

Wednesday, January 6, 2016

EPIPHANY

It is my son-in-law Norman's Birthday today. It is also Epiphany- the end of the 12 day Christmas Season. It is the day which commemorates the visit of the 3 Magi to see the Holy Infant Jesus and give to him worship and gifts. The word epiphany means manifestation or "revelation", specifically the manifestation or appearing of Jesus to the Nations, symbolized in the 3 "Kings" of the Story. It is ideally a day to renew our commitment to worldwide missions.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:37

Thursday, April 9, 2015

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION IN THE WORLD: CROSS or CRESCENT?

One of the more provocative reports on the future of world religion, 2010-2050, was recently released by the Pew Forum. Six years in the making, and encompassing data from 234 countries and territories, it is a landmark piece of research.

Based largely on population growth projections, it revealed how rapidly the religious profile of the world is changing. The précis of the report is nearly twenty pages in length, the full report much longer (245 pages), so here are a few headlines:

*The rumors of religion's death have been exaggerated. Almost every major world religion (except Buddhism) will rise in numbers.

*The fastest growing world religion will be Islam.

*Despite Islam's growth, Christianity will still be the world's largest faith by 2050, but only barely. However, by 2070-2100, Islam will gain the numerical edge.

*Islam and Christianity, combined, will represent 6 out of every 10 human beings on the planet.

*In the United States, Christianity will retain its majority but decline, and Muslims will grow to surpass Jews as the second largest non-Christian American religion.

*The "rise of the nones" will continue in the West, but not on the wider global front, where the lack of religious affiliation will actually decline.

There is much more that could be reported – fewer countries will have Christian majorities, the explosion of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa – but the gist of the report is clear. The race for the world's soul is between the cross and the crescent.

<http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp?id=9120>

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:53

Tuesday, March 24. 2015

MISTAKES OF MISSIONAL MOVEMENT

A brief overview of the the missio dei movement and its tragic downfall and lessons for today's "missional" churches and Christians to learn

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-stream-part-3-miss.html>
?

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:59

Tuesday, October 21. 2014

51% OF AMERICA CHURCH MEMBERS ARE PROTESTANTS

The Landscape Survey confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations now stands at barely 51%. Moreover, the Protestant population is characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation, encompassing hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions - evangelical Protestant churches (26.3% of the overall adult population), mainline Protestant churches (18.1%) and historically black Protestant churches (6.9%).

26.3% of adult Americans belong to Evangelical churches today. When I was born 76 years ago most Americans were Protestant and most of them were Evangelicals.

<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#>

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:57

43% OF AMERICANS ARE UNCHURCHED

Since 1990, the percentage of unchurched adults in America has risen from 30% to 43% of the population. Even as this segment has grown, has their profile changed?

With the aid of more than two decades of tracking research—a sort of cultural time-lapse photography—Barna Group has discovered real and significant shifts in unchurched attitudes, assumptions, allegiances and behaviors. We've identified five trends in our research that are contributing to this increase in the churchless of America.

<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/685-five-trends-among-the-unchurched#.VEaOTxY4KHH>

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:51

Thursday, January 30, 2014

MYTHS ABOUT THE CHURCH

Here are 25 Myths about Christianity and the Church
<http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp?id=5489>

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:44

Friday, October 18, 2013

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST? COUNTING MARTYRS

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/news/2013/09/syria-in-flames-is-this-how-to-defend-our-faith.php>

http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/september/counting-cost-accurately.html?utm_source=ctdirect-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=11430839&utm_content=202094450&utm_campaign=2013

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:00

Saturday, October 12, 2013

MOST POST-CHRISTIAN CITIES IN AMERICA

Which City has the most Christians? Which has the least? Check out the latest fascinating Surveys of Believers, Churches, Unbelievers and non-church goers (including their politics) in all the States and Regions of the Country <http://cities.barna.org/the-most-post-christian-cities-in-america/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:39

Tuesday, August 27. 2013

TWENTY-SOMETHINGS AND THE CHURCH

I have just posted a NEW Essay on my website. It concerns the problem of youth dropping out of the local church and offers an approach that considers the characteristics of The Generations.

I have also posted links to 4 other helpful web articles on the subject

<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:04

Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>

Saturday, March 2, 2013

REASONS WHY YOUTH ARE LEAVING (HAVE LEFT) CHURCH

<http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:14

Monday, May 23, 2011

DOES GAME TIME REALLY HAVE TO BE SHOW TIME?

This is funny. Read this article describing what happens at a typical professional baseball game- about things done to keep the younger fans interested in attending and see how many comparisons can be made (the same arguments) about Church Services, including the title of the article. Yes, very funny.
http://www.boston.com/sports/baseball/redsox/articles/2011/05/22/does_game_time_really_have_to_be_show_time/?camp=obnetwork

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:33

Monday, February 14. 2011

WHAT IS THE CHURCH TO DO IN THE WORLD?

I hear Preachers occasionally lament that Christians are not getting out into the world enough. They need to leave the confines of the church, they say, and get involved with evangelism and missions outside, beyond the church. This sounds good. But it also is confusing and misleading. Defining the Church as the People of God, there is only one Church and it is either gathered or scattered. The local church is gathered in a space (probably some church building) somewhere for only a few hours at most each week and then all of us are scattered out in the world the rest of the time. We do not need to be exhorted to go into the world. We do that! The question is what does the Church do out in the world?

See the rest of this article on my website- <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:50

Sunday, February 6, 2011

NYC's CHANGING POPULATION

If you are interested in cross cultural missions or simply going to make disciples of all "nations" (ethnic groups in the original Greek) consider New York City. Here is a fascinating map of NY's ethnic mosaic and how it is changing. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/23/nyregion/20110123-nyc-ethnic-neighborhoods-map.html?hp%20>

Posted by Cal in Church at 00:48

Wednesday, January 26, 2011

SAVING THE WORLD?

Saving the World? The Changing Terrain of American Protestant Missions, 1910 to the Present Thursday, March 24 & Friday, March 25, 2011 Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC Organized by the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College and hosted by Duke Divinity School, this two-day conference will explore the evolving nature of American Protestant missions since the famed Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. Follow this link to read a summary of the Century of Change in American Protestant Missions project or watch a short video about it.

<http://isae.wheaton.edu/projects/final-conference/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:22

Tuesday, January 11. 2011

EVALUATING THE CAPE TOWN CONGRESS & THE MISSION OF GOD

The article I wrote about the international Congress on World Evangelism held last Fall in Cape Town, South Africa, the most diverse missionary conference ever, has been viewed by more than 1200 readers. That is good. On the other hand, my follow-up review of that conference has had a mere 13 views. That is puzzling. In my mind the latter is the far more important article. I encourage you to give it a look-see. It is titled, The "Mission of God"- a response to the "Cape Town Commitment".

[the-mission-of-god-a-response-to-the-cape-town-congress](#)

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:12

Thursday, January 6, 2011

CELEBRATING EPIPHANY

Besides being my son-in-law, Norm's birthday, today in the Church Calendar is Epiphany. It is a major day of celebration for many Roman Catholics- not so much among Protestants. The latter is a shame. Evangelicals who overlook Epiphany are missing out on a great annual occasion to promote world-wide Missions.

Epiphany (meaning "appearance") is the Day the Church in the East celebrates the Baptism of Jesus. The Church in the West celebrates the Day when the Magi found Baby Jesus and gave him gifts and adoration. (He appeared to them. This could have been two years after his birth and therefore the Holy Family had probably moved out of the barn or cave where the Manger was.)

I celebrate the Day because it completes the Christmas Story. I celebrate it because it both confirms and demonstrates the reason the Baby was born- to save the "Nations" (not only Israel). The Magi represent those Nations. They were the first Gentiles to bow before the true King of the entire world- a foretelling of what was yet to come (Rev 15:4 and 21:24, et al) This makes Epiphany (or the Sunday after it) a time to promote World-wide Missions and to celebrate the advance of the Gospel around the world! Why would Evangelicals want to miss an occasion to do that?

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:39

Thursday, October 7, 2010

EVALUATING "PRAISE SONGS" USING THE PSALMS

Church Music (and styles of Worship) continues to be a bone of contention for many of us. Churches have tried to solve the problems with it by the unhappy compromise of blending of styles or by going all traditional or all contemporary. And the major rationale every time is that, it is said, "the choice comes down to a matter of personal preference- whatever works for me or for us. If someone else doesn't like it they may go to another church. There is no absolute right or wrong about this, it is a personal matter." Really? I respectfully and strongly disagree. But there is good reason for "Praise Songs". It is based on the Psalms.

