

**Charge to new Ordinand - Janet Taylor and the Braeside/Westmount Pastoral Charge
July 08, 2017**

(Ordinand to Stand)

'What are you doing, with the word of God upon your lips? Upon what grounds do you assume the role of mediator between heaven and earth? Who has authorized you to take your place and to generate religious feeling? Can a minister be saved? I would answer that with men this is impossible, and, although, with God all things are possible, so far as I know, there is no one who deserves the wrath of God more abundantly than the ministers.'

Those are the word of Karl Barth, famous German theologian of the 20th Century, from his book, *The Need for Christian Preaching*. They are quoted by Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian Minister and author in the US, in his book, *Then and Now*. And they suggest something of the seriousness of our task and the arrogance we show in presuming we can take on this role as Minister of the Gospel.

Janet, those words were the beginning of the Charge that was given to me by The Reverend Harry Waite, a mentor of mine, at my Ordination in May of 1985. Although language has changed somewhat, the essence remains the same - 30+ years later...

It is a serious business we are in, you and I and the other Ministers here. A serious task; a sometimes ominous task; occasionally overwhelming. You are charged with proclaiming the Word of God, telling the story of the Gospel, sharing the Good News - with all of its joy and challenge to these people here in this room and many others besides. You are charged with pouring over Sacred Scripture, pondering it, reflecting on it, struggling with it, remaining faithful to it and sending people out with it on their lips, in their hearts, their minds, their souls. Never take that lightly - it is a privilege and a responsibility entrusted to youominous. My first charge to you.

Janet, I hope you are better equipped for the 'hands on' piece of ministry than I was. When I was in Seminary, I learned lots about Church History and Systematic and Liberation Theology, I learned lots about Worship and liturgy and the crafting of Sermons, I learned lots about Biblical Interpretation and criticism, etc; and I learned some things about pastoral care. Fortunately, I spent a year at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto in Chaplaincy which helped fill out some of my experience with people in crisis, pain, deep distress....

But even with that, I was woefully under equipped when the calls came in about domestic violence, addiction, depression, relationship issues, children concerns, and so on..... Ministers can sometimes be the first place people turn to.....be ready for that.....if you are not equipped, get equipped, not that you become a therapist, or the domestic violence specialist, or the mental health expert - not at all, but so that you listen, support, understand and guide.

Do no harm Janet, and do the best that you can to help. Equip yourself, educate yourself, keep yourself current. My second charge to you.

And in your ministry with your people, these people, I charge you Janet, to look at your people through the lens of what is called, and you may indeed be familiar with it, the Stages of Change Model.

Fundamental to change is to meet people where they are, not where we think they should be..... engage people where they are in their lives individually and as communities of faith.

You may look and say, I would like to, we should, why aren't they, why aren't we, oh seriously, let's do this....

But you know that if people aren't ready for change, whatever that change may be, that resistance will be what you face right out of the gate.

Listen, be patient, listen some more, be patient some more.....if we meet people where they are, then that is place of conversation, consideration, collaboration, understanding and growth; if we simply try and engage people where we think they should be, then we are dragging them, pushing them, pulling them, telling them, and sometimes even suggesting that where they are is not right or somehow wrong - doesn't necessarily make for good, healthy conversation and understanding.

Can you do that Janet? Yes you can - my third charge to you.

And Janet, take care of yourself - no-one can do that for you, they can only do it with you. Do not over extend, do not take on more responsibility than is yours to take - it is not good for you, it is not worth it and it will take the stuffing out of you. Draw lines in the sand; if you are unsure where the lines should be - ask a trusted confidant, pray about it, listen to what your body tells you - your physical self, your mental and emotional self, your spiritual self ... Our bodies are very good at giving us signs when things are not right, when we have over extended, when our stress is high, when we are running on empty - look and listen for the signs - you ignore them, we ignore them at our peril My fourth charge to you - please do that

And to the congregations: Braeside and Westmount, unique and yet together now as one pastoral Charge. You embark on a new journey with a new Minister – a time of excitement, optimism, hope. A time of uncertainty, some anxiety, and challenge.

What are some good principles:

Remember why you are now a Pastoral Charge – because God has called you to something new, a new way – the way of the future – ministry that is shared, resources that are shared, the work of the kingdom individually and together shared.

When there are issues, and there will be – **listen first**, don't make assumptions, do not get caught up in second hand information that verges on gossip – can do a lot of damage.

Support each other and your minister. You all need each other – that is not a bad thing – it is good. The success of this Pastoral Charge and this Ministry, needs all of you. It is not dependent on the minister or one congregation, or certain people – it is everyone individually and together working for the kingdom.

And embrace possibility and be gracious. Try new things. Some will work, some won't. Welcome people into your communities – and remember that we do that much more by our actions than we do by our words.....how do people feel when they come through your doors, how do you want them to feel, what do you want them to experience....our presence, our body language speaks volumes.....what are we saying.....don't assume that you know, because you don't.....

Love people with all your might and strength and compassion – it is your calling, it is our calling. In a world of hurt, violence, destruction, injustice, fear, judgement, antagonism, harassment, bullying, shaming, wanton disregard – be the place of sanctuary where people can and

be, just be, who they are regardless of what they have done or left undone, regardless of ethnicity, orientation, ideology, creed. Be the place of grace.....

And when you mess that up, because that will happen, acknowledge the mess, seek forgiveness for the mess, learn from the mess and carry on.

Blessings on you the Rev. Janet Taylor and on the communities called Braeside and Westmount – united in common purpose – to do the will of the kingdom.

Amen.