

Bishop Cedrick - Opening Sermon on June 8, 2023, | Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference

Thank you, Pastor Mike, and to the members of Meridian for welcoming us and setting the table for us to be able to feast together. We are grateful to you, the members, and guests of the Oregon-Idaho Conference. It's good to be here. It's good to know some windows in which to do our work.

And everybody else has been like dead-on with their timing and getting all that right. And thank you for that. I'm going to do my best. All right. So, I'm going to let you know when the sermon time starts. I need to do some things before the sermon actually starts, so that the sermon fits within the time I'm supposed to do. I want to be obedient. So, I want to get that part right. But I'll let you know when to start this sermon clock. Because I don't want to rush this moment. It's one that many of us have longed for.

Over the past few years, we've longed to get back together. For some of us, this moment is even bigger than that. And it's one we've waited for even longer than three or four years. I don't want us to rush past that. But it's also a moment that really calls for us to pause. And not just to reminisce about what it was. But it's a moment for us to pause and imagine what it can be. And for those reasons, I don't want us to rush past it.

I am wearing this ring. It's a regular old class ring- "Samford University" around the top "Religion 1997". The story behind that it's not a part of the sermon. When I graduated from Claremont in 2000, my mom came out for the graduation and had a wonderful time. And after the graduation, we all went out to lunch – all the people from the church where I was serving, and other friends gathered for lunch. And after we ate for a little while people got up and shared some accolades and this that and the other. And after folks had gone around and shared, they said, "Well, Mom, you know, do you want to have anything to say?" She says, "Well, sure." And she got up and my mom talked on and on and on. I don't know where she got that from, but she went on and on. And then she takes out this little box from her purse. And she says, "you know, when you graduated high school, I wanted to do something special for you. But we just didn't have the money to do it. And when you graduated college, I was so proud of you that I wanted to do something special for you that I couldn't do and you graduated, but again, I just didn't feel I was in a position to be able to afford it." She says, "But today we've celebrated you receiving your master's degree. And finally, I can do what I have not been able to do." She takes a little box and she opens it and she says: "I got you a ring to signify this graduation." And I took it and I looked at it and I was overcome with emotion. And it was then time for me to respond in some way. And I said some words and I went on and on. I don't know where I got that from. I sat back down.

We finished the time, we got in the car, and we were we were driving to Vegas after that Pastor Mike, but we were in the car. And my mom said, "what's going on with you?" I said, "what do you mean?" She says, "even when you were talking at the end of lunch with something strange about you? What's going on?" And she said knew something's going on. I said, "Well, Mom, thank you for the ring. I said, but the reason I was a little thrown off a little by it is because you gave me the ring when I graduated college, and it looked exactly like this one." She says, "I did?" I said, "Yeah!" She says, "You may not have been doing better all along than I thought."

Because sometimes we move past the moment so quickly, or we've been doing so badly or so poorly. For so long, we forget how good we've got it. So, I don't want us to rush past. I don't want us to miss the moment. But now I wear this ring. Because it reminds me that once upon a time, I didn't think I would graduate from college. But I did. And so, every time I enter into something for the first time or enter into something that I'm not all that sure about, I wear this ring to remind me that once upon a time, you didn't think you could do this. But you did. So, I wear it today because it was my first time with you. I've never done this before with you.

But I didn't get through college on my own. I didn't get through Claremont on my own. I didn't get here on my own. So, I won't get through this annual conference on my own. And here's the other thing, I won't get through this sermon on my own either. So that laughter, those thoughts, those responses are invited and welcomed. That's the only way I'll stay within my allotted time. The Sermon begins. Now.

And for us to also be able to make this fit in I have to let you know that if you have not – if you did not participate in the live stream of the installation service and the opening of the Greater Northwest Conference – then you need to go watch that video. Because in that sermon, I laid this whole thing out. I laid out this whole “go and do likewise.” I laid it all out. It's all there. I mean, it's there in grand detail. I think I took about 85 minutes to lay it out. So, unless you want me to do those, which I have on this iPad, you'll need to go watch that because in that I lay it out.