Please visit my website for a new, major Essay on Worship & Music I have just posted
<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:20

Wednesday, August 4, 2010

LESSONS FROM OUR CITY'S HISTORY

The City of Springfield has an astounding history. It once was a major industrial and transportation center. The manufacture of automobiles, airplanes, ice skates, rubber tires, motorcycles and guns were major industries. And it was a major cultural center for the theater and performing arts. It was also a major center of anti-slavery activism. The underground railway for escaping slaves on their way to Canada and elsewhere went through downtown. Thousands of local men fought for the Union in the Civil War. Artifacts (including many beautiful antique cars) and memorabilia illustrating all this fascinating history is displayed in the new Museum of the History of Springfield. Together they offer major lessons for Christians. All that dynamic industry is long gone. But the City is currently undergoing major urban renewal and there are newer and thriving businesses here. The future looks promising for Springfield. The new industry is service oriented (insurance companies) and educational (5 growing colleges) and medical (hospitals) and coming soon- biotechnology research and communication centers. What happened to the old? Everything has long term (often unintentional) consequences. Cultures, values, the needs and wants of people inexorably change. (It is usually called "progress") Those cars and tires made here, and the new interstate highways, helped people move to the suburbs. That lesson got lost in the pursuit for immediate gains. The development of Shopping Malls replaced downtown retail businesses. Manufacturers failed to keep up with new developments in their very competitive fields. They did not see changes coming and adjust their methods and products accordingly. They did not change with the times. They did change from innovative entrepreneurs to conservative stake holders. They stopped following dreams and settled down to the status quo. They fell behind and were replaced by something "new and improved". The cycle goes on. Can you see the lessons here for local churches?

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:49

Saturday, March 20, 2010

DECHURCHED CHRISTIANS

We received a letter today from our Pastor inviting everyone on the mailing list to Services for Holy Week and Easter Day. His list of reasons why folks should attend are exactly the reasons why many Christians do not attend. The Pastor uses Jesus promise: "where two or three are gathered together, there I am in the midst". He mentions the reasons for attending include Christian fellowship and support- worshiping together in the presence of Christ who will be with us. There is no substitute, he says, for the blessings and encouragement that comes when Christians gather together. Yes, we agree, say the dechurched, Believers who have dropped out of church. And we find, they say, exactly all of that in our small groups or house fellowship- but without all the nonsense and stress that goes with having a building and maintaining a Church organization. Read more [HERE](#)

What can be said to the dechurched? What does the institutional church offer? The Church offers approved, trained Clergy who in turn, ideally, offer solid Biblical sermons and Teaching. They celebrate the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, as well as provide Pastoral ministry throughout a life time of special events, such as weddings, births, tragedies, hardships and funerals. The Church provides special Observances of the Church year, such as Christmas and Easter. The Church offers structured Christian Education for all ages. It teaches and passes on the Heritage and History of the Church to succeeding generations. With its buildings and activities, the Church offers a visible, public presence for God in the local community for generations. It is a stable and permanent Lighthouse for Truth in that place. And it is a place open to all 24/7 to receive counsel and guidance for personal Salvation and Christian Living. It is a recruiting and training center for world-wide missionary work.

A small group or home fellowship, while of value to those few who attend, can not replace a Church. Let's pray the dechurched will realize the church they have walked away from is a Treasure to value and commit to, regardless of how imperfect it may be at times. Christ Himself instituted the institutional Church. It is His, He loves it and it shall prevail long after small groups pass away.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:27

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

TAKING A STAND IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

This article from the Christian Post adds more material about the stand that Central Florida Episcopal churches have taken vis-a-vis the National Church. Many of the quoted words were originally spoken by our son (see the post below this one).

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100202/>

Meanwhile here in Western Mass, these troubling issues are never discussed in our Parish and seem to be ignored by most folks in the Diocese. I would guess there are two main reasons: to keep the peace and unity we have and lack of interest in much of anything beyond the local church or at least indifference about whether TEC "walks apart" from the rest of the world-wide Anglican Communion. In our area, many would be glad to have all the "trouble-making" conservatives just leave TEC and allow the National Church to go on its own chosen way.

Where does anyone who wants to be faithful to the Historic Faith, draw the line in any denomination or church that has departed from it and say, "No more!" ((That last statement can be taken two ways. Which is right?))

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:27

Monday, February 1, 2010

STANDING FIRM FOR THE FAITH IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

This article should be of interest to many of our conservative friends who think the Episcopal Church is hopelessly liberal and that there are no conservative, orthodox Believers or Clergy in the Denomination.

The Bishop of The Diocese of Central Florida is a friend of ours from our college days, when he was active, as we were, in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship. He is a solid Evangelical. So is one of our sons who is a Priest in that Diocese and is the one who made the resolution about the Bishop-elect of LA. There are many others who believe God wants them to remain in the Church as a faithful witness. It is where He called them to be and to serve Him. They struggle daily with the issues and challenges involved. The National Leadership is definitely working against them and The Faith, but they are, by God's grace, standing firm and faithful. They need much courage and great wisdom. They need our prayers.

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20100130/NEWS/1305035?p=2&tc=pg>

I should add that we know orthodox, evangelical Pastors who are also seeking to be witnesses for the Lord and His Word in the Presbyterian USA, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and even in the United Church of Christ. Most Clergy and Laypeople do not seem to have this calling and have abandoned these Mainline Denominations. I once was the Pastor of a Congregational Church where I faithfully preached the Gospel for 4 years. I paid a very heavy price and left there a broken man. Some 50 people I know of came to saving faith during that time. Almost all of them left to go to a non-denominational evangelical church in town. I have wondered what it could have been like at the Congregational church if they had remained and supported me and what the Lord was doing there.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:46

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

ARE CHURCHES GRACELESS AND UNLOVING?

A week does not go by without my hearing from young adults explaining why they have no use for most churches. It is always the same complaint: as they see it, churches are irrelevant to today's world. They do not engage in community activism and promote social and economic justice, particularly among Poor and marginalized people. As corollary to that, these predominately white, (liberal) college educated, privileged and idealistic young adults fault evangelical churches for being legalistic and judgemental and thus unloving and devoid of grace, which makes these churches hypocritical, because they are not open, welcoming and affirming of all kinds of people, including overt homosexuals, addicts, the homeless and the mentally ill.

Read the full article on my website [HERE](#)

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:31

Tuesday, July 21. 2009

WHAT IS UBUNTU AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Like many others, I was greatly disturbed by the remarks made last week by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church at the General Convention last, including repudiation of what she called, "the great Western heresy: that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God.' She continued, "That heresy is one reason for the theme of this Convention. Ubuntu. That word doesn't have any 'I' in it." Many outraged evangelicals were quick to denounce the PB and her remarks. But I think there is more involved here than meets the eye. She continued, "That heresy is one reason for the theme of this Convention. Ubuntu. That word doesn't have any 'I' in it." Her critics have not taken "Ubuntu" seriously enough. "Ubuntu" is the key to what she said and to much else happening in many churches today, including Evangelical ones and it is the "true" Heresy.

READ MY FULL ESSAY ABOUT UBUNTU HERE

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:08

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

DOCTRINE AND HISTORY BOTH MATTER

Many if not all of the members of the Episcopal Church I belong to do not know or care and some even deny that historically the Church was a Reformed, Calvinist church which had a very high view of Scripture and required its Clergy to subscribe to both the 39 (Reformed) Articles of Religion in order to be ordained all as well as promise to make preaching of the Word of God to be their first responsibility as Clergy. This gradually changed over the years. Such changes usually take at least a generation, maybe two. The Church officially was Calvinist until a mere 30 years ago when, in 1979, it adopted a new Book of Common Prayer which dropped the Articles and now contains a very different Religion in many aspects. The folks who joined our church in the last 30 years or who came from other Denominations do not know this. Some even deny it. None of our members, to my knowledge, including our Pastor, are Calvinists today. Indeed, they like to "tease" me about the fact that I am. Certainly the Episcopal Church as a Denomination is far from Biblical, let alone Reformed or Calvinist. Its 500 year old Reformation Heritage has been utterly lost. When I tried being a Pastor of a Congregational Church in the 1970's, I learned that they too had long lost their Reformed Heritage and the Faith of their Pilgrim forefathers and they could care less. They were interested in only the history and story of their local congregation. Actually, Doctrine and History stand and fall together. Churches that are atheological are also ahistorical. Its a sorry state of affairs. Both Doctrine and History matter!

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:50

Monday, April 27, 2009

SERMON AND CINEMA REVIEWS

People heard me preach yesterday. What they heard as individuals, probably varied greatly, depending on what they brought to church with them, i.e.- in their heads and hearts and their life experience. I am always amazed how different film reviewers demonstrate this point. Christy Lemire and Josh Hurst both watched the same film, "The Soloist", but each saw a very different movie. Compare their reviews. One saw it as almost a bomb while the other could not say enough good about it. One couldn't wait 'til it was over, the other wants to see it again. Same film, different reactions. Just like sermons.

http://www.newsvine.com/_news/2009/04/21/2714382-review-the-soloist-hits-notes-that-clang

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/2009/soloist.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:48

Saturday, April 4, 2009

MORE NEW ESSAYS ON MY WEBSITE

I have completely revised two Essays:

The Eucharist
Eucharistic Worship

I hope you will find them informative and helpful.

