

- Unwillingness to grasp that simple message often leads us down strange paths and produces in us terrible consequences. Pity the one who has never reached the place where he can say with the apostle, I know in whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to keep, to sustain, to bring to completion all that I have committed to him. In whom I have believed. Not what, but whom. I know, I am convinced he is able. Now there is stability for you. Sureness, unquestioning acceptance. We should rejoice when we come to the place or the time where our faith in Christ is no longer uncertain or unsure. When we are no longer tossed to and fro by every doctrinal wind that blows. When we are deaf to the whisperings of every new philosophy of life that comes upon the scene, we should rejoice. When the sureness, the stability of faith in Jesus Christ marks your life. And you need not fret that you are being closed minded and unthinking, for it is only now that you can begin to comprehend the meaning of continuing in the faith. For now there is something that can be continued. Something that can grow and develop and mature and flower and bare fruit in your life. When the root is secure, only then can something grow. I know nothing about horticulture, but I know some people who do. And this is what they tell me. That even the strongest of shrubs, if moved every week will soon die. Even if it is skillfully moved once a year, it will bear no fruit. Oh the misery that comes to life. The spiritual distress when our faith and beliefs are determined by the last speaker that we heard. Or the last book that we read. Or even by our own present circumstances. Faith may be informed by such, maybe clarified or refined. But the foundation, the root is secure. Next Sunday in Selma I'm going to baptize a man who has lived the majority of his years without any fixity of belief in Jesus Christ. But the time has come for him when he is willing to stand before God and the congregation and affirm this, I believe. And publicly profess his belief in Jesus Christ. And that is a wonderful thing. But what is even more wonderful is his belief and his excitement that he is simply on the threshold of the greatest adventure of life. All that comes after that. The continuing. The growth and the development. The taking of Christ's yoke and the learning of him. Finding that Christ is adequate, more than adequate. For his life, it stresses and it strains. Finding that life that is definitely different. The acid test of Christianity, its beliefs, and its practices is not here in this place of worship. But is in your home, your office, your shop. The cornfield, the golf course, wherever you play, wherever you live. And if it doesn't work there then it's doubtful that it works any place at all. God's work of reconciliation gets verified in those places. And we are compelled to give more than lip service to our loyalties in those places. And to live up to and live upon our convictions. I really believe there is no separation between the secular and the sacred. For once you know and affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord, then that lordship extends to and flows over into your work, your play, your relationships. For Christ is there. Perhaps Robert Browning put it best. I tread no path in life to him unknown. I lift no burden, bear no pain alone. Don't fear your convictions. Don't fear your certitude of faith. Shape it, illuminate, prune and refine it. Test and try it, but don't fear it. For it is the foundation upon which the holy spirit can begin to build and to produce fruit in your life. To produce the beauty of Christ's life within you. Life that is issues in holiness, that which is different, set apart. Now the way that you recognize when something is different is not when you move it from all else, but when you put it in context. When you see it alongside everything else. Have you seen that commercial on television when they're proclaiming the superiority of one particular brand of mattress over another? Well, they don't put this mattress that they're advertising out by itself somewhere. The camera shows you a whole span of mattresses. And gradually you begin to be aware that there is one

