

Perkins School of Theology  
DM9314/Dr. Robert Hunt  
George Allan Bradley  
October 9, 2006

**FIRST VIM MEDITATION**  
Matthew 5:13-16

I was in the Navy for twenty-two years. I married my high school sweetheart early and our daughter arrived late in my first year of military service. We have been around the world as a result. In every place we tried to represent our country and our families of origin well, and we always mixed with local folks because we thought it a good thing to discover their people's wisdom and blessing. Never have we been disappointed, and I hope we have never been disappointing. We knew we represented more than our country and the Navy: growing up in the former Methodist Church, we knew we represented our Lord Jesus Christ wherever we went. Forty years after our wedding, we continue trying to be salt and light, now as a clergy family, wherever the bishop sends us.

We have known the good and bad, the strong and the weak, the capable and the halt, the generous and the mean. A friend of ours, a Spanish communist in his twenties, once told me, "We want you to go home! Oh, it's not you personally—you're just fine. It's the imperialism you represent that we want gone." But we continued to be family friends while I was stationed in Spain. We were able to overlook our political differences to connect on the human level. We ate the same food, drank the same espresso, and enjoyed the same flamenco. His Spanish culture, one originating matrix of my Honduran father's, nourished him and us two Texans while we enjoyed the Andalusian sunshine. God was good to all of us, and we enjoyed life.

We rediscovered there, as in other places, that God's love may be shared in spite of, and maybe because of, difference. *Please pray that difference may always be a two-way blessing.*

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**SECOND VIM MEDITATION**  
Matthew 8:1-13

When in 1990 I began my journey toward ordination in the United Methodist Church, one of the questions my home church's Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) asked me was, "How do you know that you can do the work of a pastor?" The story of Jesus' encounter with the centurion immediately came to mind. Military people understand not only authority, but also authority's long and effective reach. Authority reaches from the head of state to the individual military member; it causes things to happen; it affects more than just the military members themselves. (Here the analogy breaks down: while the exercise of human authority can cause help, it may also cause harm.) The centurion expressed confidence in Jesus' ability to help from the positive side of the analogy. This foreigner understood at some level that God was working in and through Jesus, and therefore that Jesus could heal at a distance.

Could I do no less? Of course not. In fact, anything I would undertake in the future in the reign of God depended upon God working in and through me to do any good at all. More than this, any time I encounter another person, I may expect some capacity to perceive the truth of God's presence and activity as the centurion did. Whether or not the person expresses it to me at the time is unimportant; it's sufficient that I realize that God reveals Godself to others and that the revelation helps our interactions. God's grace to both of us immerses us in God's matchless love and care. My SPRC endorsed my candidacy, and I have ministered trustingly with this understanding ever since. *Please pray that God's love and care makes trusting connection possible between people from different backgrounds.*

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**THIRD VIM MEDITATION**  
Matthew 9:35-10:42

My spouse and I now must depend upon the generosity of congregations to whom the bishop sends me. When I was in the Navy, our family depended upon the (taxed) generosity of the American people. People on mission depend upon the generosity of their partners: the local congregations that frequent the bake sales and dinners to fund Volunteers in Mission, sometimes covenant relationships with commissioned missionaries, and ultimately, in our polity, the congregational generosity of apportionments. Every gift great or small brings with it both prayer and substance that God's love will be demonstrated in the work of the missionary.

We are to announce that the reign of God has come near. St. Francis declared that we should always proclaim the gospel, and, if necessary, use words. Surely he was remembering what Jesus instructed the disciples to do as reported in our scripture as well as in Mark 7:7-13 and Luke 9:1-6: cure disease, cleanse the unacceptable, liberate the inner human...freely. We received the breath of life from God and God's image and likeness so that we may freely associate with one another and with our Creator; our ministries among people should in some way restore the possibility of this again in communities where people have been crushed by their own sin and the sin of others. We depend upon God's redemption in Jesus Christ and God's power in the Holy Spirit to do this whether we are sent to our own people as Jesus did the disciples or whether we go to a strange place. *Please pray that God will provide while you announce the Good News in deed and word.*

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**FOURTH VIM MEDITATION**  
Matthew 15:21-28

Sisters and brothers, we can sometimes be dead wrong in matters of faith and practice. When I was towards the end of my career in the Navy, I opined, “I have never seen our opponent demonstrate this behavior before.” A civilian colleague in our tiny intelligence group upbraided me, saying, “Some of us are older than you by the twenty years you have already been in—you haven’t seen everything yet!” And I had to admit that I hadn’t well considered the possibility that we were watching an older tactic unfold. Sometimes the most gracious thing we can do is to concede the point and go on in partnership, chastened, and the better for it.

In one of the most surprising passages of the New Testament, a non-Jew bests Jesus in the exploration of who receives the grace of God! This brassy Canaanite woman broke into the shell of the Jewish exclusiveness in Jesus’ day almost to demand help for her possessed daughter. Like the Roman centurion, she recognized that God’s love and care were for all people, and she came to the source to *get it!* Jesus knew he had been sent to the lost sheep of Israel, his mission limited in his lifetime, but eventually to spread through the hands of his disciples. She spoke the truth: if dogs are part of the family and share in the blessings with the humans, then all of humanity are in God’s household. What insight! What faith! What wit! And Jesus not only concedes, but blesses with healing even the foreigner’s daughter. *Pray that you may have the grace to accept God’s deep truth when you hear it from the other...because the Other who made us intends for us all to be in the same household sharing the blessing.*

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**FIFTH VIM MEDITATION**  
Matthew 13:31-35

My spouse and I have lived in the Republic of the Philippines, the Province of Cadiz in Spain (twice), the western edge of the English Cotswolds in the United Kingdom, Virginia Beach in Virginia, Fort Meade in Maryland, and Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and I have been many other places besides these. Everywhere we went, we took being Texan with us, and it provided entrée in some unexpected places. But we absorbed some of the customs of the places where we live so that we are no longer the same kids that left Texas at the age of 20. Our children, both born abroad, are more eclectic in their worldview than we are; yet they roost in Texas mesquite branches even though they in Maryland.

What do we as missionaries anywhere in the world bring with us and what are we willing to absorb that are the blessing of God for and from us and those we encounter? Has not God given us life and (maybe) a single seed that grows into the culture of our families of origin? Has not God sent us somewhere that we don't know existentially to be leaven, or flour? Since I have entered into ordained ministry, I have found that I am changed more profoundly by the people I serve than I do them. The Holy Spirit is in charge of that, and I am grateful. But I have also realized that the Holy Spirit was doing that in me and my family members all along. Our lives have been parables that God has spoken in us that we didn't understand when first heard. *Please pray that God speaks a parable of transformation in and through you for the good of all.*