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:32

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

WHY I BELIEVE IN LITURGICAL WORSHIP

I did not grow up with liturgical worship- far from it! Most of my meaningful experience in Worship has been in the free, simple Protestant style, in a casual and informal setting where the emphasis is on preaching and extemporaneous praying. As a small child I attended a Methodist Church but later worshipped in Congregational and Baptist type churches. I was almost 40 when I was introduced to Liturgical Worship. During the last 30 years, even though I have worshiped (and have been a Pastor) in non-liturgical churches during part of this time, I have experienced a growing appreciation for Liturgical Worship. This has been accompanied (and strengthened) by a growing unhappiness with worship trends in many evangelical churches. But, is my appreciation of Liturgical Worship only a matter of personal preference and needs? Are there good Scriptural and Theological reasons for Liturgical Worship. Can it be defended and supported on ground more solid than personal temperament or "what works for me"? It should be and can be! You can read the entire Essay on my website

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:43

Monday, March 2, 2009

IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

The "Presiding Bishop" of The Episcopal Church Church (whom I regard as a Heretic) was in Boston over the weekend (see article attached below). She was there to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the first consecration in the Church of a woman as a Bishop. She went over the chain of other firsts that made this possible: ordination of women to the Priesthood made possible women as Bishops. This in turn made it possible for her elevation to Presiding Bishop. (I predicted and forewarned about this development more than 20 years ago.) The PB said this made it possible for the consecration of a Gay Bishop and she anticipates, with joyful approval, the full acceptance of many gay priests and Bishops in TEC. And that will happen, I have no doubt. Those who approved of the first ordination of women to the Priesthood helped make this "progression" inevitable. Ideas always have consequences, often unintended. The PB alluded to a small group of dissidents who have objected and left the Church over all of this. She and the majority, she said, have moved on. As far as she is concerned this whole subject is now a non-issue now TEC. It certainly is in our local Diocese.

http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/03/01/episcopal_church_marks_a_milestone/

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:11

Monday, February 23, 2009

REACHING THE EMERGENT GENERATION FOR CHRIST

According to several recent surveys by Barna Group and others, a large majority of Protestant youth drop out of church before age 23. Some return after 30, but most do not. They join an ever increasing percentage of Americans who have no church background at all. These kinds of statistics fuel the Emerging Church Movement. EC Leaders and their books insist that America's churches must seek new ways to reach these young adults. If we don't, they will not only not be saved, but churches as we know them are doomed to dry up and die. We all know churches which are doing exactly that. The Emergent Movement is (or was) basically an evangelistic movement as in the name "Youth for Christ". Understand this is where we must begin our study of the Emergent Movement (the actual name is changing or varied and some are now dropping the Emergent label altogether, but the phenomena labeled by it continues to grow world-wide). Read more on my website [here](#)

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:29

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

WELCOMING VISITORS

We couldn't make it to our normal Church Services recently because of the road conditions so we attended a Service near our house. Roads and sidewalk were still a mess and slippery. So were the sidewalk and steps going into the church building. Once in we saw two ushers in the foyer, chatting while they waited for folks to arrive. They welcomed us, but I was disgusted. Didn't they know how bad the walks and steps were? Apparently not their job. They didn't care and kept chatting. They had made it in, apparently through a side door only regulars would know about. I found a shovel and cleared the walks and steps- not my job either. We were visitors. But it had to be done before someone fell and got hurt. Not a warm welcome, for sure. We know this particular church is dying, I wonder if indifference to the needs of visitors could be part of the reason?

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:06

Thursday, January 22, 2009

NEW ESSAY ON MY WEBSITE Re THE "EMERGING CHURCH"

I just posted a new Essay about the "Emerging Church"- an update and 10 year perspective, on my website.

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:56

Saturday, December 13, 2008

AN EVANGELICAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH

"It's not too early to start thinking about Christmas. This year, we will again have services at 6 and 10:30 on Christmas Eve. The earlier service will specifically include and involve the children. The later service, with full choir and incense, will be a majestic celebration. The members of Church of Our Savior come from more than 20 countries including Antigua, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Germany, Grand Turk, Great Britain, Guyana, Honduras, Italy, Jamaica, Liberia, Panama, Poland, Puerto Rico, Singapore, St Vincent, Trinidad, and the United States of America. One of the wonderful things about Christmas is the proclamation that Jesus is King over all the world and is the Savior for anyone and everyone who trusts in Him. Our Church not only says it, but demonstrates it in action. If you are reading this because you are seeking a Church that cares, please do come and join us...we are a neighborhood church with a heart for the world, an Anglican parish committed to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with joy and boldness." I look forward to seeing you in service. Blessings, Loren C. Fox+, Rector Church of Our Savior Palm Bay, Florida This was taken from their parish newsletter for December

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:51

Friday, December 12. 2008

LETTING OFF SOME STEAM

I recently heard someone explain why he no longer attends a certain evangelical church: "If I have to listen to one more sermon about Truth, I'll scream!" Others have complained about the same church, "It is too legalistic." Sounds to me like it might be a good church! I don't know as I do not go there, but it is possible such criticisms say as much or more about the critic (and our society) as they do about this church.

Surveying our American Culture, and especially our churches, there is a desperate need for both Truth and Law. We have gone way too far in the other direction. We hear today a lot about Grace or Love and by that is meant tolerance and permissiveness and open-mindedness. We hear a lot about accepting and respecting all kinds of life styles that are blatantly sinful and we are not to be judgmental (that would be sinful). All of this is nonsense! I am dismissed by many as an old fogey, hopelessly out of touch. NO, I am definitely not out of touch. I live in a City. I am very current. I follow the news constantly. I listen, observe and learn what is going on in the world and in the churches around me. I know what is happening. I just don't like or approve of most of it. I don't buy the latest fads and trends- not because they are the latest, but because they are muddle-headed and dangerously wrong. Multiculturalism- wrong! Religious and moral pluralism- wrong! The Welfare State- wrong! Socialistic, Interventionist Economic policy- wrong! So-called Progressive, Liberal, leftwing politics- Wrong! Fornication ("hooking up" and "shacking up")- wrong! Living for pleasure and thrills- wrong! Cheating, stealing and lying- wrong! Abortion- wrong! Unwed mothers and out of wedlock babies- wrong! Being a dead beat "father"- wrong! Divorce- wrong! Teens dropping out of school - wrong! Drugs and getting drunk-- wrong! Maxing out credit cards and living in debt- wrong! Being a dishonest employer or employee- wrong! Pastors that have allowed the so-called postmodern culture, intellectually or socially, to capture them and control how they "do church" rather than the Scripture- wrong! Pastors who have substituted "narratives: and videos for solid expository preaching - wrong! Preachers who have adopted the current negative attitudes about Absolutes and simply want to help seekers to find whatever is true and meaningful to them- wrong! Pastors who no longer seek to lead sinners to repentance and saving faith- wrong! Pastors who are satisfied with "changed lives" instead of regenerated hearts- wrong! Pastors who want to simply help unbelievers along in their spiritual journey instead of telling them the old-time Gospel- wrong! Pastors who substitute Matthew, Mark, Luke for Romans- wrong! Christians who disparage Doctrine and Systematic Theology in deference to human relationships and "listening in community"- wrong! Churches who substitute social action for evangelism- wrong! Clergy and Churches who believe the United Nations Millennium Goals are what the Kingdom of God is about- wrong! I want to stand up and shout from the house-top: Stop the nonsense! We must turn back to the Blood, the Book and the Blessed Hope. We must challenge the world with the Word as it really is. We must preach absolute Truth and the Reformed Faith. Young people, all people, have never liked that. We must take a stand for Biblical principles of living. Sinners have never approved of them. We must seek regeneration and insist on personal holiness and righteous lives according to Scripture. This too has never been popular. We must be faithful to our calling. I must be faithful to mine, as God is our witness and judge!

