

Commissioning Service Homily

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Amy and I are very honored to speak during this commissioning service. We now speak side-by-side whenever possible. It reflects our unity as husband and wife, and is a sign of Protestant-Catholic reconciliation. And we like each other! It seems especially appropriate to speak this way at the ending of the Wittenberg 2017 initiative.

It is important for you to know that the initiative is ending. Our leadership team will debrief, and then disband. Of course, this is sad for us. In our years of ministry we have never experienced an effective and unified leadership team like this one.

We know that the relationships will not end ... just the organization called “Wittenberg 2017.”

The work will also not end. Amy will speak more about that in a minute. But I want to bring to your attention a paper on our website – currently in English, we are working on posting it in German. We will also send it to you all via email.

This paper describes Wittenberg 2017 as one (and only one) model for a Godly reconciliation initiative. I would like to summarize the first seven points, then go in depth into point #8.

[SLIDES – Build points 1 through 7]

- 1 – God Initiates the Ministry of Reconciliation
- 2 – God Chooses a Leader (or a couple)
- 3 – God Draws Others into the Vision
- 4 – God Creates an Intercessory Covering
- 5 – God Forms a Mutually Submitted Leadership Team
- 6 – God Faithfully Shepherds The Initiative Through Stages of Growth
- 7 – God Calls Forth Specific, Meaningful Actions of Reconciliation

There are many important details for each of these points. I will let you read the paper for those. But let's look at step #8 ... which is one of the easiest to get wrong.

[SLIDE – Add point 8 to the other 7]

- 8 – God Begins Other Works While Ending the Initiative

The initiative's ending is as important as its beginning. The power of many initiatives has been diminished, because they didn't end when God had finished His work. Leaders naturally want to build on momentum. Organizations that have been constructed have inertia. But the key ingredient is God's anointing. If that is lifted, the movement will get more and more difficult, until it simply peters away, at best, or at worst self-destructs – damaging many people.

What is the biblical basis for this?

We have been praying through John 17 for the last four days. Let's look at what Jesus says about his own ministry in this prayer:

[SLIDE - John 17:4]

"I have brought you glory on the earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."

This is an amazing statement. Jesus knew the task that God gave him. He knew that it was a completable task. And he knew that he completed the task. I call this "the beauty of completable."

[SLIDE - Beauty of completable]

(Aside: I learned this from Steve Hawthorne, who is here today - Steve, stand up.)

Jesus was the Son of God. His Father did not give him unending work to do. This is remarkable! The Son of God! ... and his assignment was limited and completable!

How much more so do we need limited and completable tasks?

Unfortunately, many of the calls to ministry we receive are calling us to unlimited and unending work. They sound like this:

[SLIDE - Typical call to ministry]

“The world is in great need of reconciliation. There’s so much that needs to be done, and God has called you an ambassador of reconciliation. So get out there, go to work ... and good luck.”

We will NOT be saying this today.

[SLIDE - Typical call to ministry, crossed out]

Now, don’t get me wrong. After all, this is a “Commissioning” service. And the fact that each of you is here today, means that God is calling you as an ambassador of reconciliation.

[SLIDE - Typical call to ministry, crossed out, except that part uncrossed]

But here is the difference. We are not calling you to just “chip away” at the huge mountain of hostility that’s out there. Please do not hear us saying this.

We believe that today ... or in days, or months, or years to come ... you will receive an invitation from the Lord. God will call you to embrace a work of reconciliation. Your task will be specific and completable. Hallelujah! You don’t have to save the world!

Wittenberg 2017 is one example of a completable task of reconciliation. George just spoke about another example, in Gemünd. Yours will no doubt be different, and just as important.

What should you do until you hear the Lord's call?

Pursue reconciliation in your own walk with the Lord, and in your marriage, family, and community. In other words, allow Christ to be formed in your inner life, as George taught us on Thursday.

But ... when you hear the Lord speak to you about a specific area of hostility and division that needs Godly reconciliation ... know that God is giving you a task will come to an end. It will be completable. You will be able to say, with Jesus:

[SLIDE - John 17:4]

“I have brought you glory on the earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

And now, Amy, let's hear from you ...