



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Probably the greatest struggle I've had in my years as Pastor here has had very little to do with our congregation, or being located in the northeast sector of the US, or the worldview of our local population. In all likelihood, it would be the same for me no matter where I might be because it really comes down to the condition of Christianity and the Church. It's so hard to separate the two, so I'll just refer to it as the Church.

As you have heard me say before, the problem as I see it predates Western civilization, going back to the days of the Roman Empire when Constantine made Christianity the Empire's "official religion". No history lesson here; I mention it only because I want you to know I am not pointing the boney finger of blame on anybody – not on anyone any of us could possibly have known (unless, that is, reincarnation is real).

In one regard, Karl Marx was correct when he claimed that religion is the opiate of the people. That observation does *not* mean (as I have heard more than one Church leader state) that individual Christians willingly partake as a means of escaping reality. What it does mean is that the message of Good News that Jesus brought has been so twisted that the Church had become an effective instrument of the State, used to keep people controlled and subservient.

How it got to be that way is not the point here. It is not a creation of our government or of our Church leaders. It's not a conspiracy devised by a few loonies who are trying to control the world. It just is. It's what our forebears brought with them to the infant colonies because it is the only system of belief that existed in Europe for centuries.

That might sound like a radical statement, and in the true sense of the word 'radical', it is. Popular usage of the term may bring violent crazies to mind, but 'radical' refers to the root or the core of the thing in question.

The question for me has been, "So, what are you going to do about it?" What indeed. What can I, an ordinary Pastor of a small church in an inconsequential village located at the edge of a poverty-stricken county in a mostly forgotten region of Upstate New York say or do that could help others get a glimpse of Jesus' Good News? What indeed. Again.

Do you have any idea how difficult it can be to ask people to let go of some of the beliefs and concepts they have heard and coveted their entire life? Suggesting that there are things that need to be unlearned, that need to be set aside, in order to learn in a new way is a challenge many people will not accept – at least not without some internal struggle of their own.

But with the sermon series I have begun that is centered on the Kingdom of God, that is what I am asking.

Why a sermon series? How else to help us all focus on something that Jesus mentions 85 times throughout the Gospels? Especially when it's something that has been set aside – mostly by dispensational thinking – as being about heaven and, so, irrelevant to how we live our lives, what other method is left to use?

I have heard a comment that a sermon series is simply a way to make sermon preparation easier. Nothing could be further from the truth. Selecting a different text segment from week-to-week and presenting a message based on that selection, which is typical for Sunday mornings, has its challenges. But focusing on a major theme, planning an approach, laying out and building the groundwork while still bringing a weekly message that can be acted upon by the hearer, all the while with an eye toward what comes next in this reconstruction project is anything but easy.

For me, it's risky – risky because it may be more than some might be willing to accept. But for me to *not* ask you to engage this with me would be a denial of what I believe God has called me to do.

I was not rescued from the destruction of my own making simply to continue charting my own course in life. I was not touched, not once but several times, by the hand of God just so I would accept the status quo of the Church. I was not asked to leave a profession in which I was highly proficient and had earned a great reputation simply to fall into line with what has been done for countless generations.

No, I was called by God to give voice to the message Jesus brought to the world. And I have come to the understanding that the concept of the Kingdom of God is at the heart, the root if you will, of Jesus' life and ministry.

So please don't forget to bring your journal with you and take notes. Even if you hear something you don't particularly agree with, something you never heard before, or something that you feel needs further explanation, write it down. Throughout this series, we will have Saturday morning discussion sessions where we will try to address those issues. (Details of those sessions are in the main part of this month's Witness.)

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud