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SERMON ON THE OCCASION OF JONATHAN N. ROBINSON'S
INSTALLATION AT PLYMOUTH CHURCH

BY

D. R. BUCKHEAL

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"THE PASTOR - A PROPHET, SHEPHERD AND AN EXAMPLE"

Scripture Basis: Ephesians 4: 1-16

It is fairly obvious in our present day society that the Profession of the Ministry does not have the same status as it did at one time. Through my contacts with churches and lay people over the past 20 years, especially those who were seeking new leaders for their pulpits, I have discovered that the members in many churches do not consider the pastor of today in the same way as they did a generation or two ago. This is not true in every church, but it is true in too many instances. I am not sure this is all bad, because there are some advantages in not being stereotyped in the same manner as our fathers and grandfathers were. I believe the pastor of today is closer to his people in his understanding of their problems; I believe that he is on more conversant terms in developing and carrying out the program of God's kingdom in and through the local church. By this I mean there was a time when laymen didn't do much thinking, but let the Clergy call all the "shots", as to how things were to be. I think we are all much better off in this respect. There is a mutual sharing of responsibility in the church which I did not see some 25-30 years ago. There is, or at least there should not be just one minister in the church today - every person must be a minister if the church is to be relevant and even come close to meeting the needs of the people and the community in which we live.

There are some problems which the clergy have today. First of all, he is supposed to be an expert in every area. He should be a first rate preacher, a counselor, an administrator, a teacher, a fund raiser, a community leader - active in civic affairs, a leader in ecumenical relations, and active in denominational concerns. The fact that the professional minister must be all of these things is not as different from other occupations today as you might think. The school administrators, government leaders, Attorneys, Doctors, also have to be diverse in their training, experience, and functions. However, of all professions, the ministry is probably the least defined of any. How the pastor spends his time is entirely up to him. There is no one sitting over you to tell you what you must do today or what you must do tomorrow. Outside of a few musts, the rest of the time and decision is 100% up to the Minister. Herein may be the rub. There are those who do not know what to do with this kind of freedom. Since the congregation must pay the bill, there is a sense of insecurity which comes to some pastors because they know if their decision of time and energy is not in accordance with what the congregation thinks, the source of funds can be withdrawn and he can move on somewhere else. The

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insecurity about having to keep people happy results many times in the pastor adapting his role and function to the desires of the people rather than what he honestly feels the ministry is all about. In an effort to be friendly, of trying his best to meet the requests of all the membership and the community, this is what sometimes happens:

He starts the morning in the office to prepare a sermon; the secretary buzzes and an alcoholic awaits to talk with him; the phone rings and a couple would like to make an appointment for the evening. The Senior Citizens want him at their dinner; he must visit a cancer patient in the afternoon; the church school superintendent wants a conference about dwindling attendance; someone calls about a baptismal certificate for "proof of date of birth" for social security; the youngsters would like to register for 5 different camps; a Boy Scout leader asks to use the church hall for a special function; a mother calls to tell you that her unmarried daughter told her last night she was pregnant. There are several new people who were in church last Sunday who are surely prospective members and you ought to set up a membership class. A lady calls because she is upset about sex education being taught in the public schools. The phone rings and a nice lady wants you to have prayer at the P.T.A. meeting next Tuesday night. Oh yes, it's all right if you leave as soon as you have prayed. The student minister at the University would like to consult with you regarding the problems he is having on campus with the protests. The lady in the nursing home died last night and you must go by the funeral home to make arrangements for the service with the family. Chuck called and they are taking Alice to the hospital as she is in labor and will probably have her baby yet today. Oh yes, I forgot that David, that's your 15 year old son, is in the chorus and they sing at the music concert at school tonight. You do want to be a good father, don't you? The phone rings and one of your deacons would like to know what you thought about the editorial in the morning paper regarding the judge's disposition of the case regarding the protesters of last week.

It is not my purpose to gain sympathy for the minister, nor is it my desire to try to convince anyone that we have more to do than anyone else. It is only to say that every Pastor has to make certain decisions that only he can make as to what he will do with his time, his energies and his talents. No lay person nor can another pastor tell you how to divide this time, nor what you should accept or reject by way of your responsibility. I can do this, however, and that is I can remind you, Jonathan, you the members of Plymouth church, and all other ministers including myself, what the scripture has to say about who we are - in being reminded again as to whom we are, we may be better able to decide what things should have prime time in our lives.

What then is the Pastor?

