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Who Are You and What Do You Want? (Wheaton, IL)

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Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "Who Are You and What Do You Want? (Wheaton, IL)" (1994). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 108.
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WHEATON COLLEGE
CHAPEL ADDRESS
OCTOBER 3, 1994

"WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

C. WILLIAM POLLARD
CHAIRMAN, THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

Good morning. Thank you for coming. The minute I say that, I realize that it may sound ludicrous. After all, isn't this a required chapel? And isn't your speaker one of those gray-haired trustees responsible for setting that policy? The point of my comment is to reinforce for me the reality that physical presence does not necessarily mean mental presence. In fact, this has been a point of anxiety for me as I have prepared for this time with you. Because, frankly, I would be far more comfortable if we could share in a dialog instead just a of a monologue from me. But hopefully, even with the limitations of this more structured environment, we can both learn together. Listen actively with me as I attempt to raise some basic issues of leadership and life.

As I contemplate this task, I am reminded of an experience a friend of mine had with one of those telephone answering machines. As the phone was answered, the machine responded as follows, "Hello. This is not an answering machine. This is a questioning machine. There are really only two questions in life that are relevant: who are you and what do you want? Please give your answer at the tone."

Who are we? And what do we want? I suggest that if we can have a better understanding of how to answer these questions in the next 20 minutes, we will have both learned.

Who are we? In one sense we are really all prisoners of our hope. It is our hope that sustains us and our vision for what could be that inspires us.

But where is our hope? We use the term in many different ways. Some of us may be hoping that this chapel will soon be over. Others may be hoping that the beautiful young lady will say "yes" when I ask her for a date this afternoon. Or, we may be hoping to finish this semester or hoping to win that football game on Saturday. Hoping to get a job when we graduate. Hoping to be admitted into the graduate school of my choice. Some may describe their hopes in terms of relationships. The hope of being accepted although I am different. The hope of being forgiven although I have made a mistake. The hope of being loved although I am unlovely at times. It can also be used in the context of feelings or understandings. The hope of feeling secure. The hope of feeling safe. The hope of knowing joy. The hope of knowing. However we use it, it always

carries with it an expectation and an expectation of something more that will occur in the future.

Hope is a continuing theme in scripture. We are reminded that Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. Our faith is described as the substance of things we hope for and the certainty of things we do not see. It is the hope of our redemption the anticipation of more to come in our life with our Lord and Savior that is at the heart of our Christian faith. This hope is described as being stored within us, a fountain of life, if you will, that confirms God's promise to us and provides the anchor for our soul firm and secure.

The opposite of hope is despair, hopelessness, depression, discouragement, dejection. Despair implies the utter absence of hope to the point of giving up. There is much in the world around us that is in despair.

Freud wrote that life as we find it is too hard for us. It brings us too many pains, disappointments, and impossible tasks. It doesn't take long for a person to realize that life here on earth has an ending, that the hero of our personal story always dies.

We have all had times of despair. Most causes of depression appear to be associated with loss--the loss of friendship, the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, a broken engagement or marriage. Loss usually results in grief or mourning. The normal type of depressive reaction is relatively short-lived, self-limited, not usually requiring medical help. But many suffer depression without having incurred a loss. They are depressed because of the disparity between what they think they ought to be and what they fear they are. The fear of inadequacy often runs deep in highly competitive situations, including a college campus. These feelings can progress to the point of hopelessness, a feeling that there is no way out.

I rest my hope on nothing less than Jesus' Blood and righteousness. Is this just a familiar hymn, a phrase we repeat, or does it represent reality, a reality of meaning in our life that touches who we are and what we are becoming?

But wait just a moment. What gives you, Bill Pollard, the right to speak about hope and despair? You are not a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Aren't you a business person who has spent most of his life in the marketplace earning money? How can we learn from you on this subject of hope?

Simply put, my friend, my life has been filled with hope and some despair. And by the way, Christ is in the marketplace. I am here to confirm that Christian service is not limited to the church, the mission field, or a para church organization.

The trappings of success, whether they be title, recognition, or wealth, do not mean lack of despair or the ultimate in hope. The answer for me keeps coming back to fixing my eyes upon Jesus, the perfecter of my faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning and shame and sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus--a person and tempted in all ways like me; yet God. Jesus the servant, who became like me so that I may know Him and in so doing He set an example of a servant who acted upon what He knew. A servant who took the towel and the wash basin and washed His disciples' feet saying, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth; no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than one who sent him. Once you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." In this one simple act of service, Christ confirmed for all of us that our hope is not in the abstract. Nor is it simply in the knowing of truth. But it is in the reality of doing, of implementing our faith.

