

Leaders with courage, credibility and mentoring others for continuity Of ministry – who can find one?

The Principal, invited guests, graduating class 2015, ladies and gentlemen, good morning!

I would like to thank Rev. Kim, the entire faculty at Common-Ground Theological Institute (CTI) and the Graduating class of 2015 for inviting me to speak in this graduation. It is an honour for me and my wife to share this great joy with you today.

First of all, I would like to convey my congratulations to the graduands who have laboured so hard and have satisfied all the requirements for graduation. Graduands – congratulations.

Graduands, you are graduating at a time when Africa as a continent needs you. You are graduating when the Church of Jesus Christ needs you.

Africa needs you at such a time when the continent is suffering from erosion of African traditional values of *ubuntu* – the quality of humanness. It is no longer shame for some Africans to steal; it is no longer shame for some Africans to practice injustice; it is no longer shame for some Africans to lie and to deceive; it is no longer shame for some Africans to take bribe and corruption. These evils are growing every day and are becoming a great challenge of transformation in our communities and nations.

You are graduating when Africa needs you so that you may make a positive contribution to fight these vices and to instil in the young generation a culture of the true humanness characterized by truth, justice, compassion, equality, hard work and such positive values. Africa needs you!

But you are also graduating when the Church of Jesus Christ desperately needs you. The church in the West that brought us the Gospel is in a crisis. Church buildings in Europe are being used for other purposes other than worship. Very few young people are now interested in spiritual matters. With post modernism, the Word of God is no longer absolute for them. Everyone would like to do whatever they feel and want. The church in the West needs Africa!

Doing some introspection from within, it is obvious that the church in Africa needs leaders with a vision to turn this continent into a viable place to live. As Adeyemo puts it, “Africa is very rich, and Africa has made other continents rich – yet Africans

continues to be poor.” In addition, today the church is confronted with the problem of tribalism and injustice that is pronounced. Some of these evils are the ones that are encouraging our youth to be radicalized.

I am sure that up to now everyone is wondering why I am describing all these problems. I am describing them because God has called you – graduands at a time such as this to face these challenges. The question, is, “What kind of leader does God want to use to face these challenges?”

For the sake of our time, I would like to suggest that God needs leaders with courage, credibility and who can mentor others for continuity of ministry whether they are alive or not. These are the qualities God and people in your communities want to see in you graduands.

Let’s examine these three qualities:

Leaders with courage

There is no greater example of courageous leaders than Christ and his apostle Paul.

Both leaders challenged traditions and status quo. They also challenged people to be accountable. I urge you to do the same. How did the two leaders do it?

Jesus ministered during a time of many traditions. The Pharisees had taken their community captive through the Law of Moses. Jesus came and brought change in the way the law was interpreted. He put more emphasis on the heart instead of external and physical rules. He challenged the traditions that were rendering people to be less human such as the disrespect of women and children. He demonstrated that no-one was perfect, and that everyone needed a Saviour. No wonder no one could stone the woman who was caught in adultery.

Graduands you need such courage to challenge traditions and status quo.

We have traditions in our churches that need to be challenged: Oh -- this is how Baptist worship; oh -- young people should not dance in the church; oh -- women should not pray without covering their heads – and many other traditions. Are these more important things to be dealt with today? Why can’t we teach and preach about transformation so that people may grow in their love for the Lord and for one another? Does the style of worship affect my love for someone from a different tribe? Does the way young people worship in church affect their love for the Lord and the desire to serve him? Does covering the head for a woman affect the way she becomes submissive to her husband in her home?

We need leaders who can challenge traditions in our churches and organizations and who can focus on issues of the heart – which is rather the source of problems in our communities and nations!

Paul was courageous too. He also challenged traditions. That is why he could not bit the bush in his epistle to the Galatians. He could not understand how Galatian believers could go back to traditions and believe that salvation is by grace plus something else – either circumcision or any other law of Moses.

As you go back home, preach the Gospel of salvation by Grace alone through faith alone and in Christ alone. Speak against some cultural practices that are putting African believes in bondage. Issue such as wife inheritance; valuing a boy child more than a girl child; belief in witchcraft and other spiritual powers – go and rebuke such beliefs in the name of Jesus. Do it with courage and boldness. That is why God has called and equipped you.

But you need to examine yourself first. For example, if you do not respect your wife – how will you teach other men to value their wives? If you do not pay the school fee for your daughters and you pay for the school of your sons – how will you teach the congregation that all children have the same value? Change will begin with ourselves!

Courage to challenge mediocrity and lack of accountability

You will work with people who are not working at a desired standard. Train them if they are teachable. But for those who are lazy and want to keep the status quo – challenge them. Challenge those who come to work at noon instead of 8:00 am because they say it is African time. Challenge such worldview! It is laziness; it is not African time!

For those who would like to abuse God's resources – whether money or even spiritual gift – challenge them to be accountable to the Body of Christ. Again, such accountability should begin with ourselves! I have heard of pastors who say they run orphanages, write proposals to donors, get money and use it for their own needs. When donors come they go show them orphanages of fellow pastors whom they also pay a fee, so that they may continue to benefit from western donations. This is sin, it is deception, and such behaviour should not be tolerated. If we ourselves are not accountable to those who entrust us with God's resources, then we will not have moral authority to blame others who are not accountable! Let's examine ourselves!