1. First he is a prophet. The prophet of Israel did not sit back to see what the popular philosophy of the day was before he thundered forth - But he said: "Thus saith the Lord". He had in his hand God's concern for mankind expressed in the Law and he took the Law and applied it to life as he saw it. For him the Law had something to say as to how a husband treats his wife and

his children, the way in which children should respond to each other and their parents. When the law was being misread or neglected, he did not hesitate to inform the community and his people as to the situation. The prophet spoke to sensitize the conscience of the people. As the nation of Israel became more affluent, it became more selfish, more unaware of the world in need, more unaware of the real needs of the people within its own community. The prophet served to sharpen the awareness of the people, to judge them for their neglect, for their insensitivity to what was happening around them.

Your responsibility to be an effective prophet in this congregation is a demanding and challenging task. It requires of you the knowledge of your community, of your neighborhoods, of your ambitions, goals, frustrations as well as a grasp of what the gospel of Jesus Christ has to say about these situations. You must prick the conscience of these people in this church, you must awaken it to the need for love and service that exists at both the front and back doors.

The prophet needs to see where the church is and where it is going.

This is especially true in this community. The prophet needles, pushes, persuades, and encourages in an effort to move the church toward the fulfillment of the vision he has for his congregation. You must use every resource available to help you in fulfilling that vision in practical terms. There is so much that needs to be done.

2. The second aspect of your work as pastor is that you must be a shepherd. A shepherd leads, and a shepherd looks after his flock. I have already mentioned about leadership, but I want to be more specific about this pastoral care.

Whenever any of you want to talk to your pastor about a problem, when death invades your family, when a loved one is hospitalized, when there is a problem with one of your youth, in any situation of grief, difficulty or shock, do not hesitate to call on your pastor. He is here as God's servant in your service. He is your friend at all times. When you need to talk with someone, when you need to share a problem or want an opinion, he waits with a listening ear, a reassuring word and prayer. The day has come when the pastor can no longer visit every home in the congregation on a set schedule or perhaps once a year or once every six months or 2 years. He is a shepherd and a shepherd must care for the sheep who have special needs. The demands are so great that maybe he will come only when needed. But this doesn't mean that he is not concerned or interested in what happens to you and your family.

Remember also, that your pastor is human and every man, woman and child needs friends. By the very nature of his interests and his families' interests and activities he may become more closely related to some families than others. This does not mean that he loves you more or less but because he is human and he needs these personal relationships which are not possible with everyone in the congregation. You must not deny him this, nor be critical of him because of them. Each of you as members of this church are closer to certain relatives or have closer friends because of your interests or activities. You must not deny your pastor this same privilege, for this is a basic need

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for him and he will be more effectively a shepherd if he can do these things with the full understanding of the rest of his flock.

3. The third thing the scripture teaches us is to set a good example for your flock.

Here there are so many areas that I will not have time to elaborate on any of them, but I am referring to your being a good father. Despite all your responsibilities you will have some time to be with your children. You will be a good husband and you will see that your wife is not neglected. Your wife should not be the most active member in your church. You, the members of this church did not call her to be the assistant pastor. She is Jonathan's wife and the mother of his children and this is her primary task. Her status as pastor's wife does not mean that she will carry any more responsibility than anyone else in this church.

By your example as husband and father, your members will have a pattern to follow. As you support and care for, and love others, your flock will follow your example. (God's love is always communicated through people, so too, may his love be communicated through you.) You are the keeper of the vineyard - the manner in which you keep yours is going to assist others in knowing how they should keep theirs.

In ministering to the spiritual needs of others, you may overlook your own. It happens all the time - you must not let this happen. Primary time must be found for communicating with God through study and prayer.

You will take care of your health. Obviously there will be demands on your energies, physical, mental and emotional. You will serve your church best if you reserve a place for some exercise, recreation, rest and diversion.

Jonathan Robinson - God has chosen you to be His servant as Pastor of this people. No greater honor can come to a man than to be His prophet, a shepherd of His flock and an example for His people. You stand today in one of the truly privileged places in this community. God grant you the strength, courage, guidance and grace to be equal to the task to which He has called you.

Members of Plymouth Church - you will grow, you will witness, you will serve God better because through God's guidance you have called him to be your Pastor. The manner in which you love him, overlook his shortcomings, assist him and undergird his efforts will go far to the impact you and your church will make on the lives of all - members of the church, community and all who have any part of the life of Plymouth Church.