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:22

Thursday, July 31, 2008

ANGLING FOR AUTHENTIC ANGLICANISM

I have finished my sermon series for the month, so now I can focus again on this Blog and my studies. Of continuing concern is the state of the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church in particular. Everyone connected claims to stand or want to stand in the "Anglican Tradition" People have very disparate and vague views of what exactly that Tradition is. It is all very confusing. Having considered the options, these are my current conclusions about what "Anglican" means. The Anglicanism I consider to be "Classic and Historic" is found in the Protestant and Reformed Church of England that began in the time of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 1556. In its first 180 years, (approx. 1534-1714) the dominant Party in the Church of England was- Protestant and Reformed for 124 years · Anglo-Catholic for 24 years · Roman Catholic for 21 years · Mixed for 11 years during the Commonwealth. It is obvious by this reckoning of Church history that the Anglicanism which is Protestant and Reformed is the Classic or authentic Anglicanism. However, there have been variations within these original Parties and other Parties, too, have had a part of that history if we extend it to the present day. The adherents of all these Parties have felt free to claim to be authentic Anglicans. Ultimately, most people will choose the meaning of the name "Anglican" that suits them and their purposes and they do so for that reason alone. The argument from History (above) carries no weight for many. Reality is, "Anglican" means whatever people want it to mean, whatever they are familiar or comfortable with. Evangelicalism does not appear until mid 18th C in England and therefore it also is not Classic Protestant and Reformed Anglicanism. However, Evangelicalism with its adherence to the basic Scriptural Gospel (the Evangel) plus its emphasis on spreading it everywhere (evangelism) including world-wide missionary work and the conversion of unbelieving adults to Christ has been the dominant party within the Protestant Episcopal Church from its origin after the American Revolution until after the Civil War, approximately one hundred years. Thus a strong argument may be made that the classic, historic Episcopal Church is evangelical. However, Evangelical influence was supplanted after the Civil War in many areas by Anglo-Catholicism and then by Liberalism, which became increasingly dominant in the PECUSA from the late 19th Century to the present- over one hundred years in the making. That dominance became official with the adoption of the 1979 BCP with its liberal theology in the Eucharist and Catechism as well as its demotion of the 39 Articles to mere "Historical Documents" which are no longer authoritative. All three of these major Parties still exist and, again, each claims to be the true Episcopal Church, representing an authentic Anglican Tradition. In summary: My Position (July 2008) The name "Anglican" has usually meant a Church which is either Protestant and Reformed (39 Articles) or Protestant and Reformed (39 Articles) as well as Catholic and Creedal with High Church Ecclesiology (with various degrees of Ritualism) or Evangelical with (usually) Low Church Ecclesiology with minimal Ritual or Anglo-Catholic (Creedal orthodoxy, but Roman Catholic in almost everything) or Latitudinarian or Broad Church, i.e. - Liberal with increasing use of Ritual. Personally, I believe the authentic Anglican Church would be Protestant and Reformed as well as Catholic and Creedal with High Church Ecclesiology (and a moderate degree of Ritualism). The Church which is authentically Anglican stands in direct Theological and Historical Succession to the Apostles. The Anglican Faith is grounded in the Creeds and Practices of the early Church (1st-6th Centuries), as well as the Doctrine of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th-17th Centuries, represented by The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion. This also means an authentic Anglican Church would practice Liturgical and Eucharistic (Catholic) Worship according to a Book of Common Prayer which is in direct line, and faithful to, The 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Authentic Anglican Spirituality flows from all of the above, nurtured by a sense of continuity with the ancient Church and its practices, by its sense of communion with the Holy and Sacred in its worship (and in sacred spaces), by its grounding in classic, historical and Biblical Theology, by its respect for ancient Tradition and by its reliance on both Scripture and the mind, as well as the Spirit within, to plumb the depth of God's revelation of Himself. It would also be "Evangelical", defined as follows- "Evangelical" to me means having a high view of Scripture, interpreted with the historical-grammatical method using Tradition and Reason (the more Reformed members, like Hooker himself, emphasize Scripture above Tradition and Reason; the more Catholic members emphasize Tradition above Scripture and Reason; the more Liberal members emphasize Reason above both Tradition and Scripture). There would be an emphasis on Bible preaching and Teaching in Services (and Parish life). "Evangelical" to me also means intentional effort to lead everyone to saving faith (being mindful that the Reformed Faith is not normally conversionist (in the Baptist sense) but Covenantal with Sacraments (We and our children are saved by grace alone through faith alone.)) I understand authentic "Anglicanism" to mean all this. It is the only kind of Anglicanism I am interested in. Inasmuch as this does not describe TEC in our time, I do not consider it to be, as a national Church or Denomination, truly Anglican. As I see it, the attempt to reconcile the differences within TEC is futile. For all the lip service paid to reconciliation and unity, I suspect each Party is waiting for the other to give up and go away. All are earnestly speaking (debating) about different and contrary things while using the same words (Anglican, God, Gospel, Kingdom, Love, Mission, etc). The irreconcilable differences particularly involve Theology (proper), Christology, Revelation (Scripture), Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology (Authority). It seems like the necessary thing to do so that all may get on with their respective Mission is to separate. Some will argue for unity within

the family; but we are also an organization with standards and goals. An organization with contradictory standards and goals working against each other can not move forward or succeed. Christ's Church, spreading from Jerusalem, took root in England and it spread from there. It also took root in many other countries and parts of the world and spread from those places to even others. The Church in any one of those places today can not claim to be Christ's Church exclusively. If what spread from England to America (TEC) has dried up that does not mean the root itself is not vital. Other shoots have grown out of it over the years and are thriving today. Authentic Anglicanism continues in them.

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:45

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

WHEN DID THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND BEGIN?

"The Christian Church was established in the British Isles well before 300. Some scholars believe that it was introduced by missionaries from the Eastern or Greek-speaking half of the Mediterranean world. Celtic Christianity had its own distinctive culture, and Greek scholarship flourished in Ireland for several centuries after it had died elsewhere in Western Europe. However, in the fifth century Britain was invaded by non-Christian Germanic tribes: the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. They conquered the native Celtic Christians (despite resistance by, among others, a leader whose story has come down to us, doubtless with some exaggeration, as that of King Arthur), or drove them north and west into Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. From these regions Celtic Christian missionaries returned to England to preach the Gospel to the heathen invaders. Meanwhile, the Bishop of Rome, Gregory the Great, decided to send missionaries from Rome, a group of monks led by their prior, Augustine (not to be confused with the more famous Augustine of Hippo). They arrived in Kent (the southeast corner of England) in 597, and the king, whose wife was a Christian, allowed them to settle and preach. Their preaching was outstandingly successful, the people were hungry for the Good News of salvation, and they made thousands of converts in a short time. In 601 the king himself was converted and baptised. Augustine was consecrated bishop and established his headquarters at Canterbury. From his day to the present, there has been an unbroken succession of archbishops of Canterbury." [by James Kiefer in Oremus]

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:22

Saturday, May 10, 2008

PROMISES OF PENTECOST

John 14:12 ... I am going to the Father. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. John 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 10 ...because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me ...

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:41

HEAVENLY WORSHIP

Just wondering how many evangelical churches which will not observe Pentecost Sunday tomorrow because they do not follow the Church Calendar, will follow the American Calendar and observe Mother's day? I have started to write several posts for the Blog this week, but tossed them into the wastebasket. Most of the Church and World events I read and hear about in the media every day are very depressing or upsetting. I couldn't bring myself to comment on them. Maybe next week... I did discover the website of St Thomas Episcopal Church on Fifth Ave in NYC. It is known for its choral ministry. And what a ministry it is! In this age of "Praise Teams", I have been deeply moved and blessed listening to their Choir of men and boys accompanied by a marvelous pipe organ. Some 1000 people gather for worship every Sunday in the classic High Gothic nave. I realize this kind of music and worship is not found in evangelical churches. It could be and I wish it were! To me it is sacred, somber, holy, heavenly, awe inspiring. It transports me into the overwhelming presence of God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth to whom belongs all power and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Is there a Scriptural basis for such Worship? Yes. A model for it in the New Testament is found in the Book of Revelation. See chapter 4 as an example. But that is a description of Heaven, you may say. Yes it is. We will spend eternity there. Shouldn't our worship here and now be a foretaste of that? Prayer for Church Musicians and Artists O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be ever present with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises offered by your people on earth; and grant to them even now glimpses of your beauty, and make them worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:34

Thursday, May 1, 2008

ALL HAIL CHRIST THE KING--Today is Ascension Day

Apostles Creed: I believe in Jesus Christ, ... He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Daniel 7:14 To [Christ] was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. Psalm 47:1 Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a cry of joy. 2 For the LORD Most High is to be feared; he is the great King over all the earth. 3 He subdues the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. 4 He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. 5 God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of the ram's-horn. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. 7 For God is King of all the earth; sing praises with all your skill. 8 God reigns over the nations; God sits upon his holy throne. 10 The rulers of the earth belong to God, and he is highly exalted. Matthew 28:18 Jesus...said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:03

Monday, April 28, 2008

UNDERSTANDING "EMERGENT", PoMo CHURCHES

Increasingly, churches are becoming known as “emergent”. Members are usually 20-30 something evangelicals who see themselves as emerging from the churches of their youth, their parents’ churches. Today, those latter churches will include “Boomer” (folks now in their 50’s) churches that have followed a contemporary, seeker-friendly model and those tend to become large or “megachurches” and occupy theater-type buildings. These emergent Christians generally share the characteristics of what is known as Post-Modernism.

