

The Memorial Service for Will Ormond

July 4, 2004

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Will Ormond was, to use the phrase of the Apostle Paul, “A good minister of Jesus Christ.” Both the preaching and teaching he did and the authentic Christian life he lived give eloquent testimony to the validity of that statement.

I do not need to talk about Will’s career in terms of times and places. You read that in his obituary. I talk, all too briefly, about the person Will.

Will was blessed with many talents and he used them for the glory of God. His preaching was not dull and drab as with so many of us. To his keen Biblical insight he added imagination and creativity that made his sermons sparkle and memorable. His touch of humor livened them up, and his self-effacing humility was winsome and invited acceptance by his hearers of the truth he was proclaiming. Will had a strong distaste for conceit and pomposity, especially in the pulpit. Neither could ever be detected in Will.

Will was a very competent scholar, though he never thought he was.

His capacity for friendship was remarkable. Wherever he was, even for a short length of time, he developed friendships that lasted through the years. Many students at Columbia Theological Seminary were not only enlightened by his teaching, but blessed by his friendship.

His sense of humor was such that he was invited to lead various conference workshops on the subject: Humor in the Bible. His delightful humor was such a part of him, that, while humor is not usually appropriate in a Memorial Service, in my opinion, there needs to be a touch of it for Will.

Will was a self-acknowledged procrastinator. Will did have a problem with procrastination, as so many of us do. When he was a young preacher at Marion and Tuscaloosa, Alabama, he often said to me, “Nearly every Saturday night I go scratching at the Lord’s door saying, ‘Lord, if you will just help me with the sermon for tomorrow, I promise I will get it done earlier next week.’ Then,” he would say, ‘the next Saturday night I would be scratching at the Lord’s door again.’” This is July 4th. On July 4th, 1976, twenty-eight years ago, the 200th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, I was leading a trip visiting sites of the Apostle Paul for seven Presbyterian ministers. On this day, July 4, we were in Turkey driving in a Volkswagen van from the ruins of Antioch in Pisidia across the very rugged Taurus Mountain range down to the ancient coastal town of Perga. The

terrain made driving on the narrow gravel road very difficult and there were deep drop off into ravines all along the way. Will was a bit scared, especially as the worst driver of the seven ministers was then driving. Will said, “Here we are, 7 Presbyterian Ministers in a remote place in Turkey as everybody else in the Nation is celebrating the 200th Anniversary of 1776. If we run off in one of these ravines and are found dead, the papers in America will read, ‘Seven Presbyterian Ministers killed in an automobile accident in Turkey.’ And people will say, ‘What were those crazy preachers doing in Turkey on July 4th!’”

We got to Perga, which was the place Mark left the Apostle Paul on his missionary journey. Mark refused to go with Paul across the Taurus Mountains to Antioch. Will said, “Now I know why Mark did not go further with Paul. Mark said, ‘Paul, I am not going over these mountains if you are going to be driving’.” Will Ormond was a wonderful and unique Christian gentleman, and with his self-effacing humility, when Will entered the gates of heaven he was surprised when the Lord said, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”