The doing side of the equation of hope provides a reason for my active involvement in the care and concern for others. As so in my world--the marketplace--manipulation of people, insider trading, diluting of a service or product are not simply illegal or breaches of an agreement. They violate God's standard and example, which is a far more serious infraction. Involvement with my fellow employees cannot be limited to a transaction of wages paid for work done. Since each of them has been created in God's image and has unique value and worth, I must take time to understand, to love, to serve them with a clear objective of having the work environment become a positive influence in the process of their development. In so doing, I confirm my hope and my faith.

It must also affect my relationship with my family. It is His standard that I love and cherish my wife. I am not the superior. She is not the subordinate. It is not my checkbook, my house, my way. We have become a partnership that is based upon mutual love and trust. Judy and I are committed to each other and must continue to work at the joining together of our separate and distinct personalities. It requires a constant attention to the smoothing of the rough edges. There is always a hope for something more in our marriage.

The single most important product of this love and hope is the children He has given us. Our role has been to provide a home for their development, spiritual nurture, and admonition.

Although each child is different and our role has changed with their maturity, we have a continuing responsibility for their development and growth for the acceptance and

love for their choice of a life partner. And for the love of our eight grandchildren. They are all God's children as well as our children.

There have been those times of doubt in my life and despair and especially through those difficult teenage years and sudden death of my father when I was a freshman at Wheaton. There followed the challenges of finishing college and law school and seeking to establish a home and support a family and finance an education. There were those feelings of inadequacy and concerns about whether I measured up.

There was the drive for success which allowed my law profession to become a jealous mistress, only to be stopped by God's intervention with a serious health condition. This was followed by a dramatic change in my life, the renewing and reordering of my service to my family and to Him. A career change meant leaving the practice of law and coming to serve here as an administrator and faculty member at Wheaton College. It was during this phase of my life that God began to teach lessons of balance and spiritual maturity, and I had a great teacher and mentor in Hudson Armerding.

In 1977, my path took another turn as my task at Wheaton was over and I joined the management team at ServiceMaster. There I have had the opportunity to work with many colleagues including two close friends and mentors Ken Hansen and Ken Wessner and now my partner Carlos Cantu as we worked together to manage and lead a fast growing service business. We are more than 20 times larger than when I joined the company, and we are touching over 200,000 people stretched from Karachi, Pakistan to Tokyo, Japan. Yes, I live in one of those pressure cooker environments where earnings and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and where earnings and profits have been up every quarter for the past 23 years. We are a public company listed on the NYSE and the shareholders to whom Carlos and I are responsible as leaders vote every day on our leadership. They have the choice to buy, hold, or sell.

But the measure of my success as a leader is not in the value of our shares or in the profit we produce. My hope comes from the opportunity in this environment to live and implement my faith. The objectives of our company are simply stated: To Honor God In All We Do, To Help People Develop, To Pursue Excellence, and To Grow Profitably. The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. They do not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes. But because of a stated standard and reason for the standard, we can't hide our mistakes. They are fleshed out in the open for correction and in some cases for forgiveness. We are not a "Christian company." Many of our officers are Christian, but we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish, or of no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized for mixing God and profit but seldom for our performance. These objectives set the standard for those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live our faith. Yes, not only to integrate our faith

with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do--with our actions and work with others. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead. To lead by example and service. It has been an environment that for me is a constant reminder of who owns me and that my hope extends beyond myself.

As you reflect upon what I have said today, listen in closing to this poem written by a friend of mine describing what he calls "The Story of Midnight Games."

Midnight Games

Last night at a late hour
two men, unknown to each other,
sat brooding over fifty-five years of life.
There are those moments
when the proper ingredients of mood--
time, silence, fatigue, accomplishment
of failure---
cause minds to gaze
across the sweep of existence,
playing a strange and ruthless game called
"What it's all about?"
Such ingredients being at the critical stage
forced my two acquaintances
so to begin play.

One man sat at his desk
amongst paneled royalty
in his private den
surrounded by quadrophonic noise.
In such opulence, he thought.

The other rested callous hands
on a scratched kitchen table.
No sound afoot except
for the deep breathing of sleeping children
in the next room
and a humming wife,
preparing for bed.

