

Guthrie urges preachers to embrace their vulnerability

November 17, 2020

WACO—Don Guthrie, pastor for 23 years at First Baptist Church in San Antonio, received the Paul W. Powell Preaching Award at the second annual National Preaching Conference, sponsored by Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

"It is a strange thing to be honored for doing a thing that is itself the greatest honor I've ever had," said Guthrie, currently interim pastor at Hunters Glen Baptist Church in Plano.

Preaching in the Truett Seminary chapel, Guthrie reflected on the "thorn in the flesh" the Apostle Paul described in this second letter to the church at Corinth. Paul prayed three times, asking God to remove the pain and hindrance.

"Sometimes an assignment from God can be really good and really painful—both of them," he said.

'A regular encounter with one's own weaknesses'

Guthrie described the "holy hope" he felt as a student at Baylor that one day he could be privileged to open God's word and allow it to speak to others. But, he acknowledged, he did not understand the cost and the burden that accompany the calling.

"With this high calling comes a regular encounter with one's own weaknesses," he said.

Guthrie described occasions when he felt “so exposed ... so vulnerable, so inadequate” after delivering a sermon that seemingly did not connect with his listeners.

God chooses to work through the human weakness of preachers so that his power shines forth, he said.

“The Great One seemed more reconciled to my humanity than I was,” Guthrie confessed.

In a sense, vulnerability, weakness and inadequacy qualify the preacher to be God’s messenger, he asserted.

“I preach grace because I need it. I preach community because sometimes I feel so lonely. I preach hope because in Christ I found it,” he said.

The ‘hard, happy and holy work’ of preaching

Guthrie marveled at the mystery that God delivers his divine message through flawed and fallible human beings.

So, he encouraged others who feel God’s call to persevere “in the hard, happy and holy work” of preaching in spite of their feelings of inadequacy.

“If you preach God’s word, somebody will hear you—somebody will. Not everyone. It’s never everyone, but somebody will,” he said.

Weakness must be coupled with acceptance of inadequacy as a part of one’s identity and a willingness to bear the burden, he emphasized.

“There were days when I thought the stress would crush me,” he said. “I thought, ‘I cannot do this.’ I just wanted out, to be truthful. I just wanted to be some place where it didn’t feel this way.

“But it didn’t crush me—not completely. It just made me a different man than I thought I would be. It just reshaped me in a way I never could have imagined or desired.”

Guthrie recalled a time when his vulnerability was on full display. While preaching to a single adult group at a church in Miami, Fla., he stepped off a platform and fell down five steps.

After his sermon, one person expressed gratitude for that exhibition of failure.

“Thanks for blowing it,” he said. “I blow it all the time, and it’s just good to know that sometimes it happens to you, too.”

Guthrie encouraged other preachers not to hide their human frailty but accept it.

“It will make you accessible. It will make you relatable. It will make you a preacher,” he said.