

Annual Conference 2015

Addendum - Ted Lyddon Hatten

Grace to you, and peace.

I'm Ted.

I've been referred to as the Conference Artist, and I am that, but I'm also Ted.

I am an elder, ordained by God through the hands of Bishop Job. His voice, on that Pentecost Sunday in 1993, was as soft - almost assuring, and intense - almost urgent. "Take thou authority to preach the gospel."

And that's what I do.

Visual homiletics is what I call this form of preaching. It is my aim to faithfully engage in, and hopefully contribute to the conversation by using a visual language.

My approach to this task is probably very similar to yours - you who have heard those same words, "take thou authority to preach the gospel." And I take the same risk you do when you open your mouth to speak words in public in the context of worship.

I risk being mis-heard.

And when it happens, it is not long before the question emerges: Who bears the responsibility for clear communication? Is it the speaker or the listener? If I mis-hear what you are saying, is that because your articulation was less than clear, or is it because my listening was compromised or incomplete?

I don't know if it is 50/50, or 60/40, but I do think that the responsibility is shared by the listener and the speaker.

Some of the words I spoke Saturday night were mis-heard.

I am responsible for the words that come out of my mouth. Maybe that does not need to be said, but I'm erring on the side of clarity today. By the volume (both in number and decibels) of the feedback Bishop Trimble has received about this - one might come to believe that he is responsible for the words that come out of my mouth.

He is not.

I am, and I am aware that for some of you, some of my words caused pain. I want to be exceedingly clear here - that was not my intent.

Do I equate the Catholic Church with Westboro Baptist Church? No

Could I have found a better example of a faith community within this conference that made the painful decision to leave this communion over this

theological issue - perhaps one where the pain is not raw because the wound is still waiting to be dressed? Yes.

The Communications Office will, in due time, be posting the manuscript I used, in case you would like to revisit the words from Saturday night.

The fact that the pain I ushered into the room is, in some ways still in the room is something I must bear. But pain is not something you can simply invite to leave. It has to be named and owned first.

I know artists who believe that it is their role to provoke the viewer onto a new or different way of seeing, and so they do it intentionally. I will defend their right to do so, but cannot and have not, in this setting, followed their practice. It would feel wrong - an abuse of the trust you place in me to speak faithfully to a faithful body. Provocateurs can generate conversation but they do not deepen it. My intent over these last 22 years as your Conference Artist - my aim is to deepen the conversation.

And Bishop Job left us with a question - a portal to a place deeper than where we are when he asked, "Who are we together?"

We didn't answer it here. We did not consider it in any profound way, but we did demonstrate who we are together.

We now know who we are together by how we treated each other while we were here. We now know who we are together by how we talked to each other, and about each other.

We know who we are together by the way we questioned each other and by the way we listened to each other.

This is who we are. Together.

The installation around the font was going to change and morph over our time together, but it seemed appropriate to leave it unchanged, static.

But I did remove the two smallest rocks. I doubt if you noticed their absence, because they were there in the middle among the bigger stones. I've been carrying them around in my pocket, holding them in the palm of my hand and rubbing them with a mixture of olive oil and myrrh.

I'm listening to them, these two stones of different colors. Right now they are perched on the rim of the baptismal font.

They have spoken yet, but I will keep listening. The small stones from the middle tend to be quiet, unsure if it is safe to speak.

This ground, the dry, rocky ground upon which we stand with all of our beliefs and questions woven and tangled together - this ground is sacred.

It is the ground between question and answer. And it is sacred.

Thank you for listening.