There are variations, but PoMo characteristics (for Christians and non-Christians alike) include the following: Agnostic, skeptical, non-dogmatic; anti-foundational (anti absolutes and claims of certainty); not into right-versus-wrong or truth-versus-error; inclusion is preferred over exclusion Moral and religious Pluralism, accept paradox and reject the need for logical consistency Knowledge comes in many ways, by reasoning but also through the irrational and non-rational; Emphasis is on feelings, experience and intuition as ways of knowing Value Narrative and stories as the primary way of communicating and learning. Relational, open to shared learning and growth in community Group participation rather than individualism; value dialogue as essential to gaining knowledge (or understanding) These are the characteristics of the younger generations, for better or worse, typically from late teens into early 40’s, sourced primarily in their formal education in school and reinforced by their music, videos (the Internet) and movies. It is important to realize that in many ways Post-Modernism is reactionary. PoMo adults intentional reject the characteristics of the Modernism that describes their parents’ approach to Knowledge and Faith. [Various dates are used for the end of Modernism, usually in the 1950’s and 60’s. But actually, “Modernism” as defined by these characteristics is still prevalent everywhere today.] Knowledge is rational, cerebral, propositional, didactic Modernism values “Truth”, “Foundationalism”- absolutes, certainties Modernism values right belief and Confessions of Faith Modernism values method, logic, deduction from principles, systems It values organization and control- distains chaos, confusion and contradiction This of course is an over simplified, reductionist view of Modernism. It is all of this and much more. In matters of Religion, it also has strong elements of Pietism and Romanticism. So-called “Modernist” Christians believe in the Holy Spirit and a deep, personal spiritual life and also believe in the importance of the local church and Christian fellowship and sharing (community), as well as learning through dialogue with others. [Ironically, Post Modernists today call traditional or conservative Christians “Modernists”. That used to be used to be what conservative Christians called “Liberals”] The major issue that divides the Modernist and the Post Modernist is Epistemology: the nature of knowledge and how we acquire it, especially knowledge of God. Put another way, the issue is the nature of “Truth” and how we define and know it. But this issue must not be seen as “academic”. This is the major issue deeply influencing how people understand who God is, what Salvation is, what being a Christian is, what Church is and what Worship is all about (including the purpose and type of music used). To be or not to be an “Emergent Church (or Christian) is not simply a matter of personal preference. There are serious, important consequences.

Posted by Cal in Church at 04:28

HOW NON-CHRISTIAN YOUTH SEE THE CHURCH

Last Fall a list from a survey circulated on a number of websites with descriptors of today’s typical church offered by “outsiders”. Apparently, the following are ways the Church is perceived by young adults. anti-homosexual (91%) judgmental (87%) hypocritical (85%) old-fashioned (78%) too involved in politics (75%) out of touch with reality (72%) insensitive to others (70%) boring (68%) not accepting of other faiths (64%) confusing (61%) Obviously, these are subjective judgments and not verified (or verifiable) by hard evidence. They actually say more about the “outsiders” than they do about the church. However, “Insiders” of particular churches might do well to take note to see if any of these descriptors are fair about their congregation.

Many Services I have attended in this area, in my opinion, are boring. Most are definitely not old fashioned (by my standards as an older person) and I don’t think most of them as churches are involved in politics as such [a few lean Left and maybe two or three lean Right]. Individuals may well be hypocritical, but I don’t know of any church which is hypocritical as a church by its own standards. As to confusing, well anything can be confusing to a new comer- but that normally is temporary. As to out of touch with reality, well that depends on who’s reality. If reality includes God, than agnostics, atheists, secularists and materialists are the ones out of touch. That leaves us with anti-homosexual (91%)

and not accepting of other faiths (64%). I imagine it is primarily because of these two perceptions that churches are labeled as judgmental (87%) and insensitive to others (70%). Well, now we are down to what churches consider to be core Biblical Doctrine and Morality. And yes, by these standards, those who do not agree with what evangelical Christians believe might see us as judgmental and insensitive to others. We must take that chance. I'm glad the airlines are being judgmental about the safety of their aircraft and colleges are being more alert for students who exhibit abnormal or aberrant or anti-social behavior at the risk of being insensitive to individuals and their privacy. Core Biblical Doctrine and Morality must never be determined by what our culture or certain groups within it deem to be "correct" at the risk of offending someone.

Posted by Cal in Church at 04:25

Thursday, April 24, 2008

A MAJOR REASON TO WORK FOR THE WELL-BEING OF IRAQ

Psalm 122 I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Where is this House of the Lord? It is found in Jerusalem-Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Country's Capital, cf to Washington DC For there are the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you. 'Peace be within your walls and quietness within your towers. Believers went into the City to Worship: Jerusalem is built as a city... . To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, the assembly of Israel, to praise the name of the Lord. The House of the Lord, the Temple, is within the City. People assembled there to worship. This is why, the Psalmist said, we pray for the well-being of the City- for the sake of the Temple there 'For my family and companions' sake, I pray for your prosperity. 'Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do you good.' Today, the House of God, His Temple, is the Church (Eph.2:19-22, 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 3:6, et al) A major reason we should seek the prosperity and welfare of any City is for the sake of the Christians living there. The latter require the former. Cf 1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made... 3 for kings and all those in authority, [for the City] that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior This is one of the major reasons we must pray for Iraq and work for its Shalom: the well-being of Christians who live there. The Church is being terribly oppressed in that Country <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/21/AR2008042103143>.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:41

Monday, April 7, 2008

MOTHER CHURCH- Part 3

I have been having an exchange with "Anonymous" about my first post about Mother Church (below) I am replying here, rather than in the Comment section, as (he?) raises important issues worth a wider read. He says, While I cannot speak for the website you were referring to (as I don't know what it is), In this case, that does not matter because I am using the words quoted as a sample of a point of view I often hear. I am taking them literally, exactly as written. I wrote: "I found this paragraph on a website, but it is a view I have heard often". I am discussing that view, not the website. The writer of the original paragraph specifically defines "Religion" (no qualifiers, .: All Religion) as "man-made attempts to reach God through rules and rituals". . (and) we reject man-made religion." This is an absolute, universal inclusive statement- all Religion is man-made. Then the original writer makes this claim "we believe religion has kept more people from the truth than anything in history."-again a universal, absolute statement about all Religion. I then tried to show that the writer of the paragraph is being careless and that his definition needs amending. I used the dictionary definition and do not believe that his argument is at all appropriate or fair, if that dictionary definition is used. I then stated that Christ Himself instituted an institutional Religion and that I strongly believe in that Religion- the Christian Religion, which does indeed include many rules and rituals. I deny that the Institution that began with Christ "has kept more people from the truth than anything in history." I agreed that many have and do trust in religious rules and rites for their salvation. This is futile and I am sorry that it happens. Anonymous says, in my experience believers often use this label to refer to the works based "religion" they (and their hearers) have experienced and are familiar with. I don't doubt that at all, but it does not change what I have said in my Post. It is not an attempt to distance themselves from "Mother Church" (usually they are involved in a church). Good, glad to hear that. I wonder if their current churches have rules and rituals. What would be the difference between now and then? I wrote that this is not an either or situation. Many of us enjoy both a relationship with God based on His grace and the nurture of that relationship that is found in our churches (our Religion). Great! Thanks for your comments, Anonymous. I hope we are in sync now

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:35

Sunday, April 6, 2008

MOTHER CHURCH Part 2

I thought I better add to the Post below about the Church being our spiritual mother. I spelled out what I meant: the institutional Church in a broad sense is the God given primary source of our nurture and support as Believers through her Worship, Preaching, and Sacraments (especially Holy Communion). I would add education, discipline (accountability) and opportunities for ministry and outreach, but para-church groups also offer them. All of these are the normal means by which saving and living faith is made possible and built up. Hence, "Mother Church". I have loved, honored and served her all my life. However, she has also given me much frustration, pain and heartache. It has not been easy to be a faithful son and I have often been tempted to divorce my "Mother". I can't and I won't. But I can say, not every local church is a good mother. Some are downright terrible at motherhood. Some can smother or suck the very life out of you. So I would say that sometimes there can be the need to move away from "Mother", when living close becomes unhealthy- and to find another who will be more helpful for awhile. "Mother's home-cooking" can be great and I don't want to go without it for long; but sometimes a restaurant is nice, too, or going to a friend's house for supper can be enjoyable now and then.