It's the overarching piece that lets you know where we are and where I believe where we're going. And it's around this theme of “Go and do Likewise.” In that sermon I talk about this theme of “Go and do Likewise” and remind us that this is not just about the three or four days that we're together for annual conference. But this is about our journey together over this next season that we want to go and do likewise. In that sermon, I talk about ways that we can do that we and you know lift up this notion of praying with our feet, that we can heal with our words, and we can love with our resources. So, if you want to know what I mean by all that, you have to get you have to go there. I'll try to trust that you will go and listen to that and get that.

But in that sermon, I also talk about this thing called the M.I.L.E. the mile M can you say that with me? M I L E. Get used to it. Because that mile is not going away. And the MILE is about ministry that matters. And a few days ago, in the opening worship for the Alaska Annual Conference, I went deeper into the “M” into the ministry that matters and talked about the ways in which we can go and do likewise with ministry that matters -- particularly in areas of housing and healing. So go watch that. Because you need that. You need that challenge. You need that charge. You need that understanding.

And today in this opening worship for Oregon-Idaho, I'll be focusing on the I. And that's Itineration and location. You got the sexiest topic, I promise you! You did. And in a few days for the opening worship of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, I'll deal with the L. And that's around lay ministry enhancement. And then in the closing for the Greater Northwest Area, I'll deal with the E -- elimination of racism. That's the M.I.L.E. And so, I'll just build on it.

All right, so you'll go back, you'll watch the opening, and then I'll build on it with each opening worship service, all right? It's a progressive message, it's not going anywhere. If you're inviting me to preach at your church at

some time, during this year, I'm going to preach about this. I don't care what the theme is, I don't care what the occasion is, I'm going to talk about this. So, if that's not what you want, 2023-2024 is not when you want to see this guy! This is all I'm going to be talking about. That's it. So, you want to get it in, so we can get it out and do what we need to do. And I'm using this to help us to advance our work, to have impact in our area as a means of discovering God's vision for us in this time.

I believe that our cultural and theological imperatives call for us to narrow our focus so that we can increase our impact in our area. And when I talk about having impact in our area, I don't just mean inside the buildings that we occupy. I mean, all over the area. Because if what we're doing only matters to those who are already a part. That's nice. But is that really all we're called to do? It's important, but is that all we're called to do? No. As we work and worship and serve together, I believe God will speak to and through us, and we will know where, why and how we must go forward. So, in each installment, we'll go a little deeper. We already did the M. Today we're going to do the I. I'll do with L and then the E. Every time you see me thereafter, I'll be dealing with the M.I.L.E. All right.

So, as we get into this text from Luke's gospel, chapter 10, when I go to a scripture, I always want to look, I want to know where people are. Like, where's this taking place? I want to know who the characters are in the text. Let's think about this text that was read for us. We just looked at the overall text here, we know who the characters in the text Jesus are, and a lawyer or legal expert. But if you go into the parable, we get some more characters. You know about characters if you don't just look around!

But as we go into the parable itself, we can see that the characters are the man who was on this road, from Jerusalem to Jericho. The characters include the robbers, the priests, the Levite, the Samaritan – I'll even add the donkey and the innkeeper. And often when I read scripture, I place myself within the feet of a character or two. So, I ask you which character are you as you think about this text? The donkey or the innkeeper? Right? We're all over the place. And I suppose your answer to that question depends on the day and depends on the situation. I want to push us a little bit on this. I think it also may depend on whether you're in a mirror or if you're in a window.

It may depend on whether you're looking in a mirror, or if you're looking through a window. Go with me here, will you? See, a mirror gives us a reflection of ourselves. When we're in a mirror, we can see ourselves up close. If we choose to, we can critique and fix what is there if we choose to do so. We can see ourselves in full view, if we step back, or if it's a full-length mirror, we can see a lot, because sometimes we want to make sure it looks the way we think it looks. And when we get in the right mirror with the right lighting, we figure out that what's in our heads is not what's in the mirror. I'm just saying. But it doesn't matter what we see in the mirror. What we have to remember is that it is always in reverse angle. And it's only in relation to all that is behind us. We can see ourselves and what's behind us.

