

Striving to Win.

Alexandra

2 April 1995

Philippians 3 vs. 12-16

Phil. 3 vs 12 b: I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself.

I look back this morning on a ministry in the service of Christ and his Church for a period of 55 years from 1940 until to-day. Technically my ministry was interrupted from 1963 to 1983 because of the decision of the N.E. Kirk to reject my request to retain my status as minister of religion but I never accepted this because of my conviction that I was called by God to his service in this way. But it was a great privilege to be officially accepted as minister of the Gospel in the N.E. K. A. and to be called to the congregation of Alexandra.

I remain deeply grateful that you, sisters and brothers, accepted me with the limitations I had: first of all that I could not speak Sotho and secondly that I could only serve you in a limited capacity, because of the other commitments to which I was bound before accepting this call to Alexandra. You gave me so much of your love and understanding, as you did to my wife Ilse who was not a member of Alexandra or of the

U.S.A. Both of us have been tremendously (2)
enriched by your love to us.

My retirement does not in any way affect my membership of this congregation or my commitment to the new U.R.C. S.A. To retire as minister of a congregation should not in any way affect ~~the~~ ministry to Christ and to his Church. This is what Paul also wish to convey in the passage of Phil. 3 vs. 12-16: if you are truly committed to Christ you do not live in the past. In fact, you "forget the past" and reach to what lies ahead.

But this translation: "to forget what is behind you" has always puzzled me until I saw that the latest translation of this passage in the Afrikaans new translation was: "Ek maak my los van wat agter is" i.e. I do not forget what is behind but I do not allow the past to become a fetter which ties me down and prevents me from stretching with all my strength to reach the goal and win the prize which Christ has set for us (Afr.: "ek strek my uit na wat voor is")

Attitude
This all sounds very nice and beautiful - but what does it mean? What does it mean for the congregation of Alexandria? What does it mean for the Christian community of Alexandria? What does it mean for the church of Christ in S. Africa of which our church, the U.R.C. S.A., is a part?

These are difficult questions to answer and in one sermon one can only touch upon some of the answers. But I feel urged to say that there is a 3-fold message which we ^{as Christians} have to portray at this point in the history of Alexandra and of South Africa:

- 1) We should portray a message of hope to our congregation: I need not remind you of the many and urgent material and spiritual needs of our congregation. I need not remind you of the way all of us are attempting to do something (however small) to meet some of the needs (however little this may seem). Allow me this morning just to refer to our efforts to build and make available a day-care centre for small children whose mothers all have to accept employment away from their children. We have made some progress - but can't we do more? A few days ago Dr Sam Buti drew my attention to a small church here in Alexandra where the whole congregation (fathers, mothers, youth and children) in 2 months time ^{themselves} built their little place of worship near the Tugela River. Isn't that wonderful? And if they have done it, can't we also do something similar (like Nehemiah and the Israelites who rebuilt Jerusalem?)

2) We should portray a message of "love in solidarity" to the community of Alexandria :

I need not remind you about the serious unemployment in our Township, the ± 70 000 living in shacks, the tremendous need for housing, & better education and training in skills. We are deeply grateful for what many organisations, ~~business~~ leaders and institutions are contributing. But is there not something special ~~that~~ where the christian community can or should make a special contribution? More than a year ago I shared with Rev Ponté this concern in which I asked whether the churches, with the blessing of our Gauteng Prov. Government and the active co-operation of the civics, the political groups and all the churches, could not initiate a survey of our whole Township to establish our most urgent needs - and then all of these bodies individually or corpo-
rately undertake to meet some of these needs? Is this not one example of acts of love in solidarity with the needs of our people of Alexandria? (e.g. 400 people left homeless by the recent rain)

15

3.) We should portray a message of healing and transformation to S.A.: Apartheid has inflicted so many wounds especially to our black communities. Has the time not arrived where the churches and the Christians in S.A. should not only say but portray and offer to all our people the message of healing and transformation which we know that Christ provides in such fulness? Is that not part of the goal to which all of us should strive? The past has brought us so much suffering, agony & pain; it has also left a legacy of anger, bitterness & fear; it has left us with many forms of racism and hidden hostility which is bedeviling our society. Has the time not come where we as a Christian community should challenge ourselves and our community & say: This is not the goal which we should strive for! We cannot ever fully forget the past - its injustices & its pain - but we can forgive ^{even} where no confession has been made - and we can portray in word and deed the message of healing, reconciliation and transformation in the name and power of Jesus Christ!

Answer