



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

August 7, 2016

God is good! God is great!

Dr. Tammy Yeager

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“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”
(Philippians 4:4-5)

What a journey this has been. It’s hard to believe that this is the last time I’ll be up here speaking to you in this capacity. But honestly, I’m still in *just* as much shock about the first time I stood here as I am about this last. I never saw this coming. Ever since I was a toddler I wanted to be a teacher and my whole life I never even considered any other possibilities. So, when God began calling me to serve as a pastor it was a long and very slow process of convincing me. And, at this end of it I am so incredibly grateful that God didn’t just give up and let me be.

Thank you God!

Thank you Westminster... for affording me the privilege, the blessing, the honor, of serving as an associate pastor for congregational care; of getting to know and to love you all these years!

I told you this story once before. My earliest memory of this church goes back to when I was barely tall enough to see out of the window in the back seat of my family’s car. Every Christmas Eve my family came from our house in Penn Hills to a wonderful party at my cousin’s house over here in Brookside. One year, our car was stopped right out here at the traffic light on Route 19 waiting to turn.

I remember looking out the window at a scene so beautiful that it has stayed with me all these years. That night it was snowing; the kind of snow with those gently falling, giant snowflakes. The soft lights from the church

windows cast a warm glow over the blankets of white that were already covering the ground. Several families, people of all ages, were slowly making their way in to the sanctuary. It was like a Norman Rockwell painting. To my young eyes, it all looked like something that had magically appeared, just dropped out of heaven for one special night.

Every Christmas Eve, as I've sat now on the other side of those sanctuary windows, I have remembered that night from so many years ago. And, I've wondered if that event in my early childhood was some sort of premonition of the huge role Westminster would come to play in my life. Now as I leave, I know that Westminster isn't an apparition from heaven. But it is a real place of red bricks and mortar and real people...though it certainly has been *a little piece of heaven* for me.

I'm thrilled that today we'll celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; that we'll come to this table and take this bread and cup together. I'm hopeful that the momentum will continue from the "baby step" proposed in June at our General Assembly to remove the one exclusion Presbyterians have held to those who are welcomed at this table, people who haven't been baptized. I've always believed that no one should be excluded. If the Lord allowed Judas to sit at his table and then washed his feet along with the other disciples then surely there's no one Jesus would ban from coming willingly to him. And after all baptism, as we say, is an outward sign of an inward reality. Surely the inward reality trumps the sign?

I'm so passionate about this sacrament. It is a precious gift that Jesus gave to us before he died. **Everything** I've ever said from this pulpit is embodied at this

table; the love of God in Christ that binds us to him and to one another eternally.

As I thought and prayed about what I should say today many of the experiences I've had in my years here came to mind. So many of you have allowed me in to your lives, you've shared the most difficult parts and the most joyous. You've welcomed me on the sacred and holy ground of the end of this life and the beginning of the next. I've cherished your smiles, your tears, and even your doubts, angers, and frustrations, because you trusted me enough to let me in to those places. I've been blessed beyond words. I've been inspired. I've learned so much and grown so much in my faith. So, I leave you with just ten parting thoughts.

1. We should never limit ourselves to only the biggest plans we dare to dream for ourselves because God's plans for us, those possibilities, are far greater than anything we could ever imagine. God longs to give us far more than we ever ask him for... the blessings of heaven.
2. So many of us come to worship for what **we** can get out of it. We get frustrated on any given Sunday if we've left feeling that we didn't **get** anything. But, shouldn't our focus be instead... on what we can **give** to God when we worship; what we can **bring** to God...our praise, our thanks, our time, our talents, our treasures, our confessions... our heart?
3. God is alive... and real... and present... **ALWAYS!** God is so close that we could touch him; constantly calling us, guiding us and drawing us closer to

him...persistently inviting us to be a part of what he's doing in each moment of our lives.

4. The more we open ourselves up to, and trust in the nudgings of God, (*God winks as some people call them*), the greater our awareness becomes of the workings of the Spirit, and the more we sense God directing our lives every day.
5. Pray... pray always...and pray everywhere.
6. God redeems **EVERYTHING**. The darkest and ugliest and most difficult times of our lives will be used for God's glory and for good. Nothing is wasted. God is the greatest recycler of evil and suffering, our poor choices, and our bad behavior.
7. Right now, in this very moment, we have **EVERYTHING** we need. There's nothing that we need to achieve, or acquire or prove. We are loved, and cherished and held forever in God's care. We belong to him and nothing can ever take that away from us.
8. Don't be afraid to die. Don't be afraid to talk about death. Heaven is a real place and death is just the passing from this life to the next. It's a journey we'll be prepared for and accompanied on by people that we know and love, and even beloved pets from our past. We should all be prepared to grieve at some point in our lives. We should learn all we can about grieving before it becomes the "new normal" for us or someone we love. C.S. Lewis once said,

“Bereavement is not the truncation of married love but one of its regular phases--like the honeymoon. What we want is to live our marriage well and faithfully through that phase too. If it hurts, (and it certainly will), we accept the pains as a necessary part of this phase.”

9. Number nine is something that I learned first in my time as a chaplain at Children’s Hospital. We shouldn’t be overly concerned about the things we don’t know or understand about God. We need a God much bigger than our mortal minds can comprehend to set right all of the things that are wrong in our world.

And finally....

10. Don’t be afraid to love...to love completely... and deeply...and easily. Because if you don’t ...you’re missing everything!

God is good! And God is great!

I join my voice with the psalmist who said, “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable!”



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