Leaders with credibility

Credibility is about how leaders earn the trust and confidence of their constituents. You cannot force people to trust you; you earn trust. One of the key factors that make people trust their leader is integrity they see in him or her.

Daniel is an example of someone who lived a life of integrity.

One – Daniel did not defile himself because of benefits.

Daniel refused to eat the food with the King because it was defiled. By choosing to abstain from the food, there was risk for him not to pass the test for the job he was being recruited for. Today people defile themselves because of interest. Graduands, you are going home when the job market is not good. There are few positions in your churches and organizations. I urge you to pray for God's provision instead of trying to please your leaders and probably offer them some bribe. God has wonderful jobs in store for you. Remember that, although Daniel did not take the royal food and only ate sukumawiki and drank water, after some time he and his colleagues were healthier than everyone else. Trust the Lord.

As the Psalmist says, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. As others trust in powers and connections – you should trust in the name of the Lord who has called you. He is faithful to provide for your needs.

Politics will come in your churches and organizations and you will be tested to defile yourselves in order to keep your positions. Resist such temptations. Trust in the Lord and he will turn your trials into triumphs.

I was personally victim of such a case. In 1992 my church back home went through a difficult moment. Our denominational leaders were corrupt and immoral. Organizations such as Tear Fund, Compassion International, WorldVenture decided to withdraw their support. I was then Director of our Bible School. My denominational leaders asked me to back them up or quit. I decided to resign instead of backing evil and corruption. I lost my job. My family suffered for 4 months. But after the 4 months God remembered our integrity! The Lord opened the door and I got an amazing job in a ministry that we founded and today it is doing very well. So, do not fear to lose benefits for the sake of your integrity!

Two – Daniel did not defile himself even when he was away of people. He was in Babylon. He would have said, "I am away – far from home – no one will see me." But he knew that he was far from people but close to God.

Graduands, you should not defile yourselves because people do not see you. Integrity requires that you live an undivided life – whether people see you or not.

Thirdly, Daniel did not defile himself because of fear. He would have feared King Nebuchadnezzar who spoke and things were done. He could have feared that if the King knew he could lose his life. He and his colleagues did not fear that. In fact, even when the King asked them to bow before his image of gold, they responded to him and said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Don't defile yourself because of benefits or because no-one sees you. Live for the Lord - the Holy God who has called and be holy as He is.

Leaders who assume the responsibility of mentoring others for continuity of ministry

One of the cries of young leaders today is that they lack experienced leaders who can mentor them. I am who I am today because I had mentors in my life. My dad was my first mentor. We were eight children and I was the seventh child. My dad would take me everywhere he would go to meet other wazee. I would sit down and listen to what they were discussing and how they were taking decisions.

After I gave my life to Christ I had a pastor who mentored me. He gave me small opportunities for ministry until one day he decided I was going to preach. He asked me to prepare a sermon, and on a Saturday we met. I rehearsed the sermon and it took 30 minutes. But on Sunday when I stood up to preach, after 9 minutes my sermon was gone. But he was not discouraged. He kept encouraging me until I went to a theological school to be trained on how to preach. His preparation was very important in my ministry.

It is unfortunate that leaders today are rather knocking out emerging leaders instead of mentoring them. Joshua did well because he walked with Moses; Timothy did well because he walked with Paul. Even Paul himself - he did well because he walked with Barnabas.

Who is your Paul? Do you have a mentor in your life? Do you have someone who can challenge you and tell you hard things that no-one else cannot tell you?

Last year I was on Skype with my mentor from the States, and he moved his chair as if he was coming closer to me, then he said, "Faustin, it is evening in Nairobi and morning in California; do you at this time have evil thoughts in your mind that you would like to confess to God and to me?" Yes - we need such mentors in our life as ministers.

But we also need to do the same to others. Paul in 2 Timothy 2: 2 says that what Timothy has received, he should pass it to faithful men and women who will also pass them to others.

Do you have a Timothy in your life? If not, please plan to have one. Otherwise your church or organization will grow but when you move to another ministry or you die, the church or organization will die with you. That is not what a good leader would desire. A good leader would desire to leave the mark; to leave in place a team of people who can do better than him or herself.

That is what I have been doing. For 7 years I pastored a church in Limuru and mentored Kenyan leaders. Today, the church is doing very well – not because of my leadership – but because of the investment I made in the life of a few leaders in that church. The church in Africa needs leaders who can mentor emerging leaders for the continuity of ministry.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I would like to tell you, graduands that you have a difficult task before you. But he who has called you is greater than the challenge. The Lord and the church need leaders with courage, integrity, and who desire to mentor others for the continuity of ministry.

If you feel that you are missing one of the characteristics, or two, or all – go to your knees and tell God to mould you into the kind of leader he would like you to be.

You have learnt a lot during your training. It is not just learning a lot; it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to use what you have learnt to mould your life and to use you as His vessels to bring transformation in the church and community where you will be serving.

We send you as Ambassadors of Christ and ambassadors of Common-Ground Theological Institute. Be good soldiers of Christ; honour him; preach in season and out of season. The Lord is faithful to continue the good work he has begun in you. Be courageous. Keep your integrity. Mentor young leaders. The Lord will prosper you and your ministry. The Lord bless you!

Faustin Ntamushobora, PhD