

McCabe United Methodist Church

Peace with God (Part 3)

(Based on Billy Graham's book *Peace with God*)

Ecclesiastes 12:1 * Matthew 9:35-38: March 22 & 23, 2014

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"Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes, before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire."

-Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 (MSG)

"Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young." This passage is talking about young people and the importance of having faith in Jesus Christ. It's saying the sooner you have faith, the better. Life can be hard, having Jesus Christ in your corner helps a person to endure and live.

This is the third message in a series I'm calling *Peace With God*. It's based on Billy Graham's book of the same name. My message today isn't based on one particular chapter of the book. But rather, it's based on something that I know Billy Graham cares about and it's something that I care about. The church!

Again, I'll be using the Billy Graham preaching formula which goes like this:

1. God has a plan for us
2. We don't follow God's plan
3. God has a solution for us when we don't follow God's plan
4. Our response to God's solution

My message today is for our youth. If you are young or young-at-heart this message is meant for you. You have a part to play in the Kingdom of God. God needs what you have to offer. God has already given you the gifts and talents you need to make a difference not only in your own life, but also in the life of those around you.

This message is also for those of you who are struggling to have a better relationship with Jesus. It's for those of you who are trying to figure out what to do with your life. Why are you here? What is your purpose in this world? What is the meaning of your life? Do you have any idea?

Today's church is in trouble. I'm not only talking about this church, but most other churches as well. The church is becoming less and less relevant in the world. We're losing our voice. We're losing our influence. We're losing our power.

We build new buildings, but not new followers. We entertain, but we don't convict or convert. We modernize how we do ministry, but we don't seem to make much of a difference.

Our young people today, are staying away from the church in record numbers. They're asking the question "**Why do we need God**" and the church strangely remains silent. We don't have a good answer for them.

And so many of our youth have stopped looking to the church for models to follow, for ways to live their lives. Instead, they look to the world of sports or music or business or culture for the examples.

The church is in trouble.

Kyle Idleman is a young pastor living in Kentucky. He described today's church in an article I read:

He writes, "Jesus was never interested in having fans. When he defines what kind of relationship he wants, "Enthusiastic Admirer" isn't an option. My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him. The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them."

Fans or followers? This is our basic choice. It's up to us.

I think Jesus was trying to make this same point in our passage from Matthew. He was talking to his disciples. He was saying that it's the church's job to teach people, to help people, to guide people and to love people. He was talking about being a worker and not merely a fan.

*“And so Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing diseases and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them. He said, **“they were like sheep without a shepherd.”**”*

*And then he said to his disciples, **“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”**”*

“The harvest is plentiful.” People still need what the church has to offer, but **“the workers are few.”** We’re not harvesting because we don’t have the workers.

Where is the church today? According to the Pew Research Center, one out of three people under the age of 30 claims to have no religious affiliation.

Where is the church? Today, thirteen million Americans consider themselves atheists or agnostics.

Where is the church? Did you know North America is the only continent on earth where Christianity is not growing?

Where is the church? Did you know that only 17.5% of the population of the U.S. attends church on a weekly basis?

Where is the church? Did you know that during the last decade there was a 19.4% decline in church attendance?

Where is the church? Did you know that 85% of churches in America are at a plateau or are declining in membership?

Where is the church? Did you know that because of our large population of unchurched people, the U.S. is the 4th largest mission field for other countries?

Where is the church?

Today’s church is in trouble. Where can people today, find the hands and the feet, the heart and the soul of Jesus Christ? Where can young people hear the stories of Jesus and the story of salvation? Where can the

least and the lost and the forgotten find followers of Jesus who are willing to stand by their side? Where can people find models and examples of how Jesus lived and how he wants us to live?

Today's church is in trouble. In our Dakotas Conference, we're again facing a shortage of pastors. It's getting harder and harder to find people to fill our pulpits. The biggest reason for the shortage is simple: We don't have enough men or women willing to work or willing to consider the ordained ministry as their vocation.

By the way, this is also true in most other UM conferences and most other denominations including the Catholic Church. There's a shortage of pastors.

Why? Serving Jesus Christ through the church has become less and less relevant. When was the last time you heard a young person say, **“Well, I'm thinking about being an engineer or a computer programmer or a pastor?”** Engineers, yes. Computer programmers, yes. But a pastor? Come on!

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”

Young people! Are you hearing God whisper your name today? God needs you. God has plans for you. God needs what you have to offer.

This is a second career for me. I was perfectly fine owning my own business and doing something else. But God had other plans for me. I tried to avoid those other plans, but finally it got to the point where I had to say **‘yes’**. And here I am.

I've never regretted my decision.

Now, if making gobs and gobs of money is your primary goal, than being a pastor isn't the career for you.

However, being a pastor makes you rich in other ways. What other career allows you to walk with God on a daily basis? What other career allows you the privilege of knowing people during some of the most important parts of their lives? What other career allows you to influence young people? What other career allows you to bring people close to their

Savior, Jesus Christ? What other career allows you to make a difference in the lives of all the people you meet? What other career allows you to help build the Kingdom of God?

Young people, is God talking to you, right now? You already have what it takes to serve God. God has given you the gifts and talents you'll need. Plus, God will be with you, serving with you, helping you and supporting you.

Just as You Are is how God wants you.

"Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes, before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire."

Maybe some of you are thinking to yourself, **"well, I'm not so young anymore. I've got some snow on the top. I've slowed down. Can God still use me?"**

Yes! God needs you as well. When I went to seminary, the average age for all students was in the mid-thirties and growing older. I don't know what the average age is today, but I know that God needs you and needs what you have to offer.

You might not be interested in a career as a pastor. That's OK. You need to know that there are other ways to serve Jesus Christ. McCabe needs what you have to offer.

In a few short months, your new pastor will arrive at McCabe. She will need you to support her and encourage her and help in ways that you might or might not imagine right now. Being a pastor in today's world is difficult. Being a young, single, female pastor is even harder. Pastor Jenny will need you.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

What's God saying to you today? Is God whispering your name? **"Come, follow me. I want you to be a pastor. I want you to be one of my workers. Come, follow me."**

Today, as we sing our last hymn, *Just as I Am*, I'm going to ask our young people to come forward if you're hearing God's voice. Also, if your wrestling with God and wondering what you should be doing, please come forward. Kneel or stand at the altar. Take your time. Pray for discernment. Pray for clarity. Pray this prayer, **"Lord, help me to hear. Help me to understand you. Help me to follow you. Amen."**

I'll stand here and if you want me to pray with you, I'd be more than happy to do that. Also, if you want to talk to me about a career in ministry or some of McCabe's ministries, I'd again be happy to meet with you anytime, anywhere.