

multiplied five loaves and two fish - enough to feed five thousand people” . . . “We believe in you!” “Stay, you’ve walked on water . . . you’ve stilled the storm . . . we think that’s spectacular!” “Stay, we’ve come to know you, and love you, and accept you . . . you’re one of us . . . we need you. Stay, stay, stay!”

Surely Jesus had heard these voices many times, but just as surely he had heard his Father’s voice and had concluded that he must move on. We pick up the narrative at the point where Jesus is preparing to go to Jerusalem. We find Jesus saying to those who are tempting him to stay, “I *must* be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.” This was a *must* about destiny, a *must* about intention, a *must* about determination and perseverance, a *must* about the direction of Jesus’ life at this crucial crossroad.

Jesus had known other *musts* in his life. Luke records some of them for us. In early childhood when he went missing during a visit to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus asked his anxious parents: “Did you not know that I *must* be in my Father’s house?” In Luke 4:43 Jesus says, “I *must* proclaim the good news . . . for I was sent for this purpose.” And in chapter 24, Jesus says to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Was it not necessary (or was it not a *must*) that the Christ should suffer these things . . . Everything written about me . . . *must* be fulfilled.”

We know how this all ended. We know that through a mysterious combination of human action and divine purpose Jesus does meet death in Jerusalem. We also know that the crucifixion was not the last word, and that is why we celebrate Easter.

As Christians we have committed ourselves to follow Jesus . . .to journey with Jesus in our daily lives. This means we have faith that in the momentous milestones of our lives, as well as in the minutest details of our lives, we are under the direction and guidance of Jesus Christ. Surely this is what is meant when we affirm “Jesus is Lord!” Because we take Jesus as Lord seriously, we will know times when we *must* respond to Jesus’ calling and directing us.

I knew that I *must* enter the ordained ministry in my senior year in high school. There was no question in my mind that I must move in that direction. If I had my life over, I know

that I would do the same thing again. I still have a very strong sense of calling to ministry – it has never left me, and I expect that it never will.

While my family and I were still living in South Africa, I undertook a trip to the United States in 1987 to explore the opportunities to minister in America. After returning to South Africa, I felt intuitively that I *must* move with my family to the Western North Carolina Conference. Two years later in 1989 we made the move and arrived in Atlanta as immigrants on June 4th. We have never regretted our move to America. We are deeply grateful to God for the many blessings that are ours as US citizens.

In both these instances, I am convinced that I did not act purely on my own volition, but that God was directing me to go forward. I had a calm assurance that God would go before me. It is hard for me to believe that I became a Provisional (or Probationary) Member of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in 1972. That is 38 years ago. Over the years there have been times of tumult and times of peace, there have been deaths and there have been resurrections, there have been agonies and ecstasies. But always there has been a sense of direction . . . always there have been the *must* moves and the *must* callings and the *must* journeys. I imagine that what is true of my life is also true of yours. You, too, have known times when you *must* go, *must* move on, *must* follow God's directions or promptings as you understand them. We all know times when we *must* do something new and spiritually rewarding . . . usually it takes a lot of courage.

Now let me add this: I would be fooling and misleading you if I did not confess the *maybes* of my life and vocation. You know what I mean: “*Maybe* I’ll make more time for prayer and meditation in my life, Lord.” “*Maybe* I’ll lead a pilgrimage of pain and hope to South Africa, if I don’t have to do all the planning, Lord.” I would invite you to add your own *maybes* to my list. Perhaps some of the *maybes* in this room this morning would sound something like this: “*Maybe* I’ll take a Bible Study, Lord, if I have nothing else to do on a Wednesday night or Thursday morning.” “*Maybe* I’ll volunteer for VBS this year, Lord, if it’s not too hot or Lynda has it indoors!” So much for our *maybe*’s!

I wonder what you *must* do . . . where you *must* go . . . what direction you *must* take, at this time in your life. Are you at a crossroad like Jesus was? Are you wrestling with a sense

of direction, purpose, destiny in your life? Do you know where you are going? What does Jesus have to do with your decision? In fact, if Jesus were you right now, “What would he do?” I know what Jesus did at his crossroad in our Gospel lesson on this Second Sunday in Lent: he journeyed to Jerusalem as a prophet obedient to God’s direction.

I know I have a decision that I *must* make in the near future. I *must* decide to take a bold step forward to share with all of you a vision I have had . . . I know I *must* continue to explore a vision of ministry to people in our community who are not gainfully employed in these hard economic times. I know I *must* move forward with this vision as senior pastor. I know that when I do so it may help to catalyze a shared vision that is in harmony with the identity of our church. This is one of the many *musts* I face today.

What about you? Could it be a growing *must* that you move into some kind of fulltime ministry? Have you ever thought about that as a real possibility for you? Could Jesus be calling you, directing you, to volunteer to be part of the ministry team to our children, to our youth, or to our older adults? Is this something that you *must* move towards in order to be an obedient follower of Jesus? What about volunteering to assist with the Angel Food Ministry or InterFaith Hospitality Network or our Prayer Shawl Ministry? What about joining a UMW Circle? What about taking a turn to serve a Meal of Grace at Cooperative Community Ministries, or advocating in some way for the poor, or the homeless, or victims of abuse? What about helping those suffering from AIDS, or helping to keep Thomasville a drug-free community?

Are these *maybes*? Or could there be a *must* in that litany of needs and opportunities for ministry? Only you know what you *must* do . . . where you *must* go . . . what directions you *must* follow in order to follow where Jesus leads. I hope you will not shrink from the challenge even if it means that the road will lead to suffering . . . perhaps even a cross.

Our *maybe* responses are usually cheap. Jesus’ *must* was a costly *must*. So will ours be, if we truly follow him. If we will accept the challenge, Jesus will always be with us to give us peace and to still our souls.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.