feel really good about our preaching / teaching like those who speak in tongues. But if the message is not being trumpeted clearly, it ultimately will fail to “edify” or “build-up” the church. What do we do? Where do we go from here? An

edict from the Board of General Superintendents or District Superintendents is not the answer. Instead of nit picking over exotic Wesley issues - Focus on bringing unity to the message and its proclamation.

- 1) Call a summit meeting of leaders and our scholars / our professors and our practitioners.
- 2) Consider Wesley's annual conferences. Can it work in the context of our district assemblies?
- 3) We must work more intentionally with all our ministers during the credentialing and ordination process to ensure that they know and understand our doctrines, are experiencing them, and can proclaim them clearly.
- 4) We leaders must lead the way in modelling the living and proclamation of the doctrines.

CONCLUSION:

I conclude with a great quote from Al Trusdale and Bonnie Perry's book, *A Dangerous Hope*.

Let the Church be a people that heralds the gospel of true hope in this world so pitifully broken by false hope. Let the Church live in the hope that advances the Kingdom of God in His good creation. Let there be holy living through the meaning and power of the gospel. May we be people who live in, and live out, the dangerous Christian hope by placing all of life in the gospel's promises. And may we live under the Holy Spirit's comprehensive cleansing, empowerment, and governance. Amen

And may God help us as the prophets of the Church to put the fine tuned trumpet of gospel truth to our mouths and trumpet the complete message of God's salvific activity in Jesus for therein is our one and only message.