

## **CHRISTIAN LEADER AS PILGRIM AND PERSON**

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It is a marvellous things for us to be together. "Together" is a great New Testament word. That word "apartheid", about being apart, and a philosophy of apartness is not a Bible word. But "together" is the Bible's word. And we are together, praise God. Let's say it: "We are together, Praise God."

Acts 2:1 says: "When the Day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." Verse 44 says: "All who believed were together." And that togetherness of verse 44 in Acts Chapter 2 is the explanation of verse 47 which says: "People were added to the church daily." The evangelistic and missionary explosion of the early Church was the result of their incredible togetherness. And that togetherness is very real. We are indeed one in Christ. Our task is to make that visible, evident and active. And we are in a journey towards that expression of our togetherness, in activity, initiative, mission and evangelism for our Lord.

We are now embarking on a journey together. A journey of encounter with the Lord, of finding fellowship with each other, of learning from each other, because often the person from whom I can learn most is not my theological or spiritual identical twin, but rather my Samaritan, my Cornelius, my brother or sister from another background, or ecclesiastical merry-go-round, or another denominational history. And we are here to hear from each other, to hear from the Lord through each other. And beloved if at any time along the way in the journey in these days, as can happen in a physical journey, we lose each other, there is a rendezvous place. I will draw a picture of where we will meet if we begin at any point individually or corporately to lose each other. This is where we will meet. The rendezvous place is at the Cross. And if perhaps in these days we can live at the foot of the Cross, we won't lose each other, and it will be a journey indeed into new beginnings, new initiatives, new action plans.

We are thinking about the Christian Leader (man or woman, boy or girl) as Pilgrim and Person and about journeying together as real Christians. And, of course, all of life is a journey. From womb to tomb. From cradle to grave. From infancy to childhood, to teenage years, to young adulthood, to full adulthood, to middle age and onwards to older years. There are three stages of life – youth, middle age and "You look good." So if anyone comes up to you and says "You look good," you know in which category you fit. At one conference I attended, someone came up to me and said: "Michael you look terrible. You remind me of that hymn we sometimes sing: 'Change and decay in all around I see.'"

But, in any event, life is a journey. There is the emotional and psychological journey, as we grow up and mature. The intellectual journey from learning the three R's to intellectual maturity. The professional journey from lower to senior ranks. If we are married, there is a journey into deeper love and companionship with our spouses. Not like the guy to whom his wife said one day: "You never tell me any more that you love you." He replied: "Dear, listen. I told you 25 years ago that I loved you. If the situation changes, I'll let you know!" I guess they had a way to go on their journey!

There is also a moral journey and there is nothing inevitable about the moral journey that there should be progress from badness to goodness. Sometimes people start out with sweetness, innocence and goodness, and they can end up a Hitler, a Stalin or an Amin. Then there is a spiritual journey into God and onwards with Him. Again there is no inevitability about this journey, that we will make it and progress. Some people effectively never start. As the Apostle Paul says: "They are always searching and never arriving at a knowledge of the truth."

But in Christ we can arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Maybe not an exhaustive knowledge, but a partial knowledge. We can know the truth and the truth can set us free.

What I do know about all these journeys, moral and spiritual, is that they are meant to be journeys of progress. John Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress". St Paul said to Timothy: "That all may see your progress."

Brothers and sisters, I wonder what your secret graph is of your or my moral or spiritual progress? What would that graph look like. Would it be plunging downwards, on the level, neither up nor down for the last 30 or 40 years? Just plodding along, me and God? Nothing new to report? Or would it be a gentle or steep incline? Or a violent up and down gyration like a cardiograph picture or a roller coaster? Don't ever allow

yourself to go on a roller coaster at the Rand Easter Show! When my daughter, Debbie, was about 10 she inveigled me onto such a roller coaster. It is the fastest way to have cardiac arrest and lose your sanctification at the same time!

However, I do know what the Lord wants is a graph of progress. I am not sure I could claim that. So I am with you in that struggle to progress. But the journey, graph and progress of the Christian Leader is incredibly important, because the way we progress will determine how the world thinks about Jesus – about who He is, what He's like, what He requires of them and all of us. St Paul says: "We are letters from Christ, known and read by all people." Are we legible or illegible letters? And maybe that is why the Lord has to say to us in South Africa today as Christian Leaders, as he said to Adam: "Where are you?" And He had to say it to Adam because Adam wasn't where he was meant to be. And I wonder if we, as leaders, in whatever categories or spheres in the Church of Christ in South Africa today, are where we are meant to be?

