

## WRM 2017 HBI Banquet talk

What a wonderful privilege it is to share this amazing evening with all of you! Thank you for coming to support and encourage us!

Tonight you've seen a lot of slideshow pictures and heard some inspiring stories and highlights from each of the three branches of our shared ministry. Each picture and story shows why we've been called to this work and the way *our 4 Core Values* guide us as we reach across to *Serve* our neighbors by conferring *Dignity*, demonstrating sacrificial *Love*, and building *Community*. I'm sure you must understand that there are low times, too, when we struggle in faith personally and financially. Your steadfast support in prayer, word, and action is an inspiration that's a vital lifeline for our success.

Before I begin my message to you this evening, I'd like to take a few moments to recognize and honor those who serve us so faithfully throughout the year:

- First, our amazing Banquet Committee, without whose tireless dedication we wouldn't be here tonight, and the wonderful serving staff here at the Diplomat...
- Next I want to acknowledge the support we receive from our brothers and sisters in the faith community. Did you know that tonight 9 out of our 34 tables are being hosted by churches? It's such a critical part of God's plan for his people to be united in witness with those gathering in churches being equipped for ministry in places like His Branches that are out in the midst of the community, men and women from different churches working together. I've always had a heart for the Luke-Paul relationship, serving and equipping. If you're a pastor or elder in your church, please stand...
- And where would we be without all of our dedicated volunteers, staff and faithful Advisory and Governance Board members who give so sacrificially of their time, gifts, and talents...

*Thank you, thank you all for responding to God's call to serve... [applause]*

Without these people, and all of you who've come to share with us, we wouldn't be able to carry on and bear fruit for His Kingdom here in Rochester.

Now to the message I've been given...

## *IMAGINE...*

I'd like you to imagine with me for a moment, if you will, what our community and our world would be like if we all truly allowed God to be in charge of our lives. There are a lot of people out there "raising hell" and all God want is for His people to be as diligent about "lowering heaven" as the children of the world are at doing the opposite.

What would life be like if our Lord's Prayer were answered and His will was really being done on earth as it is in heaven. What would it look like here in Rochester? Millennia ago the Lord gave Habakkuk a vision:

*"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."*

What about us? For the past few years we've been earnestly engaged as a ministry, staff and Board alike under the gifted leadership of Jan Thirlby, in Strategic Planning, praying and seeking God's face to give our ministry a window into the future – not just our future but a clear sense of His heart for our community. The long-term vision our planning group received goes like this:

*"We look forward to a time when our community is brimming with God's love, where everyone feels a sense of belonging, safety, and well-being."*

That's quite a view, isn't it? It's far above and beyond what John Lennon imagined and nothing we can hope to achieve by our own efforts alone, a goal that human hands clearly can't make happen apart from a genuine, God-breathed revival.

The particulars for His Branches also rely entirely on God's Grace as outlined in the 6 bullet points listed just below our Long Term Vision statement that you'll find in the middle of the Mission and Vision paper on your table (*hold up*)... Please take a copy home, study it, and pray for us and for how you can take part. Before then, however, please just set it aside and listen. Let's hear the vision we received again:

*"We look forward to a time when our community is brimming with God's love, where everyone feels a sense of belonging, safety, and well-being."*

*How are we possibly going to get from there from here?...*

I've been praying, along with many of you, for a long while with a hope that the Lord would visit us with a fresh move of His Grace. Recently that hope has begun to get more and more solid, knowing that ***“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things as yet unseen”*** and I'm beginning to believe more and more firmly that we're on the verge of another wave of God's Holy Spirit, a profound God-given time of refreshing and genuine revival that is so earnestly needed in our troubled times.

If you look at the history of mankind from its earliest days, revivals of faith, from Old Testament times through the New Testament and throughout church history to the present, historically come in cycles, sometimes separated by decades and even by centuries. We see it in Noah, Moses, what happened with the kings of Israel, the Maccabees, and the profound revival that Jesus brought, the most pivotal revival in all human history. Since then there have been numerous revivals including Francis of Assisi, Savanorola, Luther, Calvin, and on and on. Right here in Rochester nearly 200 years ago an amazing revival took place in the times of Charles Finney. The cycle of each revival goes like this:

- First there is a growing sense of emptiness, hunger and yearning for better times.
- This is followed by a renewed sensitivity to spiritual matters and rediscovery of the power of the Word of God, which leads into a rising time of inspired revitalization of human ideals and values.
- The result is a groundswell of conviction and repentance that produces a host of positive, godly moral and social endeavors, after which the community drifts into an ebbing time again, becomes less cohesive, and settles back into more conventional social patterns.
- Finally disunity and social and moral decay set in and reach a point where the cycle starts over again, each time building on advances that have been made in the past.

Sadly but auspiciously, it doesn't take very strong powers of observation to see that right now our society is pretty deep in the “social and moral decay” phase and heading around the corner into the “growing hunger and yearning for better times” stage. This is especially visible in the parts of our community that we've been called to serve where intergenerational poverty, crime, physical and mental illness, loss of moral values, and discouragement have taken hold so tenaciously. Meanwhile our national scene is troubled by profoundly divided and discordant political visions and hopes with two sides

neither of which has a corner on the truth, a wildly drifting moral compass where even common sense isn't common any more, a rapidly waning commitment to our nation's traditional *"In God We Trust"* credo, and surprisingly lukewarm, fragmented, and unfocused spiritual discernment and witness.

Unbridled choice is being confused with freedom, license with liberty, rationalizations with righteousness, alternative facts with truth; expediency is being confused with wisdom and religion with genuine faith in the living God. As a nation, as a community, and as individuals we've lost sight of what it means to "Trust in the Lord with all our hearts, lean not to our own understanding, and acknowledge Him as Lord in all of our ways."

Everywhere we look are countless fatherless children, rich and poor - sheep without a shepherd wandering into their own paths, lost in sin and confusion, and unable to get back to a home they never really had. In the midst of this, our Father God has sent his only begotten Son to seek his prodigal sons and daughters and bring them back Home with Him: "I will be their Father, and they can be My Children, if only they will hear my Son's voice, come, and let my Holy Spirit bring about the adoption in them that they so earnestly desire..."

In the meantime, where has God's church been in all this? Unfortunately, all too often we've allowed ourselves to become marginalized, fragmented into thousands of denominations and isolated congregations each gathered into its own silo seeking its own religious path, existing in the community but not serving our neighbors in a unified witness.

*"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me," Jesus proclaimed.*

Is this the time? Can we turn "if" into "when" and then say "What about now, Lord?"

Greater Rochester is a wonderful community, rich in so many ways, but sadly deeply separated into the proud haves and the unhappy have nots.

*Into this gap we cry "Come, Lord Jesus! Pour out your Holy Spirit! Redeem us and our community! Reveal our real Father to us and adopt us into your family!"*

Will we be ready when He responds to our cry? His call will come to the poor in spirit, to those who are most aware of the grief, pain, guilt, shame, and anger that wrongdoing and injustice produce. He will come, not to the well but to the sick – not to the righteous but to sinners, and His call will bring us soul searching to our knees as we seek to help our neighbors.

Together, we can make a difference if we will obey the call to pull up our parochial anchors, raise and unfurl the sails of the amazing faith that's been entrusted to us, and learn to navigate the wind of the Holy Spirit as it rises in our midst.

Will you join us? Will you pray and learn with us? Will you "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" with us as we seek to establish our Lord's hopes and plans for our community?

*United we will stand.*

*God bless you all!*