among those mattresses that is different, for it is seen in context. There are no glass houses put around Christians. There is no point at which we become so spiritual and holy that we are relieved from the basic physical necessities that make up the lives of all people. It is always questionable when one becomes so heavenly minded, he is of no practical earthly use. And yet the difference comes in that as we work or as we play, we know in whom we trust. And it gives our words a different tone. It gives our tone a different meaning. It gives our life new hope. Holiness. And then Paul said there is developed within you blamelessness. That word is strange, but not the condition. For it is not only how God in Christ sees us, but how we can see ourselves. Paul says that God in Christ has reconciled us to himself. That Jesus Christ by his cross has made possible the cleansing and the renewing of life. That we may stand before God unspotted, without blemish, forgiven and recreated. That's good news. That's the hope of the gospel. And here we have a responsibility too because God forgives us, cleanses and renews us, we can forgive ourselves. How many people live life reproaching themselves for their past? Never able to forgive themselves for something that was said or done or lived through so many years ago. And they're hindered from living a full life, a free life. They know nothing of the freedom of the Christian life. Continually calling to mind their past and blaming and reproaching themselves. And perhaps here also is where our forgiveness of each other is tested. To be able to allow another to have the freedom from our digging up their past. Pulling out the old. Never moving on. If in God's sight of us through Christ we are forgiven and cleansed and stand before him without reproach then we can turn to face the future, and perhaps irreproachableness aptly describes the quality of that future. A life of such quality that no charge can be leveled against it. The quality of life that becomes a walking advertisement for the Christian faith. Because our commitment to Christ is not only a matter of the heart, but also of the will, then it becomes a willful decision to continue stable and steadfast, not shifting. There is a song in our Methodist hymnal that I think I cherish above all the others. It poetically expresses Paul's prose. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but holy lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand. And you who once were estranged and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death. In order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast. Not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard. Do you know Christ? Have you faith in him? Is your faith in him the central certitude of your life? I pray God, it is so. Amen. (traditional Catholic music)

- The Lord be with you.

- And also with you.

- Let us pray. Lord God, help us to pray as Jesus Christ has taught us. So that our prayers for others be of the kind which you want and not just ways of getting what we want. We who already have so much. In Jesus Christ, our savior. Let us pray for the world. Lord of all the worlds that are, we pray for the whole of creation. Order the unruly powers. Deal with injustice. Feed and satisfy the longing peoples so that in freedom your children may enjoy the world you have made and cheerfully sing your praises. Let us pray for the church. Gracious God you called us to be the church of Jesus Christ. A distinctive and holy people called for faith, but leave service telling good news to the world. That all may believe you are love and live to give you glory. Let us pray for peace. Eternal God send peace on this troubled earth and put down greed, pride, and anger.

Which turn nation against nation. Speed that day when wars will end and all shall call upon you as savior and Lord. Let us pray for enemies. Oh God whom we cannot love unless we love our neighbors, remove hate and prejudice from us so that your children may be reconciled with those whom they fear, resent, or threaten and live together in your peace. Let us pray for those who govern us. Almighty God, ruler of all direct those who make, administer, and judge our laws. The president of these United States. Our senators and representatives. The mayor and counsel of this city. That led by your wisdom they may lead us in the way of righteousness. Let us pray for the sick. Merciful God, you bear the hurt of the world. Look with compassion upon those who are sick this day, especially those in Duke Hospitals. Cheer them by your word and bring health as a sure sign to them that in your kingdom there will be no more pain or crying anymore. Let us pray for rain. Creator of the world, we are dependent upon you to give us what we need to live. For crops and bread. For cattle and all living things, we pray for life giving water. In remembrance of your daily kindnesses to us, we pray for those in our region who suffer because of heat or drought. And let us pray for friends and families. Oh God, whom we call upon his father, bless us and those whom we love. Our friends and our families. That drawing close to you, we may be drawn closer to one another. These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. And now as the people who have been blessed much by a loving and gracious God, let us offer ourselves and our gifts for the work of God. (traditional Catholic music)

- Oh eternal God, the author and giver of all good things. We thank thee for all thy mercies and for thy loving care over all thy creatures. We bless thee for the gift of life, for thy protection round about us. For thy guiding hand upon us. And for the tokens of thy love within us. We thank thee for friendship and duty. For good hopes and precious memories. For the joys that cheer us and the trials that teach us to trust in thee. Most of all, we thank thee for the saving knowledge of thy son, our savior. For the living presence of thy spirit of the comforter. For thy church, the body of Christ. For the ministry of word and sacrament and all the means of grace. In all these things, oh God, make us wise and to a right use of thy benefits that we may render an acceptable thanksgiving unto thee all the days of our life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray with confidence. Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen. (traditional Catholic music)

- And now may the grace of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you now and always. (traditional Catholic music) (people chattering)