We had reflection in the SACLA Council along the way to this conference: "Are we ready to march?" We have talked about Moses and Joshua and the children of Israel. They marched. Are we ready to march? In the SACLA Council many of us felt we were not really ready to march. What about you and all of us here tonight? Are we actually ready to advance on these Goliaths and Giants which have been identified? Are we ready for that? Can we cope with that? Or are our lives so full of sin, moral and sexual compromise, spiritual lethargy, evangelistic paralysis, prophetic timidity, that we need a big check in with God Himself before we can move out to tackle the other giants that are out there? The giants of the unevangelised world, or the hurting world, the lost world, of HIV/Aids, crime, corruption, poverty, unemployment, violence, sexism, racism and the collapse of the family.

I suspect that in many of these plenaries we are going to find ourselves face to face with God Himself and with whom and where we are so that maybe out there in the tracks we can talk more about the giants that are out there. But the burden of my heart is that we check in with the giants which are in our own hearts. Each of us knows that we have giants in our hearts and that if we have a whole bunch of unresolved giants in our hearts, we cannot lead the South African Church, let alone the nation, any place at all. We become as Jesus said in Matthew: "The blind leading the blind, and both falling into the ditch." And if we aren't blind, then maybe like many of our people out there in the churches, we are bland. Just pottering along with no fire, no passion, no oomph, no evangelistic zeal and no social concern. And when that happens it is the "bland leading the bland!" And maybe they also both fall in the ditch.

But the sadness is that if we are like that we have nothing to say to neopagan, secular society, because in measure we have become a pale religious reflection and echo of the values, morals and standards of the world. It is not a case of reforming and changing the Church out there in the world, but the world has come into the Church and is shaping the way we think, behave and teach. And with respect I want to say there is no way, not for me at any rate and I suspect for most of you, that the state can tell us the nature of marriage or redefine it for us, or when infants in the womb or oldies in the Old Age Home can be taken out. There is no way that we can be told that a condom culture and the total misnomer of safe sex is the solution for HIV/Aids, rather than following the Judaeo/Christian principles of biblical sexual behaviour. I am not going to let the state or media or anybody else tell me and redefine for me those questions. I believe if we allow anything other than our Lord and His Word to define where we stand on all of these issues, then we have problems.

That is why I believe that what we ourselves need is a fresh vision of God Himself and a fresh commissioning as a crucial part of our personal and corporate journey. We must check in with God and with Jesus and with the Cross and His Word tonight, before we can move on much further into this week. And the amazing thing about Isaiah was that he had to have this check in himself. Isaiah's giant was a loss of a vision of God Himself. And in Judah in the 6th and 7th century BC, there were giants. You read Isaiah 5 and you will see the giants of his day. Injustice, violence, bloodshed, acquisitiveness, materialism, exploitation of the poor, drunkenness ("People were heroes at drinking wine"), iniquity and falsehood, moral confusion, calling evil good, and good evil. Darkness was called light. Light was called darkness. There was intellectual self satisfaction. "People were wise in their own eyes." Widespread corruption and bribery, despising of the Word of God, adulation of the powerful figure in Uzziah who had reigned for 52 years. All eyes were on Uzziah and not on Jehovah God. And to all these giants and to those behind them, Isaiah came along and said to all of them: "Woe is you, woe is you, woe is you who are caught up in these things and behind all of these things."

But Isaiah 6:1 says: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." All eyes had been on Uzziah and

it was impossible to think of a post-Uzziah world. But now in the year that King Uzziah died, he says: "I saw the Lord." And Isaiah says: "I saw Him sovereign, on a throne, high and lifted up." That means He was sovereign, He was in charge, He was boss of history. So we don't have to pray like the little girl one night who got down by her bed and said: "Dear Lord Jesus, please take good care of yourself because if anything happens to you we'll be in a terrible mess." Nothing ain't going to happen to Him! He's OK! He's sovereign, He's in charge, He's on the throne of history.