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:23

Tuesday, April 1, 2008

THE CHURCH IS OUR MOTHER

"Many people refer to us as "Christians," but we consider ourselves followers of Jesus. Like Jesus, we reject many of the issues found in "organized religion" (man-made attempts to reach God through rules and rituals). Actually, we believe religion has kept more people from the truth than anything in history. Although we reject man-made religion, we consider the personal pursuit of God as tantamount in each of our personal life journeys." I found this paragraph on a website, but it is a view I have heard often: we have no Religion, we have a personal relationship with Jesus. I understand what these well-intentioned folks are saying, but this concept and attitude really disturbs me every time I hear it. By "Religion" these critics of it mean "man-made attempts to reach God through rules and rituals". The standard M-W dictionary definition of "Religion" is 1 a. the service and worship of God b. commitment or devotion to a Faith or observance 2 a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices The declaration that all that is encompassed in this definition comprises "man-made rules and rituals for the purpose of reaching God" is totally bogus. That is a presumption read into the definition and an unfair one at that. There is no warrant for it. Actually, it is silly. Last time I checked, most of us go to Church for regular scheduled organized corporate worship with recognized Leaders, which includes rules and rituals of some kind. We stand, sit and follow directions. We sing and stop singing on command. Likewise with praying. We bring offerings. Invitations are often given for people to come for healing, to confess sins and for help to accept Christ. We take Communion and we submit to Baptism. We confess faith and become members. All of this is Religion. I have a Religion, but I do not practice it in order to get saved or go to Heaven, if that is what the critics above mean by the words, "to reach God". I have a Religion and I have a personal relationship with Jesus- both. It is not either-or! The people saying this are evangelicals who do, in fact go to church. To say that my Religion (and theirs) is man-made and "has kept more people from the truth than anything in history" is ridiculous. Their argument puts all Religion into the same trash basket. I agree some Religious beliefs and practices may be harmful. Undoubtedly, some people may very well be religious and not have saving faith. Some do trust in their religious practices to "reach God" or Salvation. That does not mean every religious person does this and that all Religion is bad. They actually mean depending on "all man made rules and rituals" for salvation is bad. That is not what they are actually saying and they don't seem to be aware of the difference. I have found that many evangelicals who slam "Religion" are expressing a bias against the institutional Church and are (unknowingly?) advocating a docetic Christianity- one which is all "spirit" and no "body". Can't be done. Christ Himself (who, after all, was God in the flesh) instituted the institutional Church- complete with Doctrines, Clergy and Sacraments and Members. In other words, Christ established the Christian Religion. Let's not knock it, using His Name to do that no less ("No Religion for us. We just want to follow Jesus.") The Church is our Mother, inasmuch as she nurtures our faith and Christian life. This is true even when we disagree and are unhappy with her. She has the means of Grace. Her Gospel and Scripture, Her preaching and teaching, Her Sacraments, Discipline and Fellowship are all essential to our "personal pursuit of God". Let us love our Mother and not reject her as nothing more than a bunch of man-made rules and rituals.

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:45

Sunday, March 30, 2008

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD SERVICE

We stopped at a major chain restaurant for lunch after church today. The sign said open at 11:30 and it was just before noon when we arrived. We walked in and no one seemed to be there. There were no customers and no hostess. We stood there for at least 10 minutes, then I walked around. I then saw at least 6 young ladies clustered and chuckling in the kitchen area. A janitor taking out trash called their attention to me and a few minutes later one of the young ladies came out to the front desk and asked "Can I help you?" Well, duh. I told her "no" and that we were leaving now because of the poor service already. We went somewhere else and spent our money at a restaurant that cared about our business and about customer service. I can't believe a Manager who is serious about staying in business would run such a loose operation. We will not be back. By contrast, we were really impressed by the service offered at church. There was a supply Minister and she (yes, she) did a great job. She conducted the Service well, projected her voice and spoke clearly throughout. (We have had to strain to hear anything the regular Minister said.) Her spirited sermon was well delivered, without notes and it had very good content with a pastoral, inspirational application. It might have helped that the preacher had been a trial lawyer before moving into her second career in the Church. At any rate, she delivered the goods and we enjoyed our spiritual dining experience and are thankful. We shall be back for more next week!

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:40

Saturday, March 8, 2008

SHOULD THE CHURCH BE EXCLUSIVELY SPIRITUAL?

In a recent email, someone referred me to a Blog where I read that the church, as a visible and constitutional organization, ought to be exclusively concerned for "spiritual" matters.' Accordingly, the church supposedly serves to proclaim a gospel that transcends social activism, economics and politics. Here is my response-The "Church" can be defined as a community of Believers who have covenanted together to be the people of God, the Body of Christ, in a particular location. (The Bible expects every baptized Believer to be active in such a Faith Community.) Such local churches exist, first of all, to publicly, corporately worship God the Father, Son and Spirit. This worship will include listening to the Word of God preached. This could be said to the gathered church confining its concern to spiritual matters only (i.e.- Praising, Preaching and Praying). However, I'm sure listening to the Word of God is done with the expectation by the Preacher that what is heard will be obeyed and put into practice during the week after the gathered church has scattered into the community. This is possible only if the preaching includes expositing those passages that have to do with marriage, family, money, work, ethics, morals and righteous living. (Unless the Preacher confines himself to texts about Salvation, church polity, praying, personal evangelism, prophecy and the like. Many preachers do.) But if the preacher is really preaching what is in the Bible, cover to cover, he can not and dare not avoid what God has revealed about righteousness and justice. Do the spiritual only folks really believe God has revealed nothing relevant to social issues, economics and politics? Is there really no Word from God relevant to our world and culture and how we are to live in it? If there is such a Word, it is to be preached and the church is to scatter into the world to act accordingly. Neither the Gospel nor the Church transcends these issues. God forbid! Besides gathering for Worship and listening to the Word preached, the gathered local church celebrates the two Sacraments (or to observe the two Ordinances). What the Church is about is indicated by these Rituals. They are called Gospel Sacraments (or Ordinances). Baptism has to do with regeneration, saving faith and entrance into the Church- the beginning of life as a Believer. The Eucharist (Lord's Supper) has to do with strengthening saving faith and nourishing that new life in Christ. Are Regeneration and Life in Christ exclusively spiritual matters? Do they transcend social, economic and political matters? What is the Incarnation about? Was that exclusively spiritual? God the Son entered and lived in the real world. He was immanent- one of us. He had a physical body that sweat and bled. Is His Body, the Church, called to avoid that and not get dirt under its collective nails from laboring in the economical and political world? We are not docetists, renouncing the flesh as evil and seeking escape from it into some so-called spiritual, transcendent eyrie in which to nest and be safe high above the world. Could it be that God has not spoken about such matters? What kind of good news is the Gospel if it does not bring help and hope to this fallen world? A Gospel that transcends the world, a Cross that transcends the world, a Resurrection that transcends the world, a Savior that transcends the world, a Church that transcends the world- what are these? Surely not anything that is in the Bible! Or that we want!

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:46

Friday, March 7, 2008

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH MISSIONAL?

Certain traditional churches I know are being confused these days by their new young Pastors encouraging them to become "Missional". That is a major buzzword these days. The following CT article is fair and helpful in explaining what these Pastors may have in mind. I add my own comments in response. **What Makes a Church Missional?** Title and quotes [in bold letters] are from the CT Essay found here <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/march/16.56.html?start=1>

missional and missional church are barely 10 years old A 1998 book titled *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* was the first work to introduce the concept of a missional church. [the authors] sought to bring the World Council of Churches' discussions of *missio dei* ("the mission of God") and Lesslie Newbigin's missionary insights to bear on North America. the authors of *Missional Church* emphasized that everything the church ought to be and do is mission: "Missions" should not be one church program among many, but the church's core identity as witnesses sent by God into the world. *Missional Church* authors ... sought to diagnose the cultural captivity of today's church, ... they painted a theologically rooted vision of the church as a community called to participate in God's mission in and for the world. [advocates of a Missional Church often disparage the traditional Church, its "cultural captivity" and History and want to move around or beyond denominational and doctrinal differences, becoming united with each other in being missional] Since [1998, there have been] many conflicting definitions of missional church. In general, these definitions share a sense that the church is not primarily about us, but about God's mission. But consensus breaks down over what God's mission is and what it means to participate in it. *Missional Church* speaks about the mission of God as the kingdom of God—something larger than the church of which the church provides a foretaste. Yet this emphasis can become reductionistic. For example, Brian McLaren, one of several Emergent church leaders who self-identify as missional, focuses so much on the kingdom "message of Jesus" in the synoptic Gospels that he sidelines other scriptural themes. Hearing McLaren and others, the kingdom often sounds like nothing more than a set of ethical activities in which anyone—Christian, Muslim, or atheist—can participate. The centrality of Jesus Christ himself can be eclipsed by the ethical "message of Jesus." Whereas *Missional Church* [the book] sought to free Scripture from its cultural captivity, some kingdom theologies reduce the gospel to a fashionable cultural creed of ethics, inclusion, and social action. Among the commonly cited deficiencies of Christendom are the Reformational marks of the church. Allegedly, concern for true preaching of the Word and right administration of the sacraments leads to an unhealthy focus on the church's internal life. With the ministry of Word and sacrament de-centered for a vague notion of "mission," strange forms of experimentation can result [in being church, as well as in Worship] Some see the missional church as a refocusing on God's action in the world rather than obsessing over individuals' needs; others see it as an opportunity to "meet people where they are" and reinvent the church for postmodern culture. _____ My Comments: the authors of *Missional Church* emphasized that everything the church ought to be and do is mission: "Missions" should not be one church program among many, but the church's core identity as witnesses sent by God into the world. Notice that "missional" does not mean promoting traditional foreign missions. These are two different words, but traditional Christians first think their Pastor means the latter when he uses the former until they learn better later. *Missional Church* authors ... painted a theologically rooted vision of the church as a community called to participate in God's mission in and for the world. Here is a new definition of Church. Until only 10 years ago, churchgoers never heard of *missio dei* ("the mission of God") Most still have not. They know of Christ's "Great Commission" to the Church. That is about being Missionaries, preaching the Gospel and making disciples, as we go into the world. They consider this the Church's Mission, but have not thought much about God's mission. If they do, they would probably say God's mission was to send His Son into the world to be its Savior, just as He now sends us into the world to spread the good news about His Son and Salvation through Him. None of this is what being "missional" is about. No wonder there is a disconnect between long time church members and new time Pastors using this word and exhorting his congregation to become "missional", i.e.- the church as a community called to participate in God's mission in and for the world. Huh? the church is not primarily about us, but about God's mission. Most church people would question this. The Church does exist for us- to facilitate our Worship of God (which includes offering Sacraments) as well as to minister to our personal needs, especially in times of grief and tragedy as well as in times of joy, like the birth of babies or adoptions, conversions and weddings. The Church exists to teach our children about our Faith and the Bible and to offer a Christian youth program. The Church exists to provide small groups and discipleship training and to help us in our personal lives. The Church exists to help our elderly, sick and shut-ins. Yes, our Church also exists to preach the Gospel and offer a variety of outreach programs and ministries to the community. The Church exists to support world-wide Missions and Missionaries. The Church rightfully exists for all of these things and it always has. But none of this is what is meant by "missional"! Well, then, what is meant by "Missional"? consensus breaks down over what God's mission is and what it means to participate in it. *Missional Church* [the book] speaks about the mission of God as the