And oftentimes, a mirror is hanging on a wall. So not only is there a mirror that's blocking us, but there are some walls. And sometimes what's back there – what's behind us – calls to us and challenges our ability and our capacity to move forward or to look at or see things differently. Mirrors have a way of bringing us a view that is familiar. But it's not always welcome. We don't always like what we see when we look in the mirror.

Mirrors can also block what's out in front of us. And I think the lawyer who approaches Jesus was looking into a mirror. I think the lawyer that approaches Jesus was looking in the mirror. He can only see himself and his way of understanding the world and the ways of God. But Jesus, I believe Jesus invites him to step away from the mirror and to step into a window. He wanted the lawyer to see what was happening beyond himself. He wanted the lawyer to see something other than himself and what was behind him. He wanted him to grasp the possibility that what was behind him may have served him well for a season. But this was time for him to look ahead to look at what was going on around him, to see the many ways he was not being a good neighbor. Because he limited his understanding of who could be his neighbor.

So, when I was up in Fairbanks, where the sun never went down (it didn't go down!), I was in my hotel room fiddling around, doing the stuff that we do when we're in hotel rooms, and eventually it gets dark and you're tired and you get in the bed, and you go to sleep. You know, just fiddling! I looked at the clock it's about 10 minutes after 11 p.m. – the sun's just as bright as it was at noon. So, I took out my phone. I was facing kind of a main drag and across the street there was the Mecca bar. I took out my phone and I took a picture out the window at 11:30 at night and if I closed all the curtains and rigged it to make sure there was no light getting around and shut off everything. I said to myself, "just get in the bed, you'll go to sleep eventually." And then when I woke up, it was a little after, you know, around 6:30 or so in the morning. I looked, and that light was still around the edges of those curtains. I pulled them open and there was the Mecca bar. I took out my phone again, and I took a picture and the only thing that had changed was the cars in front of the bar. Everything else, except for that one black car that was still in front of the bar, was almost identical.

But in that sermon that day I talked about the "M" – the ministry that matters – and went deep into ways in which we can care for our area around issues of housing, and health. So, you'll want to go listen to that. And today I want to talk about itineration and location, the I in the M.I.L.E. You may ask, "What does this have to do with 'Go and Do Likewise.' What does this have to do with being a neighbor?" Well, I'm glad you asked, thank you so much. Well, it seems that as leaders and members within the United Methodist Church, we've been walking and talking a lot like the legal expert in the text. We've been focusing on the letter of the law. Instead of loving each other as though our very lives depend on it. We've been "in the mirror church," looking at ourselves, patting ourselves on the back, and stabbing others in theirs – all in the name of God. While blood is being spilled from black and brown bodies all around us, we've been caught up in mirror talk. Credit me the first time. Caught up in mirror talk, where our children, our blessed, beloved children know more about active shooter drills and how to dribble a basketball than they do about what it means to be created in the image and the likeness of God.

Beloved, that's mirror talk. Women being held hostage to fables and ideals that may not even apply to them, but the men won't shut up and sit down long enough for them to speak; mirror talk. Claiming our church pays more in apportionments than that other church, so we ought to be able to decide who our pastor will be; mirror talk. I should have told you I may meddle in the sermon.

Insisting that you've done your time on the east side or the south side and now you deserve to be downtown or uptown; going on and on about how no one that the conference has called you, when you don't even bother

calling on the sick who are members of your own congregation? Mirror talk. Knowing you no longer have passion for serving a local church, but you keep doing it because you don't know what else to do? Mirror talk. Insisting that your church does not do enough to support you, but you do little or nothing to support it is mirror talk. Asking why you're not at a church paying a higher salary or inner-city church with more programs? Or in the mouth of the lawyer in the conversation with Jesus, the question sounded something like, "Who is my neighbor?" Doesn't matter. It's all mirror talk.

But Jesus challenges the lawyer to move beyond mirror talk and to do some window work. He tells the story after this legal expert comes to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to gain eternal life?" and Jesus says, you know, "just love the Lord your God with all your mind your soul and love your neighbor as yourself." Who is my neighbor? Jesus goes on to tell the story which you heard. And he ends the story by inquiring about window work. Jesus asked, "Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?" And the legal expert responded with what sounded like a window work response. He said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him." Jesus told him go and do likewise – better yet, go and do window work. You can steal that one, too!