And then Isaiah saw Him as "Holy, holy, holy. The Lord of hosts." We need to grasp afresh the holiness of God. He has standards, He has values, He has commandments – 10 Commandment, not 10 suggestions! Ten Commandments. He has laws about behaviour. And He is Holy, Holy, Holy. And when Isaiah saw that God – Holy, Holy, Holy – he said: "Woe is me!" He said he was lost. The prophet. He said: "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the middle of a people of unclean lips." And maybe the place of uncleanness for different ones of us in this place is different. It could be hands, or eyes, or ears, or sexual organs, or mind, or feet, or heart. For Isaiah it was lips, maybe because of things he said or because of things he didn't say. And he cries for mercy.

And beloved, maybe the first thing we have to do in SACLA II is to move from "Woe is you out there on the giants", to "Woe is me", "Woe is us", because of our sin and compromise and doubting of His Word. So often we have a moral form without a moral substance. We have a spiritual appearance but not a spiritual reality. "A form of religion," Paul says "but denying the power of it." But amazingly (but maybe not amazingly, because our God is a God of amazing grace), the Lord forgives Isaiah as He longs to forgive you and me, especially for when those giants are conquering us, and he removes Isaiah's guilt, forgives him, cleanses him. That is what we need afresh – the cleansing. And then, when Isaiah is cleansed and forgiven, he hears the voice of the Lord. We don't hear the voice until the cleansing. "I heard the voice of the Lord." He heard the voice which said: "Who will go?" Who will go for us? Who will go out to South Africa? Who will go into that legal firm, that hospital, that school, college, church, denomination, congregation? Who will go? And Isaiah says: "Here am I, send me." Now truly repentant, truly cleansed, truly forgiven, properly commissioned and empowered, he became the man to tackle the Goliaths of his day in the post-Uzziah world.

This is an incredible picture. And maybe this is why Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16 – "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching." The pastoral epistles are full of concern about teaching and doctrine. Passionately so. But they are more concerned first about the person behind all of that. Paul says: "Take heed to yourself," and maybe that is why in SACLA II our Lord is calling us first of all to take heed to ourselves. I think perhaps it is not insignificant why it was that it was the night in which He was betrayed that He took bread and instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and Communion and the Eucharist. It dawned on me after some years – because the Cross is all about dealing with betrayals: your betrayals and mine, all our sins. They are dealt with at the Cross and that is what that great sacrament symbolises: His death on the Cross and His forgiveness offered to us.

We see that journey in Isaiah, and it is a journey which all leaders have to take. If you step back a little bit you will see it was a journey Moses had to take. When we look at Moses we see two chapters as a leader in the life of Moses. Moses junior and Moses senior. And we need to ask in our lives: Am I Michael Junior or Michael Senior? Moses Junior started out and we find that he was a very powerful fellow. Wealthy, a triple PhD education, learned and instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was powerful and qualified. He had it all. But valuable as those things are, they can never be the primary things in which a godly or senior leader can trust.

There was also Moses the tough guy, the fighter, the intimidater, the pugnacious fellow, the violent fellow, the thug. So when he is aged 40, he sees an Egyptian beating up a Hebrew and he kills him. Bishops and Moderators, have you killed anyone recently in your office? Don't, it is part of Moses Junior! You are allowed to think of murder, but you can't do it.

But then he graduates to Moses Senior. It happened as a result of him having to flee the place first of all and he lands up in faraway rural Midian where he becomes a shepherd. Somewhat of a step down, surely? No! It was a step up, because God's way up is always down! He takes us down to the Cross, to the place of brokenness, to Gethsemane, to failure. He takes us down so that we are not trusting in all those things which were part of Moses Junior. And we now find Moses in Midian for 40 years. Why 40 years in Midian? I came to realise it was because it took that long for Moses to unlearn all the wisdom of the Egyptians! He was filled with all the secular understanding of leadership – not that all of that is wrong – but when God comes to do something, He has different ways. And Moses had to unlearn the wisdom

of the Egyptians, and learn what the Psalmist called, "The ways of God".

So what did he learn? He had to learn to forget his own agenda and ways, and tune into God's. God's agenda was liberation of His people from Egypt. And He was going to have some extraordinary ways of doing it. That notion was very new to Moses. Second he had to learn to hear God's voice, like Isaiah, in solitude and in prayer. When were you last in solitude?

