

***Foundations For Christian  
Living:  
Pace***

**Matthew 14:13-23**

PREPARED BY  
KEN GEHRELS  
PASTOR  
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA  
ONTARIO, CANADA

There are five words which can help Christian workers ground their service for Jesus Christ - within and outside of the Church. We're spending our Lenten Sunday evenings considering them. They are:

- Purity**
- Passion**
- Power**
- Place**
- Pace**

Each one is significant, I believe, for effective ministry, for effective living for Jesus.

- As you serve, is it with clean hands and a pure heart?***
- What is the passion that drives your service?***
- Where do you get power to serve?***
- Are you serving where the Lord wants you to serve?***
- Are you serving at the pace that God requires?***

**Purity**

Be very careful about guarding the well-being of our souls and minds and bodies.

**Passion**

Be careful to take time to maintain the vigour and passion of faith. Keep the commitment fresh and keen.

**Power**

God's power begins to flow when our power ends. God's power can flow in and through a person's life when that person is willing to submit their lives under the control of God. It was the Lord's word to the apostle Paul -

*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*  
[2 Cor 12:9]

**Place**

Be willing to stop and prayerfully ask if you are serving in the situation and doing the sort of task that the Lord wills for you to do. Look for His very direct, very real guidance in discerning the PLACE where you are called to serve.

And be aware that when it comes to PLACE, the key thing is not even so much what God desires to do **through** us -

- though that certainly matters -

- but what is God at working doing **to** us!

The location where God is most interested in doing work is right at home, **inside** us, shaping and moulding our character into the image of Jesus Christ.

Where is God,

who is always at work,

revealing that work to you?

And to what sort of Christian activity is He drawing your attention?

Be it through

Dreams

Circumstances

Inner heart peace

drawing our mind's attention to a particular project

consensus in deliberation among prayerful believers

the concurrence of Scripture

an inner voice

How are you prayerfully experiencing the guidance of the Lord's Holy Counsellor?

AND

As you experience that guidance -  
- do you follow it?

Obediently?

One step at a time?

Just as Israel was called to follow the cloud in the desert one step at a time?

When the cloud moved, they moved.

When the cloud stopped, they stopped.

Where the cloud went, they followed.

With Purity.

With Passion.

With Power.

And in the right Place.

One more piece to the puzzle in this, the conclusion to our Lenten evening series.

How hard are we to be at work?

What's the **PACE** that we should be adopting?

Someone was interviewed on CHRI recently about his particular ministry.

He shared very freely about being incredibly driven by the work.

Always on the go.

And then came this comment -

*I desire to burn right out for the Lord. Let me flame right out for Jesus.*

Sound right?

How ought we adopt a particular **PACE** for Christian service?

Is there a right pace?

Is there a wrong one?

Is there only one?

Purity, Passion, Power, Place.....

What do we make of the **PACE** of ministry?

Hear the Word of God -

**MATTHEW 14:13-23, p.16 (NT)**

We're thinking about the **PACE** of ministry.

Consider the life of Jesus.

He's in major grief - his cousin and good friend, John the Baptist, has been murdered by Herod.

If you've been accosted by a tragedy at some point, then you're well aware of what a shock to the system it can be. You go numb. Energy drains right out your toes. Feeling and emotions go all funny and unreliable. The world seems in a swirl, and you need to get away.

As does Jesus.

He withdraws in a boat to deserted place by himself.

Even the Holy Son of God needs space and time alone.

To recharge himself.

And to meet with His heavenly Father.

Notice that at the end of our reading, when the interruption of the crowd and the disciples is dealt with, Jesus heads for quiet space again.

Quiet space.

Silent time.

Recall what we've been speaking about in our morning series - Sabbath.

Pause time.

Eugene Peterson once wrote, "*Busyness is the enemy of spirituality.*"

[*Subversive Spirituality* p.237]

It's very easy to get caught up with the doing of **stuff**, forgetting about for Whom it is that we are doing it.

Rule # 1 - In your **PACE** of ministry, make absolutely sure that there is a rhythm of isolation, season of seclusion, patterns of Sabbath.

One of the most helpful things to my ministry here,  
and at the same time  
one of the most DIFFICULT to stick to  
is a pattern of monthly prayer & meditation retreats.

I'm committed to making that part of my patterned **PACE** of ministry.

I believe that this is something the Lord is asking of me.

And yet it is hard - there's always another phone call to return, question to answer, administrative loose end to attend to. Always more.

But I've got to make sure there's regular time for me to, as it were, go up the mountain by myself to pray.

It seems that every time I do it, I enter that day thinking, "*I'm an idiot for doing this - I'll be so far behind by the end of the week, and will regret it to no end.*"

And every time I finish such a retreat, I leave the day feeling spiritually clear, the fog is lifted from my vision for ministry, sense of connection with the Lord is strengthened.....

....and at the end of the week, the work is usually done!

PACE of ministry.