And here it is, beloved. Your window work in your community may be different from the window work in other churches. And it may not fit neatly into the M.I.L.E. It may not fit neatly into the categories outlined by the Annual Conference or by the area. And again, if you're lost, you have to go watch (the other sermons). I want to point out one aspect of our window work here. Because in the few months that I've been with you, I've been diligently listening, participating in meet and greets and listening sessions and one-on-ones and trying to respond to all your emails and show up to meetings and, you know, show up in worship. I'm trying to get it. I'm trying to soak it up. I want to learn. I want to be a part of what's happening here. But more so, I want to be a part of what God wants to happen here. I've been listening and reviewing what you've been engaged in, hearing the cries of your hearts, and seeing the need for direction, focus, and vision. I offer a pathway for us to move toward discerning our vision by naming areas where we can have great impact, experience unity, and listen for God as we do our window work.

The "I" have our M.I.L.E. of our mile is itineration and location. I told you it was sexy! I told you. Because it's in the text. Not only are their characters in the Scripture, but there are significant places and locations. Because we find that Jesus includes in this story this little notation that the man was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Well, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is a location in the text. There's a ditch. A ditch is a location! If you're in a ditch, you are in a location! You ever been in a ditch? I can tell you a few ditch stories. If you're on a donkey, you're in a location. If you're at an Inn, you're at a location. And all around these locations, we had some who were itinerating. The priest crosses to the other side of the road to get to his people and to his role with his people. The Levite crossed to the other side of the road to get to his people in his role with his people. Oh, but the Samaritan went into the ditch and itinerated with the injured man to the Inn and did some collaborative and cooperative ministry with the innkeeper. There is a place for itineration and location in the text, as well as in our life and work. Neither of these is better than the other. It just does not help you or me when we don't know what is possible or what is best.

And beloved, our current policy structures or behaviors do not help us either. So, speaking of the ditch – pause the sermon clock for a minute. I want to show you this. I'm going to do two things. One, anybody who says that I don't believe that Discipline is useful. Not true. I'm using the middle of a sermon! Paragraph 338 talks about the itinerate system. And those of you who are in it, probably have never read this. I can tell because when we call you about an appointment, you seem stunned and surprised. That's not just the clergy. SPRC chairs, lay leaders the lady on the back pew, the usher by the side door, all get all up in arms. Oh my God, our pastor could move? Why would this happen? Paragraph 338.

It says, and I quote "The itinerate system is the accepted method of The United Methodist Church by which ordain elders, provisional elders and associate members are appointed by the bishop to fields of labor." Somebody challenged that because there's a judicial council decision number 713 down here that speaks about that. It goes on to say, "all ordained elders." In case you didn't read it in the first sentence, "all ordain elders, provisional elders and associate members shall accept." That's A-C-C-E-P-T. "And abide (A-B-I-D-E) by these appointments." Bishops, I'll be one of those. Okay. And cabinet superintendents, raise your hand. Okay. All right, there you go. All right, "shall commit to and support open itinerancy and the protection of the prophetic pulpit and diversity." Now most of y'all want to lean on that prophetic piece, and you forget about that first part. I'm just saying. "Persons appointed to multi-staff ministries either in a single parish or in a cluster of a larger parish shall have personal and professional access to the bishop and cabinet. The Committee on pastor parish relations as well as to the pastor in charge."

The nature of the appointment process is specified in paragraphs 425 through 429 – 425, under appointment making. Here it says, "it's responsive." That's under appointment making. It says responsibility here. "Clergy shall be appointed by the bishop who is empowered to make and fix all appointments in the Episcopal Area of which the annual conference is apart." Okay, everybody got that. Right. "Appointments are to be made with consideration of the gifts and evidence of God's grace of those appointed to the needs, characteristics and opportunities of congregations and institutions and with faithfulness to the commitment to an open itinerancy." And if you're wondering, 'what in the world is open itinerancy?' I'm glad you asked. Because the next sentence tells you it says, "open itinerancy means appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, or age except for the provisions of mandatory retirement." That just means when it's time to go, it's time to go okay, all right? But we will still appoint you if you want to. Can I get an amen from the retirees? I'm almost done with this. "Annual conferences shall, in their training of staff parish relations committees, emphasize the open nature of itinerancy and prepare congregations to receive the gifts and graces of appointed clergy without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status or age. The concept of itinerancy is important and sensitive attention should be given in appointing clergy with physical challenges to responsibilities and duties that meet their gifts and graces through appointment making The Connectional nature of the United Methodist system is made visible."