I asked a Christian psychiatrist in Canada when I was on sabbatical: "If you were to give me as a person going back into ministry one word of counsel, what would that be?" She answered: "Get solitude." Get quiet. Get alone with the Lord. And that had to happen to Moses. He also had to discover that feeling strong and adequate is not the key to godly leadership. But feeling weak and inadequate, because then you are forced to rely on God. So Moses had to face deep feelings of inadequacy. He didn't want the job, he felt he wasn't up to it, he had a catalogue of excuses in Exodus in 3 and 4 that are famous. He wasn't grasping for the job. And I think one of the great marks of a significant leader is so often that they are not grasping for the job, but there is a reluctance to it, like with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses. But the Spirit of God, circumstances and the call, press that person out there to assume leadership. And so Paul could say that the Lord kept him weak. He said "My power is made perfect in weakness."

Moses had to learn to depend on other people like Aaron. He had to learn to share the load and delegate as we see in Exodus 18. He had to get the word from God. He had to listen to God. One of the keys for us in leadership is listening to the Lord. Not easy I know. I would be head of the queue to say how difficult it is. But you cannot lead unless you are being led by the Spirit of God. We need a leadership led by God in this nation and in the Church. Not easy, I know.

One time, a little girl came to her pastor father on a Saturday afternoon and he was working on his sermon on a very tatty looking manuscript. She said to her Dad: "Daddy, does God tell you what to say?" He said: "Yes, of course He does." She then asked: "Well why do you cross out so much?"

The leader listens. Moses had to learn to listen, to learn to move in real faith, to see situations from God's perspective. The lesson that was read for us earlier from Numbers, was a critical passage for me in my life and walk. After some of us had been to PACLA in Nairobi, I returned and after all the excitement of what I had seen in Nairobi, I looked at the giants in South Africa and I was totally overwhelmed and depressed, cast down. I went off on holiday with my family to the Eastern Cape. As I was reading the Word, I came to Numbers 13 and 14 again and the story of the 12 spies coming back with the report. Ten of the spies say they couldn't go, the giants were too big, the walls were too high. And two of them, Caleb and Joshua, said if God delights in us, and we have looked at the situation with the eyes of faith and the spectacles of God, we can go. We can tackle it. The Lord said to me: "Michael, my son, with which lot do you stand? With the 10 or with the 2?" I replied: "Lord, I must be honest, right now I stand with the 10." And the Lord said to me: "Right now, move over to the 2." I did, and I have never gone back to the 10.

Beloved, I ask you: are you with the 10 or the 2? The key to going out to those giants lies in being with the 2. Seeing things with the eyes of faith and the power of God. And it was out of a number of us coming to the place of moving from the 10 to the 2 that we came back and we mounted SACLA I.

Now we are in a time to move from the older generation to the younger generation. It is a time for Timothies to be emerging, and Timothies to be coming forth and standing up before the Lord. Taking the baton forwards. The Apostle Paul was very aware of the importance of Timothies. That was why he could write in his letters about himself being "an imitator of Christ". He said: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." That is the mark of an extraordinary leader who could say that. Could you or I say that to anyone? Imitate me. But Paul said "Imitate me because I am imitating Christ and you will see how it's done."

So when St Paul was imitating Christ, what did he see? I believe he saw in Jesus one who incarnated the Word. The Word became flesh. Every word has to become flesh in us as leaders if it is to have any credibility. The Apostle Paul was aware of the big gap between what he was secretly and what he ought to be. He knew that what he didn't want to do, he did. And what he wanted to do he didn't do. But he saw Jesus incarnating his word. He saw Jesus moving in the will of the Father. "I do nothing on my own authority. I do always what is pleasing to my Father." He saw Jesus moving in the agenda and power of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit came on Jesus like a dove and as he began his public ministry as recorded in Luke 4, the word says: "The Spirit of the Lord God was upon me." And the Apostle Paul entered into the fullness of the Spirit through Ananias and the experience on the Damascus Road.

The key to the explanation of any Christian leader lies in the work of the Spirit. We have to get back to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me." We are lost, lost, lost without the power, fullness, fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit. If this is not real for us, we need to be seeking afresh after that fullness, that anointing, that correcting and being prayed for to go deeper with the Spirit.

I sometimes get sad when people downplay the work of the Holy Spirit, however you think of it. Without the Holy Spirit we are finished. We can't outgrow the work of the Holy Spirit or renewal. No driver outgrows gas in the tank. No modern householder outgrows electricity coming from the power plugs. No yachtsman outgrows wind in the sails. And none of us outgrows the need for food in our stomachs. The Holy Spirit is our gas, our power, our wind, our food. And we need to revisit the work of the Holy Spirit in these days.