Committees - when we meet to do the business of the church, we all arrive tired and challenged. There's usually a printed agenda. It often is ambitious.

What's often the first thing we tend to skip on?

A time for prayer and quiet devotions as a group.

Here's a challenge for any committee chair, prayerfully insert a time of focussed devotion, sharing, scripture and prayer in your meeting. Stick to it. And then, at the end of the season, take note of what has been accomplished. Has it been more or less than when you didn't include it in the PACE of your committee's ministry?

I won't tell you what my experience has been.

You go ahead and try it for yourself. Challenge the sceptics of your group to take a risk and try it with you. Let me know how you make out.

Busyness is the enemy of spirituality.

Another element of pacing is this -

When the Lord presents an immediate ministry opportunity,  
right there  
in your face

Perhaps then it is time to lay the seclusion time aside and attend to that opportunity.

There was a Friday night some months ago where I was looking to be involved in a regular activity that I do with my wife. Something I quite enjoy and looked forward to.

Then the phone rang.

Someone on the other end - could I come to meet with them and pray through a particular concern? My mind kicked into high gear trying to waltz past this one. Grab the daytimer. Of course that slot is full. And I know well enough that family time is important. Can't be committing ecclesiastical adultery. My vows of ordination are strong about that sort of thing!

Yet there was a deep inner sense that told me I shouldn't deke around this request. I can't explain any other way than it was an inner compulsion.

Which I responded to. Went to meet with the person. And looking back, I can see that it was absolutely the **right** thing to be doing. To have ignored the request would have been a huge ministry mistake.

Sometimes the **PACE** of ministry calls for an extra lap around the track. Pushing out the extra effort. When is that?

Well, no one right answer here.

It goes back to the same thing that we talked about last time regarding the PLACE of ministry. Each believer, as part of their maturing in faith and service, needs to develop a sense of watching and hearing for the Lord's guiding in their life.

What that will look like may be rather different from believer to believer.

But trust that the direction will come.

Be open to it.

And practice responding to it.

God will honour your practice. I'm sure about that. And you will grow more and more accustomed to knowing when it is the Lord's direction that is tugging at you, and when it may be your own compulsiveness to keep a tidy daytimer, or your own need for control over a situation or group, or your own addiction to being needed or to work.

One of the best tools to check which it is - God's will and direction or your own inner longing - is by the outcome. What happened when you made the choice to do something or not do it? What was the fruit of that decision?

In Matthew 7 Jesus said:

*15 "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart.*

*16 You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don't pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles.*

*17 A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit.*

*18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit.*

*19 So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire.*

*20 Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced. [New Living Translation]*

That's true about prophets, people who come claiming to hear the voice of God. That's also true as we seek to prophetically understand the voice and leading of the Lord in our own lives.

What's the fruit?

What's the outcome?

Time and experience are key there.

As is surrounding yourself with a small group of mature believers.

For me, as many of you know, I keep contact with a couple of mature pastors whom I trust. And when facing an uncertain situation, they're the ones I go to saying, '*What do you think?*' I trust their input. And learn from it.

They help me keep a proper **PACE** for ministry.

God speaks into my life through them.

Finally this about ministry PACE -

I take serious issue with the person issuing some kind of self-fulfilling prophecy about burning out for the Lord.

If Jesus has destined us to be a martyr for Him, so it will be.

But we don't have to set ourselves up for martyrdom. We OUGHT not do so. Nor ought we martyr those loved ones close to us - families included.

1 Timothy 3:4 says that Christian leaders must be able to manage their homes and families well. You can't do that when you're never around.

And Hebrews 12:1, which comes hard on the heels of the great chapter of faith, Hebrews 11 with all its inspiring stories of martyrs and saints who have lived strong lives of trust in the Lord....

...Hebrews 12:1 says this in response -

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.*

Run with endurance.

That's a phrase about pacing.

Some of you know that my doctor rather ungently compelled me into regular exercise, in my case running. Try to get out a few times a week - generally around 10km. And I've learned that I don't run for 10km the same sort of way that you run 400m or even 5km. Got to pace it right for the long haul. To be able to keep going. I'm slowly learning to get it right. To be able to go longer distances.

If we figure we're wanting to burn out for Jesus, like that person interviewed on the radio - that doesn't sound to me like running with endurance.

Jesus, in the midst of his grief, is willing to take time to minister when he really longs to be alone.

The gospels give account about Jesus actually doing that more often. It's not a one-off kind of event. But it's not the daily pattern, either.

There is time alone.

There is synagogue worship time.

There is time with just his small group of friends.

There is party time - so much, in fact, that word got around town that he was a drunk and a bit of a glutton.

The pace in Jesus' life varied according to the situation the Heavenly Father presented to Him. He watched for it, and set his stride accordingly.

Are we watching?

And adjusting our stride according to what the Lord presents to us?

Healthy Christian service -

Purity

Passion

Power

Place

Pace

May God grow maturity in each of these within our personal lives, and within our life together as a congregation.

To His Glory!