kingdom of God—Brian McLaren, one of several Emergent church leaders who self-identify as missional, focuses so much on the kingdom "message of Jesus" in the synoptic Gospels that he sidelines other scriptural themes. Hearing McLaren and others, the kingdom often sounds like nothing more than a set of ethical activities in which anyone—Christian, Muslim, or atheist—can participate. The centrality of Jesus Christ himself can be eclipsed by the ethical "message of Jesus." ...some... reduce [this to a] fashionable cultural creed of ethics, inclusion, and social action. Evangelical friends who are into being "missional" strongly insist they are, nevertheless, Evangelical and evangelistic. I think they are deceiving themselves. In their heads they are undoubtedly sincere about this, but in their hearts and actions they are moving in a different direction. Some see the missional church as a refocusing on God's action in the world ... others see it as an opportunity to "meet people where they are" and reinvent the church for postmodern culture. With the ministry of Word and sacrament de-centered for a vague notion of "mission," strange forms of experimentation can result [in being church, as well as in Worship]. Reinvent the Church? Reinvent the Gospel? Can anyone say, "Yellow Flag"? I feel badly for traditional churches who find themselves with "missional" Pastors. If I were on a Search Committee and the candidate self-identified as "Missional" (if he defines that anything like this article does) I would move on to another candidate. Ironically, there is some good in all this "missional" business. The Bible certainly does say God and His Word are alive and active and on a mission in the world. Other friends are so into doctrinal orthodoxy, they seem to have forgotten this. Missional Christians are to be commended for drawing the church's attention to this Biblical truth about God. Jesus did ascend to the Throne in heaven from which He is actively ruling in the affairs of the world. He is an actual reigning Sovereign and His Kingdom is real and present and it is more and bigger than the Church. In fact, extending and establishing the Kingdom on earth is God's mission and the Church is His primary agency to accomplish that mission. I heartily endorse this teaching. It is not a 10 year old heresy.

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:56

Saturday, February 2, 2008

ANGLICAN ESSENTIALS

Historic continuity with the Church of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury (and, through this continuity, to the Church in England, back to those who brought the Faith of the 1st Century Church to the British Isles) Liturgical and Eucharistic (Sacramental) Worship according to a Book of Common Prayer which is in direct line, and faithful to, The Book of Common Prayer (1662- 1928) A Trinitarian Faith that is both Catholic and Reformed This means the Anglican Faith is grounded in the Creeds and Practices of the early Church (1st-6th Centuries), as well as the Doctrine of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th-17th Centuries, represented by The 39 Articles of Religion (Those who sought to "purify" the Church in the 17th Century crafted and adopted The Westminster Confession. Many Anglicans (the Puritans) eventually left the Church of England over matters of Doctrine and practice, to become Congregationalists and Baptists and still others became Presbyterians.) Being Catholic and Reformed also means that the evangelical, pietist, revivalist, charismatic or fundamentalist Faith and practices of American Protestantism are not Anglican, although they have been found among Episcopalians. A Theological Method that involves what is known as Thomas Hooker's 3-Legged Stool: Scripture + Tradition + Reason The application of this method varies greatly. Simply put, the more Reformed members, like Hooker himself, emphasize Scripture above Tradition and Reason; the more Catholic members emphasize Tradition above Scripture and Reason; the more Liberal members emphasize Reason above both Tradition and Scripture (in that order). What is crucial, all 3 "legs" are involved in "doing theology" the Anglican way and the effort is made to keep them in tension with each other. A Spirituality that flows from all of the above, nurtured by a sense of continuity with the ancient Church and its practices, by its sense of communion with the Holy and Sacred in its worship (and in sacred spaces), by its grounding in classical and historical Theology, by its respect for ancient Tradition and by its reliance on both Scripture and the mind to plumb the depth of God's revelation of Himself and to seek His will in all things.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:03

TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A Church is a group of people who confess faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and regularly assemble to worship God and to hear the Gospel preached and the Scripture expounded. They are baptized and observe the Lord's Supper. This is a minimalist definition- the basic Essentials. In a far more complete definition, a Church would also have a 3-fold ordained Ministry in historic continuity with the ancient Church, its Doctrine would be Apostolic and Creedal, its Worship Liturgical and its Ordinances sacramental. By these standards, the current Leadership is endangering of The Episcopal Church (TEC) as a true Church. This is because that Leadership, in its many pronouncements and decisions, has departed from The Faith. Officially the Church still has all the essentials, but the Leaders are not faithful to the Apostolic Creeds and Reformation Doctrine. The evidence includes not only the actions of National Conventions and Councils of Bishops, but also of local Dioceses, specific Bishops, including the current Presiding Bishop, the writings and statements of many Theologians in the Church and local parish Priests. Ignoring the Church's Historical Documents, the current 1978 BCP and Catechism (and Proposed Alternate Services) documents the shift away from its roots. The issue of Homosexuality is in the spot light and gets the media and popular attention, but that is not the major problem, contrary to what most people in and out of the Church seem to believe. Some Conservatives recognize this mistake and have tried to shift the focus, but very unsuccessfully. The major problem is actually not the authority of Scripture per se (the first Essential). The major problem is hermeneutics- how that Scripture is approached, interpreted or applied. The latter is determined, we hear repeatedly, by the Church. The mantra is "Let us listen to what the Spirit is telling us." Repeatedly we are told, "We will determine both the meaning of the Scripture and what the Spirit is trying to tell us, in dialogue within the Church." But the Church, in turn, is captivated by the current post modern, theological, sociological and psychological fashions of our times. The prevailing view is that there are no theological or moral absolutes and meaning is all socially constructed. Together, in our multi-cultural, pluralistic Age, in which we want to be relevant, we will construct the truths that will be most helpful to us as a Church. How the Church hears what the Spirit speaks is determined most by these factors. In this context, the Spirit, as well as Scripture, is seriously misunderstood. I am concerned with this state of affairs which has led to an inevitable denial of the Trinitarian Faith and historic Catholic and Reformation (Biblical) Doctrines by many of our Church Bishops and the current Presiding Bishop (who are officially responsible for safe-guarding of that ancient Faith). With the prevalence, among the Clergy at all levels, of concepts associated with Process Theology and Open Theism and the resurgence of the Social Gospel, TEC has gone beyond the pale of Classic Anglicanism. It no longer continues in the Teaching of the

Apostles. The debates about gender specific language and sexuality derive from this deeper, more fundamental theological captivity to our Times. For the time being, TEC is still officially a Church in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the world wide Anglican Communion. What to do? First, I take comfort and hope that the Church, in and of England, belongs to Christ and that it has been around for almost 2000 years. He has preserved it through all kinds of turmoil and danger. We must keep this bigger and long perspective. Second, we must acknowledge the current reality of the Church as we know it today. Apart from another Reformation Movement, it is not about to change any time soon! Third, make a decision: A particular Diocese, Bishop, Priest, Parish or member may decide to remain in The Episcopal Church and try to be a remnant faithful to our Anglican Heritage, witnessing and working within this apostate organization. Or one may leave for some other Anglican Home and continue in the world-wide Church there. I thank God for the many local Priests and Parishes (and some Bishops and Dioceses) of the Church who are choosing to remain truly Anglican and faithful to its Heritage within TEC. I am thankful for the steadfast witness of The Episcopal School of Ministry (TESM). I have also been blessed by many Reformed or conservative Anglican Clergy and Theologians and Scholars (mostly British) over the years and some are personal friends. All of these factors attract and hold me in the Church. If we leave, where would we personally go? There are no Anglican Alternatives in this area where we live and I find many serious problems and almost none of the "desirables" in other Churches with which I am familiar. However, as important as being Anglican is to me, it is not essential to my Christian life. The preaching of the Trinitarian Faith and the teaching of historic Catholic and Reformation (Biblical) Doctrines are! Our Parish is now looking for a new Rector. Our current Rector is a Reformed Anglican and many of the members and local leaders are Evangelical. However, if his replacement is not orthodox, Reformed or at least Evangelical, I will no longer stay in this Parish and will be forced to seek another.