The great Roman Catholic Cardinal, Leon Joseph Swennens, once said: "Spirituality means the Holy Spirit at work; a profound action of the Holy Spirit in his Church renewing the Church from the inside."

DL Moody was once asked: "Mr Moody, have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?" He replied: "Yes, but I leak!" Do you? I certainly do. We need to say: "Come Holy Spirit, our hearts inspire, And lighten them with celestial fire."

We find also for the Apostle as he imitated Jesus, he saw Jesus as the One who moved in submission to Scripture. Jesus said: "Have you never read in the Scriptures?" (Matthew 21). In Matthew 12, He said: "You err because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God." John 10:35, He could affirm: "The Scriptures cannot be broken." Convincing the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, "He expounded to them in the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Then Paul says to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Theopneustos, the Greek word, means "expiration". The Spirit has anointed the Scriptures. And we need to operate in submission to Scripture. That is why we stated in our SACLA aims, we want to know what it means to be witnesses according to the Scriptures. So may we be faithful to Scripture.

Paul, in imitating Jesus, saw Him in humble servanthood and in sacrificial life. Not in lordship over people but in servanthood. In many ways leadership in Christian churches is about top dogs becoming underdogs – going down via the Cross and the thorn.

And so as I close, as St Paul gathered together all that he had learnt about Christian leadership and he talks to young Timothy, he brings a tremendous moral and spiritual picture of the leader. Spiritual qualifications of prayfulness, righteousness and godliness. Social qualifications of being above reproach so that detractors do not have a leg to stand on. Enemies would have no grounds at all for reproach or attack. A good reputation with outsiders, no scandal can attach to that person. Then there are marital and moral qualifications. He says the leader is to be husband of one wife. This is the New Testament norm for marriage, as monogamous and heterosexual, and it is the only norm the Bible knows. Matthew 19:5 and 6 ties up with what Jesus says: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh so they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate." So it is a picture. He calls for a picture of good, reliable, solid, exemplary domestic, home and marital life. Very hard for us to achieve that, but that is what the Apostle is talking about.

He is also talking about a leader being committed to truth. I don't believe truth in the post-modern, relativistic sense, but in the sense CS Lewis spoke of truth when he spoke of truth as truth as 'coherence with the facts as they are'. Paul could say: "Guard the truth." The leader was a person of evangelism. Paul said: "Preach the Word, urgent in season and out of season." A leader of social concern, Paul said to Titus: "Show yourself a model in respect of good deeds. Apply yourself to urgent needs. Think about the widows, orphans, elderly." In Titus he talks about Holy Spirit renewal. This is a holistic, Christian witness from the leader. Scholarly and intellectual integrity guarding the truth, evangelism and mission, social concern, Holy Spirit renewal, all in one package.

This is an exalted standard for us. I find it frightening. If I were to point at you, there are three fingers pointing back at me. We are all in the same struggling place to achieve these biblical standards, and maybe in SACLA II we are going to say first of all "Woe is me." And then we are going to say "Praise God, you are merciful." We are going to look at the grace of God as He extended it to the adulterous psalmist, to thrice denying Peter, to Doubting Thomas, and we are going to take hope that He can also forgive us, deal with our Goliaths. As we say: "Woe is me", He will come to touch the place of sin and bring

forgiveness.

And the result will be that if the Church in South Africa and Africa truly repents and becomes a Kingdom Church and we don't just preach to Africa and ourselves the salvationist message about how to be born again, how to be converted and how to find Christ, but rather how to live under the Kingship of Christ, because this is a problem in Africa – 380 million Christians, and yet in many ways we are going down the tube in many places. It is because the Christians are not making the difference we should. We are not salt which arrests decay, or light which dispels darkness. We live the same way as the world. But if we repent and if it began in this assembly, God would move us towards the great destiny He has for the African Church – I am convinced of it – to be the fulcrum of world mission some time in the 21st century. It's coming.

God is going to use Africa to reach the world. But the deal is, we must repent first. See Him and say: "Woe is me." Claim His grace and forgiveness and there is no telling then what our God will do out of our assembly in these days, if we will meet the conditions and come to Him first.