We have lived beyond a time when we can do this. And when I say beyond, I don't know that we've advanced so much as we have stopped moving. Because this is aspirational. If it were only that easy. If only this were true and possible. Because we're sending pastoral leaders where we can. Many congregations and communities experience sexism, racism, economic apartheid, political wastelands, and unrealistic expectations for the compensation – making it difficult to appoint the best person to serve. Protesting when we send someone who

matches more of the best of who you can be, instead of who you once were, makes any notion of open itinerancy mirror talk. Clergy believing one church of 50 or less can sustain a full-time salary and do meaningful ministry is mirror talk. And bishops who make the appointment anyway are part of the problem. See? There's no harm in opening yourself up to say, "I have real family concerns and needs that will not permit me to iterate for a season." That's not to say that heaven and earth must now be moved to make everything work for you. But you should not be punished for that. You should not be punished because your spouse has employment or a career or there are health concerns and educational needs in your family, or financial strains. Amen. Nor should the church's mission be put on hold to satisfy your need. That's the tension.

There's no harm in saying we're struggling to be better; to be more inclusive. There's no harm in saying that it's not okay – to say it's too hard and we're fine just the way we are. No matter how conservative or how progressive you are, it's never okay to say that "we're fine just the way that we are." If that's true, then I beg you to stop praying, you're clogging up the line. There is no harm in realizing or discerning that I am called to pastoral ministry and something else. Who told you that a call to pastoral ministry is a be all end all? That those gifts of nurturing and care and teaching and administration can only be used at one address at a time. Who told you that? The One who created you created everything that is and everything that has ever been created is as complex as it will ever be. That includes you and your call.

See, I'm certain I became a better pastor after I did something else. After I involved myself in other vocational pursuits. Now, I have to be completely honest here. Some stuff went down that kind of forced me into a situation where I had to do that. But you know, if you don't make the choice, one will be made for you. So, I recommend if there's an inkling in there for you to try out something else, I think I have it on good authority, do that on your own accord. Don't let God set up the circumstance to get you into that space.

I became clear about my call and the ways I would and would not live that out. I had to move out of the mirror and into the window. I have to break through the windows and move out into the world so that the church could be of greater relevance in my call, instead of it being a place where I work out my call because I could not imagine anything else. See, for some of us church, and our call to serve it, is our ditch. I had to move from a place of only seeing me and my needs to engaging with others and their needs. I had to do some window work of teaching, consulting, writing, volunteering, partnering with other clergy and congregations, serving a multi-point charge, opening myself to leave ultra liberal Los Angeles to serve ultra conservative Orange County. If that's not window work, I don't know what is.

In Jesus' story, the Samaritan's window work involved him taking the man who had been beaten to a secure location, and ensured he had what he needed to be taken care of. He identified a need and involved himself in a solution. He didn't pass to the other side of the road. He didn't assume it was someone else's issue to solve because he had his own problems or his own people to attend to. He engaged in his window work. And the legal expert heard the story and responded to Jesus' question.

But did he go back to mirror talk? Or did he enter into Window work? Well, beloved, when you decide to do window work, you will still need to look in the mirror from time to time. Because you need to check in on yourself too. Don't just check in on yourself only, check in on yourself, too. Because when we do window work,

we get a better sense of who we see in the mirror. And while you're in that mirror, I challenge you to ask yourself the question that the legal expert asked Jesus: Who is my neighbor? And I pray that the voice that speaks back to you, responds, and says, Go and do likewise. Or better yet. Go and do your window work. May it be so. Amen.