

I am sitting in the back seat, somewhere near Jackson, Tennessee, on Interstate 40, on the way home. Loris is engaged in a conversation with Paul Kendall, a young man who accompanied us to Nashville. He has relatives there. We arrived about 10:30 Saturday morning after camping in Natchez-Trace State Park Friday night. The trip has been pleasant. Last night Wayne Pell and his daughter Brenda came out for a visit. (She is a sophomore at Transylvania in Lexington.) We had a good discussion about our experiences. We attended his Vine Street Church this morning and could feel that Wayne keeps the moral pressure on the people to think on the issues of our time in Christian perspective. Nashville is southern. But the church is facing its problems in a way that makes us hopeful. Bruce and Dotts were good hosts.

I don't know if I told you. We had a letter from Laird and Evelyn. He will be preaching four Sundays in August—dual services. The church is middle class and upper—80% Negroes who have arrived. It will be an experience in reverse prejudice—not perhaps in the church, but in his total work in the community. I am glad they will have this year.

We will go back now to the last week and a half of our ministry here. There will be a gradual letting up and shifting the work to local people, as many of the kids will be leaving the same time. Some of them are going east and will go to the Atlantic City Convention. Not me. I will want to come home and catch up.

But, you know, some of these young people are very fine. Take this boy with us on our trip—a PK who does not let the fact bother him, Presbyterian, pre-enrolled at Union this fall, really one of the most comfortable and delightful fellows we could know. And there are others like him. Some of my earlier letters referred to the eager beavers. They are OK, too, but I have met some of these others who are doing their jobs with little fan-fare. I still don't know what my job is at times, but I guess I am doing it.

August 10, 1964

I have come home to rest up a bit and clean up and study my sermon for tonight. At 6 o'clock we are invited to the home of Rev. Cooper for one of Mrs. Cooper's famous suppers, before we go to the Jerusalem Baptist Church. I think we will be on a tight schedule to be fed in style and then get to church. Then too, I am somewhat frightened about my sermon—what can I preach about which will relate to the needs of these people? How can I say it in their vocabulary? I can talk about freedom, but when I preached my "ad lib" sermon I could do that. What more can I say tonight?

We have finally been doing some voter registration, and I have finally witnessed the look on a woman's face when she was told she had passed! I took her picture in front of the Court House. All day we have been taking persons to the Court House to get a report on their efforts (most of them failed) and to ask if they could take the test again. Of course the County Clerk is very busy this week, two courts in session, no time to administer the tests, and no room in which to give them. He is so very polite and gentle, it makes such great sense—except that for the life of me I can't see much evidence of activity and bustle that he seems to refer to. But this one lady—and a fine appearing lady she is too, did pass, out of about a dozen today. Of course it is too late for her to vote in the November elections! August the first is the deadline for that. And it will be a long, long time before the Negro voters make much of a showing in Mississippi politics! Talk about being discouraged when you think of the battle ahead—a long time.

We are losing some of our workers, and a whole new crew seems to be coming in—each to be orientated, each to wonder at the seeming disorganization, each to find his own groove by himself, until he can feel that he is making the best contribution he can. But that's life.

We arrived "home" safely from Nashville about 8:15 last evening, a fine visit. Thanks for the many fine clippings. We devour them and marvel that the Register and Tribune know what is going on here. It is our main source of local news!

—Frederic A. Thompson