

Remembrance and Vision
A Charge to the Congregation on Bostrom Appreciation Sunday
July 16, 2006

As Ty Busbice said this morning, Steve Bostrom is a man of words. Hearing that, I was reminded of a Session meeting about 15-16 years ago, in our old building. There were only four or five of us then, and we were deliberating, heads down, looking at some document. I had learned a new word that day and, in the course of things, an occasion arose to use the word. When I said it, Steve looked up and smiled. The conversation went something like this. Steve said "what?" And I said the word again. He said "That's not a word." I said "Yes, it is." He said "That can't be a word." I said "It is too!" He went for the dictionary. It was a word. Probably the only word I ever taught Steve Bostrom.

Well, this evening we are saying goodbye and sending the Bostroms to a new work after nearly 18 years of service with us. And so, this time together is mostly for them. But my purpose is just to speak to us about who *we* are and who *we* remain after their leaving – during the next days when we do not have a Senior Pastor, when we seek God's will for us as a church.

The question is: what now? Let me challenge you with two words: *remembrance*, and *vision*. We want to keep on being the church, remembering God's faithfulness to us *and* envisioning how He will work in our lives in the future. Both tasks are to be done communally and prayerfully. These are things we should be doing all the time, individually and corporately, but they can come to the forefront when we have an event that really makes us pause and look back and look ahead. We recognize that these are important moments.

Remembering is very important. By remembering we see God's providence, the outworking of God's plan for not only our lives but the life of the church. We can glimpse the truth of Roman 8:28, that God really does work all things for the good of those that love Him. Some of you, better than me, can put words to what God has done in our midst. But I can look back and see that we have grown in so many ways – in our men's ministry, in women's fellowship, in our understanding of grace through Sonship and other teaching. You know, we speak of discipling as an individual thing, but we can also look back and see how God has discipled us as a community by carrying us through different events.

We can be thankful that we have a now long tradition of faithful, biblical preaching and teaching here, through Steve and Eddie, and Doug, and Byron, and our founding pastor, Jim Workman, of service by many in music, in taking care of our property, in teaching Family Bible School, in short-term missions – in so many ways. So, it's a time to remember, and be thankful.

But more than that, it's also a time for us to look forward, to envision what God might do here at Peace. Again, it's not something we just think of now, but it is one of those moments in the life of the church when it comes to the forefront.

It's not my purpose to cast a vision for us – we all do that together. But let me plant three more words in your mind to think on as we enter a new phase of our life as a community: faith, hope, and love. As the Apostle Paul says at the end of the well-known "love" chapter, 1 Corinthians

13, "[a]nd now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love. . . ."

By *faith* we believe in something we cannot see; we affirm that God is everywhere, an all powerful, all-knowing, and all-seeing power -- and yet we cannot see this Power. We walk out and look up at the stars and moon, peer out into eternity, and speak to God and generally hear no audible reply. And yet, we have faith. We believe. We put our faith in Jesus. We know we cannot save ourselves. Contrast this with the fact that all around us are people with misplaced faith or no faith, looking for something to believe in, and we must continue to, as scripture says, to "hold out the Word of life," not offering them religion but relationship, Someone to believe in.

By *hope*, we mean we hope for eternity, for the restoration of Creation, even though sometimes a nagging voice in our heads, in the corner of our mind, says it is all useless, that the world is winding down, that nothing can be done to reverse its decay. All our shiny new Cary houses age, cracks line the driveways, paint peels, stains multiply, and sooner or later there isn't enough money to fix everything, to remake it all, to keep it shiny, to fool ourselves into thinking we can stop the decay. Neither a new kitchen nor a new wardrobe will really give us hope, will stop the voice in our heads. For us, that voice is recognizable as that of the Deceiver; for many of those around us, it's the soundtrack of their life, one they try to drown out by distraction. Sooner or later, as Rev. John Ames, the central character in a book called *Gilead*, says of his town in Gilead, (and as we might say of Cary) the "whole town does look like whatever hope becomes after it begins to weary a little, then weary a little more. But hope deferred is still hope." We still hope. We refuse to hope in the new and shiny, in the corruptible. Our hope is in the incorruptible, in what God is doing in us and in His growing Kingdom.

But now we come to the most devalued word of all, the subject of most pop songs, sitcoms, and novels. Paul says that *love* is the most important. Francis Schaeffer said that the "church is to be a loving church in a dying culture," that indeed the mark of the Christian is love. It's difficult to use the word love. It's like worthless currency, an overworked metaphor, a trite term. Not to be dramatic, but maybe we need to ask who we have "died" for today, because dying to self is what it's all about, isn't it? We also can't forget that love is *particular*, and so we ask what does it mean to love *these* people *here*, in this place, and more broadly, what does it mean to love this place, now, here? So what does love look like here? Am I willing to die to self? I need to ask it moment by moment. The honest answer is no, I'm not willing to lay down what I want, not every moment, that sometimes I want my space, my peace and quiet, my freedom, just a few moments to myself, because I have to take care of myself, right? Wrong. Love is sacrificial. It'll mark our community as different.

There's one final and odd phrase from 1 Peter. The Apostle says we are "aliens and strangers" in this world, and so we are. Our chief alien, Steve, is leaving us, but we will carry on, right? And so we have an *alien* faith, and *alien* hope, and an *alien* love. It's not from here. It comes from somewhere else. It comes from Someone else. Going forward, we'd do well to remember that.

I guess what I'm saying is: Let's press on, let's keep being the church, Let's remember God's work in our midst over all these years and envision how He will continue to work through us in the future. By His grace.