
PENTECOST 5/ FAREWELL SERMON

BISHOP DAVID

Seven years ago, while I was in Darwin, before I came to Light, David Altus was our Bishop, and he gave me two pieces of advice that were impossible to forget: **Short and Sweet and Finish Well.**

I immediately dismissed the first as an impossibility. Anybody who has asked me a question knows that there is the short answer and the answer I usually give, the full answer, with the historical background that explains the answer. The second piece of advice, however, has been a source of concern for me for some time. I have been debating how I could satisfy David's encouragement, even though I know that he wasn't the first person to offer that advice.

Well! **I am finished.** That much has been very clear since I started counting the days, about three months ago. But how do you define **well**? I could debate whether or not I finished well over the last seven years.

Many of you have been observing and sometimes suffering under my attempts to sing new and old songs, with me playing on my guitar. I think I have been getting closer to **well**..... I hope I have been getting closer to **well**..... One of the songs that I introduced to recently, through the song books that were used at Wheatfields, is titled "**It is well with my soul.**" We've sung it a couple of times. It was written by an Englishman who had lost his whole family when his ship capsized on a journey to visit his brother. **Horatio Spafford** defines wellness, not by what I am doing, but by what God has done and is doing for me.

BY GRACE! IN GRACE! WITH GRACE!

He was in good company. St Paul defines wellness in exactly the same terms. **Wellness is a free gift.** In Romans 6 his words are very precise and concise: **The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Everything that I have! Everything that I am! Everything I am becoming is a free gift—a grace. In fact, these words from Paul have formed the basis of my favorite saying: **By grace, in grace, with grace!** Just in case that statement needs to be clarified: by **GRACE**, I mean **an undeserved, unexpected, and inexhaustible gift from a gracious and generous Father.** The extended quote is: **We have been saved by grace. We are showered in grace every day. We live with grace, graciously and gracefully.** I have repeated it so often that I am sure you will never forget it.

I can say with absolute certainty that grace is the foundation of my life as a child of God and my work as a pastor. I can also say that I am drowning in grace only to be reborn each new day in God's forgiving grace.

But we don't have to stay just with the words of Paul. The words of Jesus which were recorded in Matthew also express the nature of living in grace and living with grace. **Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me.**

Every single day, through the relationships that we have shared with each other, Christ has been showering his healing gifts in our lives. Daily, through the relationships we share with each other, Christ is changing our hearts to live comfortably and enthusiastically with grace, to live graciously.

This I have seen. This I am thankful for. For this I give Christ the honour and the glory.

*From that point of view, while I have been living and serving at Light, I have been **well**, living with and serving a people of grace. And I have every confidence that God's grace will continue in your lives from this day on, whether we are here or there or in the house of The Father, together with our Saviour Jesus Christ in eternity.*

Paul's relationship with the congregation at Philippi best expresses my sense of wellness at Light.

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy because you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.

And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.

It is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others the Good News.

(Skip the prison part and I echo those words with enthusiasm.)

*You know what? I could have cut everything I have just shared with you and simply sung my theme song which says exactly what I have always been trying to say. That song is titled **Grace!** Then I would have followed Bishop David's first piece of advice: **Short and Sweet.***