

TALK at the CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

1. Good Morning!! My name is Willie Baptist like a Baptist Church. I mean no disrespect to your church, this Episcopal Church.

I want to thank you for having me. I want to thank the Reverend Dr. Pastor Earl Kooperkamp. I've known the Reverend for some time now. And he is not just about preaching at the pulpit. He is also about hitting the pavement. He has indeed been for me personally a model of commitment and leadership.

I also want to thank the Vermont Workers' Center for all their hard work of economic and social justice and for bringing our Poverty Initiative delegation here.

MY THEME:

We can and must follow in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ

2. I like to start my comments by reading a Bible passage telling us what the Lord Jesus Christ planned and did after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Luke 19:45-47:

“Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the moneychangers from the stalls. He told them, “The Scriptures declare, “My Temple will be a place of prayer,” but you have turned in into a den of thieves.’

“After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him.”

He knew he would be killed for what he has been teaching and doing. Yet he went on teaching and doing.

3. To be a Christian one must strive to walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be difficult and dangerous BUT it can and must be done. To truly LOVE THY NEIGHBOR as Christ did can be difficult and dangerous BUT it can and must be done.

4. In the book of Luke 4:18 Jesus said what his Ministry and Mission was all about,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.”

5. What does it mean to truly walk this walk and not simply talk this talk ... In the book of James 2: 18, it is stated,

“Now someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith, others have good deeds.’ But I say, ‘How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds,’”

6. On this date March 24th and a little over a week later, April 4th, we commemorate two ministers who put their life’s on the line: the Archbishop Oscar Romero and the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both were assassinated on those dates.

Archbishop Romero once stated in a sermon,

“It is inconceivable that someone is called ‘Christian’ and doesn’t make a preferential option for the poor as Christ did. It is a scandal when today’s ‘Christian’ criticize the Church because it is concerned with the poor.”

Dr. King once stated in a sermon,

“I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out ... This is the way I’m going. If it means suffering a little bit, I’m going that way ... If it means dying for them, I’m going that way.”

Both of these Disciples of the Jesus Christ, like Christ, died for the poor, gave their life’s for their neighbor. Reverend Dr. King once stated,

“If you have nothing to die for, you have nothing to live for.”

7. March meets a minister and a highway patrolman in the South

-- KWRU (a multi-racial group of poor and homeless families) decided to walk/march in the footsteps of MLK's Poor People's Campaign on its 35th Anniversary in 2003 from Marks, Ms to Wash. DC. We all feared the South because the only images we knew of the South were deadly images. And yet we marched!

-- KWRU and the national network it help founded and spearheaded decided to use that occasion to bring national attention to the devastating housing crisis, jobs crisis, and healthcare crisis in the richest country in the world.

-- I'm an old school black man frighten because of the horrifying stereotypes and misconceptions I had of whites in the South

-- Starting out from Marks, Ms (still one of the poorest towns in the country) to Batesville, Ms.

-- Narrowing of the highway shoulder, white patrolman stop the march for safety reasons, call his minister, prayer and escort.

-- We heard his prayer and he heard our message. The minister and the patrolman saw that we did not simply talked our message, but that we also walked that message. It was the message of Jesus Christ, that is BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

8. In especially this period of economic and social crises, to be a Christian one must strive to walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. To truly walk in the footsteps of Lord Jesus Christ is to walk not simply FOR the poor.

To truly walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ is to walk WITH the poor to abolish ALL injustice, to abolish ALL poverty and unnecessary human misery.

To truly walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ can be difficult and dangerous BUT it can and must be done.

AMEN!!