

Toma Farewell – June 24th, 2023
IMITATOR OF CHRIST

Prayer

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

AMEN

The Chosen

Jim, I know you're a fan of THE CHOSEN series, so let's start there. A dozen years ago or so, you joined Redeemer. Just like Jesus chose His disciples, and indeed, like the Father chose each of us, before the foundation of the world to be adopted as His child, you specifically chose to join Redeemer, not only because of where we're located, but more importantly because of what we believe, teach, and practice.

The Goal

When you joined, your goal was clear – you felt called into full-time ministry and needed specific academic training for that role – and it only took you six years to finish the four-year program because life doesn't always turn out the way you planned it. As the Psalmist says (Ps 16:9):

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

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Jesus's goal was clear as well – the defeat of sin, death, and the Devil. It only took him 30 years until began his full-time ministry, and He only lasted for three years before being forcibly retired – you've almost doubled that time and we're sorry to see you leave.

The Call

When Pastor Schuldheisz left unexpectedly, you answered our call to step into the role of a settled, sole Pastor – not something that you had expected and anticipated. Again, you were imitating Christ. He knew what He needed to do to fulfill His mission of reconciling the Father with his creation, but He still prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:39b):

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

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The Role

In that role, you taught by example how to Follow Jesus on His Mission – you spent unhurried time with people – sinful people for whom Christ died. You listened to both members and non-members, without any judgement or prejudice because of their age, sex, race, or socio-economic status. You even learned how to spend time with preschoolers, something that I'm told you were at first apprehensive about (because you had seen Pastor Sam do it so well). As evidenced by the artwork on your door, those children have seen Jesus in you, and you've heeded Jesus's warning as recorded by Matthew (Matt 19:14):

**“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them,
for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”**

And you've led so that this congregation is doing the work of the church - preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments - implementing Jesus' great commission (Matt 28:18-20):

**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
I the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**

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The Stay

You announced that you wanted to retire from your role here over a year ago, but God used the death of your beloved wife Barb to keep you with us another year (maybe in part so that I could finish my own delayed colloquy process). Christ also needed some additional time to complete His public ministry – 40 days in fact: those days between His resurrection from the dead and His ascension to sit at His Father’s right hand in Heaven.

The Release

Which brings us to today. As a congregation, we give you a peaceful release from our call and wish you Godspeed in your retirement. However, I have it on good authority that God isn’t finished with you yet. It seems that you will finally get your wish: to use your gifts and talents as an Evangelist, talking to those outside the walls of the church about the Good News – how a sinless God died for you and me, taking God’s just punishment for sin – death – and exchanging them for eternal life and the joy of the restored relationship between creator and created.

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The Sending

In this new phase of your life, we pray that you find much success – both personal fulfillment and growth in the body of Christ. Please let us know how about life on the mission field, so you can be in our thoughts and prayers.

Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers as well, helping us to be open to whoever God has already chosen to be our next Senior Pastor and the next phase of life and ministry for this congregation.

AMEN