



Back to Church?

By Pastor Stephen Becker



Dear Friends in Christ,

As we all settle in from our summers of travel, vacation, and other busy events, we also settle back in our routines, with “coming to church” on Sunday being part of that. Some may muse that “things have changed,” or may comment “well we never did ‘it’ like that before.” Certainly, at times, criticisms of the church are quite valid. Luther had 95 criticisms of the Church that were entirely valid. But, nevertheless, I don’t believe I’ve ever heard a criticism of the church, however accurate it might be, that has impressed me. For every criticism leveled against the church by those who have no association with it, I can come up with a half dozen more that they have never even considered. Finding fault with the Church isn’t difficult; it’s like trying to hit the broad side of a barn.

The church, in the Apostle Paul’s words, is very much the “earthen vessel” he describes. It is imperfect, sometimes prone to unfaithfulness and selfishness, and often times slow to respond to the very things God is calling it to do and be.

But if the church is as flawed, as its critics claim, what purpose can it possibly serve? How can we defend its purpose? Why we would want to be a part of it? Even more importantly, why would we ever want to invite someone else to be a part of such a community?

Well, first of all, let me make one thing clear: it isn’t, and never has been, **about** the Church. Evangelism is **not** about inviting people to love the Church – or even necessarily join the Church. *Evangelism is about inviting people into a living relationship with a loving God who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ.*

I guarantee if you tell someone how important it is for them to belong to a church – they will either ignore you or find 101 reasons why you are wrong. If, however, you share with them how Jesus has made a difference in your life, people will pay attention. This Jesus, who forgave sinners, healed the sick and took in the ones no one else wanted, is more interesting to people outside the Church than those of us “inside” the Church sometimes realize. To hear we follow a Savior who loved the outcasts, touched the untouchables and went head to head with the self-righteous religious folks of his day is amazing news to many people. To hear a person does not have to “have it all together” before going to church – and the church is there to welcome them wherever they might be in their lives – is something a lot of people simply do not know. It is a message we can’t take for granted. Indeed, when we do, we no longer have any function other than institutional survival.

So, why is the church necessary? Why is it the beloved of God despite its many and obvious flaws? In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul writes, “...we have this treasure in jars of clay to show this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” *See friends, we are an imperfect messenger with a perfect message.* We are the flawed, sometimes even unfaithful Church, yet we have been entrusted to witness about the one who was faithful in every way. The imperfect contrasted with the Perfect One highlights the Power of God to change lives.

So, will you at some point make a “mistake” in your work for the Church? Absolutely. Your pastor makes mistakes every day. And yet, somehow, God continues to work through me...and us...How can be? Because we are baptized believers who have been forgiven forever of our sins! It is as simple as that. Forgiven of our sins and mistakes, we are free to take the message of the Church to a world hurting to hear the Good News, eager to hear how to live a better life, despite what this world may bring.

Is the church imperfect? Yes. But I believe, like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, God is always waiting for us to turn back to him. God wants nothing more than to bless his church – this “earthen vessel” – because in doing so all the world can see that God is real. After all, if God can work through “those people,” (meaning us!) then God can do anything!

Why do I love the church? Well, it’s not because the church is always warm and fuzzy. Rather, I love the church because it gives me an opportunity to be a part of what God is doing in the world right now. And it gives me a chance to do it alongside other believers (imperfect as we might be), who likewise have taken up the message of God’s love, have surrendered to God’s power, and are seeking to be vessels of something that has the potential of saving the world. Who WOULDN’T want to be a part?

Even now, God is doing amazing things in and through Greenhaven Lutheran Church. Not only can you be a part of those things, but you can invite others to come along for the ride. Indeed, that’s part of the deal – and something God will honor and bless in ways we can only begin to imagine.

Amen and amen.

Your Pastor,
Stephen Becker