"Tally the card,"
that part of man's being
which searches for accomplishment
said.
"Count the score," it cried; "make a report
you two men,
separated by railroad tracks,
square footage, horsepower, and clout."
And so the first of the two began.

For openers, I own a home, he said,
with three garages, each filled with imported cars.
(I might as well say it)
the spread is lavish
nothing spared to make it the best
all around.
I own it all; it's paid for.
You could say that it's an estate.

I own a business, and
I own three hundred persons who work for me.
(I might as well own them)
I tell them when they must come to work;
I tell them when to eat,
How much they'll earn
How hard they'll strive
They call me "Mr.;" some call me "Sir;"
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I own a wife
(I might as well say it).
I've capped her teeth,
imported Paris' finest,
paid for weight reduction,
exercise lessons, club memberships.
I've purchased her cosmetic beauty.
Yes, you could say that I own her.

I own my kids
(I might as well say it)
I've paid for the college,
the car, the optometrist,
their doctor.
I've set them in motion
with trust funds,
European vacations
and front page weddings.
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I guess I own just about everything.

Why then am I so empty of spirit
as I play this midnight game?

Why do I sit here
wondering:

 why my wife is not here
 why my children choose other things to do
 if my company will survive
 if my reputation is secure
 if anyone likes me.

Why must I wonder
when I own it all?

Second half of match;
please leave that impressive scene;
cross the tracks
count the score,
tally the card
of a second man
who plays the game.

My house is old; my car rusting out,
and I wonder, he thinks,
if the furnace will last the winter.
But (I might as well admit it)
This place owns me.
It calls me to itself each evening
As I walk three blocks
from the bus stop.
It beckons with memories
of Christmases, crisis,
giggles and prayers.
I am gladly owned by its warmth.

My job...is a job, humbling;
 its income modest
 But (I might as well admit it)
 It kind of owns me--
 its opportunities to serve others,
 to fix things,
 make them go and click
 to make something
 with these hands of mine
 some sense of accomplishment
 producing finished things from raw
 You could say I like what I'm doing.

My wife, listen to her hum off key,
 was not a cheer leader,
 and Wellesley is not her background.
 But (I might as well admit it)
 she owns me; I belong to her.
 so compelling her affection
 so deep her insight
 so broad her perspective
 so eternal her values
 so compassionate her caring.
 I gladly give myself to her
 You could say that I am possessed,
 nothing held back.

My children; hear them toss in troubled sleep,
 average students,
 reasonable competitors.
 They (I might as well be frank about it)
 own me.
 I cannot withhold my time from them,
 my unrestrained enjoyment as
 they discover life and allow me
 to join them as both
 player and spectator.
 The birth certificates say they are mine
 But my heart says they own me.

Tally the card; count the score
 the souls of two men cry out.
 One owns, the other is owned.
 Who is winner?
 Are you as confused as I,
 As we watch two men
 extinguish the lights
 and go to bed?
 One face is smiling,
 and humming off key.
 The other is frightened,
 listening to silence.

Perhaps we counted wrongly?
 Perhaps we didn't know soon enough,
 it was a different game
 with different rules
 and a different judge,
 mounting to different and
 very high stakes.

By Gordon MacDonald

Who are you and what do you want? As you think of this poignant story about two people, don't get lost in the fact that one was money rich and one was not; or that it involved the voice of the male gender. It could have been written in any context. The issue is, who owns us? Where is our hope? And what will we do? As we acknowledge that the fear of the Lord is the legacy of wisdom, how shall we then live? With the excellence of a Wheaton education, there will be new leadership opportunities before you. One of the greatest tensions you will face in life is the tension between knowing and doing. There is no scarcity of feet to wash. Towels are always available. The only limitation involves the ability of each of us to be on our hands and knees, to compromise our pride, to be involved and have compassion for others. To be willing to serve. To be owned by the Lord we love. To act upon what we know.

For you know, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor so that you through His poverty might become rich. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men. It is the Lord Jesus that you are serving.

The world, not just the evangelical community, needs your involvement. Don't be detracted and divided by the definitions of your faith. Accept them as reference points for learning. Seek to know the essentials. Understand what you would die for. Embrace the reality of the dignity and worth of every person--the redeemed and unredeemed. Continue your quest of inquiry knowing that all truth is God's truth and that learning is a lifelong experience. Remember, the Christ of our hope was in the beginning as the Word was with God and was God; and also remember that He became one of us as flesh and dwelt among us. He cared enough to be involved and to serve. So do likewise.

* * *

Rev. 10/2/94