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:50

ANGLICAN HERITAGE AND TEC

Evangelicals are fond of saying they believe in the Church of Christ as an organism, which consists of true Believers everywhere. They typically downplay or minimize the institutional church. However, Christ founded an organized, institutional Church. There is an organized Church on earth today that is in historic succession to the Church of the 1st Century. For the first 5 centuries it was simply the "catholic" Church. Until the 12th century there were two branches, Eastern and Western, under the one name. The "Great Schism" in 1054 resulted in the Roman Catholic Church (i.e.- the Catholic Church, under the authority of the Bishop of Rome) and the Orthodox Church (i.e.- the Catholic Church under the authority of the Bishop of Constantinople). The Reformation of the 16th Century, an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church, led to the never ending proliferation of new "Protestant" churches, which exist apart from the Roman Catholic Church, with no one ecclesiastical authority over them (instead there has been the Bible, Confessions of Faith, Theologians and myriads of Preachers).

In the mid-16th Century, the Roman Catholic Church in England was reformed enough under the influence of Protestants (and other factors) to become the Church of England or Anglican (English) Church, under the shared authority of the King and the Archbishop of Canterbury. No other segment of the Roman Catholic Church became Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anabaptist or any of the many other Protestant Denominations. The Orthodox Church continues to this day, but has ethnic characteristics and national loyalties and is identified with them (especially Russian and Greek). As convoluted, confusing and messy as it is, the Church in England traces its history back to the first century. Legend suggests that Joseph of Arimathea and Aristobulus (Romans 16:10) brought the Faith to England. The first historical record of a Christian martyr in England is Albans, who was killed for his faith in (perhaps) 209. Historical documents list three Anglican bishops as being in attendance at the Council of Nicea in 325. By mid 6th Century the Faith was firmly established with monasteries, clergy and church buildings throughout the Land (although it was not yet united as one Institution). The Church of England, not without much controversy, was Catholic and Reformed (Protestant) in Theology and in the 18th Century, many of its members became Evangelicals, committed to world wide missions. Thus it spread through out the world and lost its identity (not its connection) with England and became a global communion of churches, all of whom have continued the Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical heritage (in varying degrees). Most Anglicans today are not English and live in the Global South. The most practical bond uniting them all has been their Book of Common Prayer and its Liturgy. Because of the Catholic connection, Anglicans are not properly described as Protestants. They are Reformed Catholics, many of whom are also Evangelical. They are historically and traditionally, orthodox and conservative in their Theology, but are in no way Fundamentalists, Charismatics or Revivalists. (The latter, who occasionally appear within parishes, are atypical and not truly "Anglican". In spite of that, Pentecostalism seems to be growing influence among Anglicans in the Southern Hemisphere.) Anglicans, especially in the West, are usually Sacramental, Liturgical and have a high view of the institutional Church. In the 20th Century, in the United States, the Leadership of the historically Anglican Church (i.e.-The Episcopal Church-TEC)) have drifted away from its orthodox, Reformed and Evangelical Heritage and TEC has been morphing into a different Church, although still

officially part of the Anglican Communion. There remain some American Bishops, Priests and Parishes that are Reformed (or at least orthodox and conservative) and at least one Seminary (out of 12) which is true to the Heritage. Most evangelical Episcopalians who remain in the Church seem concerned most (only?) about their local parish, which they prefer to see as their "Church" rather than a Parish of the Episcopal Church. My take on today's situation is that the members most agitated about the National Church and its future are the Conservative and the Reformed, not the evangelicals. I see the latter group as functional Protestants in their ecclesiology (without even realizing that) and their means of grace are found primarily in evangelical para church organizations like Promise Keepers or from conversions and discipline in para church meetings like Franklin Graham Crusades and especially from evangelical small group studies, books and music- not from the Church, her Preaching or Sacraments. I, personally, am very concerned about the Heritage. When I kneeled before a Bishop and was confirmed 26 years ago, I was committing myself to the Historic Catholic and Reformed Church, dating back through the Centuries to its founding by Christ, not to a particular Parish (or to TEC). At that Ceremony, I became an Anglican! My synopsis here is overly simplistic, I know; but, it gives, in very broad brush strokes, a picture of the Church as I see it. I served as a Protestant Pastor, for several years, after my Confirmation, inasmuch as my attempt to become a Priest in the Episcopal Church was rejected and I am still called by God to minister His Word wherever I may. I do not believe that the Anglican Communion is the only expression of a true Church. Its Heritage is the historic expression of Christ's Church, in my mind, but not essential to its very existence. I prefer it, but do not reject Protestant expressions because they are not Anglican. Now that I am retired, and no longer a Pastor, I am back to trying to find my place within the Tradition as a layman, still called to minister the Word.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:51

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

ON NOT BEING A NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIAN

We are members of a local church which began in 1925. It is part of Denomination that goes back to Colonial days in America and that denomination, in turn, traces its history to the Church of England in the 16th Century, which had been a part of the Roman Catholic Church, which itself reaches back to the Christian Church in England in the 6th Century, which itself has a history connecting it to the Apostles. Our local church is named after a Saint who lived in Wales during most of the 6th Century. He was a Celtic Christian and monk who, in the 12 Century, was named the Patron Saint of Wales: St. David. In other word's, the church we attend now, St David's Episcopal Church of Agawam, Massachusetts has a very, very long and important Heritage. It is known as the Anglican Heritage.

I value that Heritage and am glad to be part of it and want to see it continue. I am not interested in getting involved with organizations that emphasize they are non-denominational and seek to be Christians only. Not only am I not non-denominational, I am an Anglican Christian. That means I am not only a Christian, I am a Catholic and Reformed Christian. There are many groups seeking to be non-denominational. I want to promote and strengthen the Denomination and Heritage to which I belong. I encourage you to promote and strengthen the Denomination and Heritage to which you belong. If St David's is to continue as a church, it must be evangelical, vigorously preaching the Gospel, intentionally seeking to win men, women and children to Christ and a center for Biblical Learning and passionate about Christian living and Ministry in the community and world. If St David's wants to continue as St David's Episcopal Church, it must also be staunchly Catholic and Reformed in it Worship and Doctrine and unapologetically Anglican in all that it does.

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:46

OUR "CALLING" AND "UNITY"

Many sermons are preached about discovering our "Calling" and even more are preached about preserving our "Unity in Christ". People like these Sermons. They sound good. They can mean whatever the listener wants them to mean. And since they are usually preached with a sub text, with a background or context familiar to the audience, it is assumed folks know what the speaker means. It is imperative that these words be defined. Here is a simple outline for future sermons on these topics:"Calling" (has four successive levels or stages)1. To God2. To Jesus as the Christ3. To Discipleship4. To Ministry"Unity in Christ" (must be discussed in relationship to 6 different subjects) There must be unity-1. In Authority2. In Doctrine3. In Worship4. In Obedience/Living5. In the organized Church 6. In Service (specific ministries) "Division" is both good and bad, depending on which of these areas is involved: Division is "bad" in areas 1-5; it is "good" in area 6

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:41

Monday, January 14, 2008

CHURCH AS A WEB 2.0 COMMUNITY?

Here is a Blog by a man who has developed software for churches to develop community on the internet. It is called Connect our People. That is a significant name and the developer's passion and purpose. Teens and young adults are into a Web 2.0 world now and they will become 30 some things soon. My son, Kevin, has tried to get me interested. I have read the articles here and the related links.<http://www.connectourpeople.com/blog>It is all very interesting, but to me community is still best face to face (my face and your face, talking in some coffee space). I enjoy and use emailing everyday and I Blog almost daily, but the internet social networking world is foreign to me (and to most everyone my age) But is it the future for churches? I'm sure it is not meant to replace (nor can it replace) breaking bread together, either at a church supper or at the Lord's Supper; but is it a necessary means to help develop the life of a congregation? We need to be open to the possibilities (but, if I have a blue tooth, I am going to the dentist)

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:27

Wednesday, January 9, 2008

ENOUGH ALREADY! I PROTEST! BACK TO BASICS -Part 1

Enough already! Whereas I am constantly hearing the Gospel is about Love and Love means caring for the poor and homeless; whereas I am constantly reading that the Gospel is about Jesus and Jesus is about serving street people and addicts and single women with their children; whereas I am frequently told that Ministry is about living and working in the inner city and with the urban underclass; whereas I see that Missions is going on a trip to help flood victims or painting a school building in an impoverished country; and whereas more and more Christians declare true Christian outreach is working in a food bank or tutoring or helping in a youth recreation program I must say, enough already! Do not misunderstand. All these are good and worthwhile activities or concerns. I am not putting them, or the people who do them, down. I admire such people and respect what they are trying to do. I am saying these activities are not what the Gospel, Jesus, Ministry, Missions or Christian outreach is about. I am very concerned that all of these well-meaning activities and concerns are increasingly replacing what the Gospel, Jesus, Ministry, Missions or Christian outreach truly are about. Churches and parachurch organizations everywhere are jumping on the social action bandwagon. This is not good. Enough already! After much deliberation, I now must protest.

So-called holistic ministry has a growing hole in the middle of it: what is missing is good, old fashioned evangelism. Why? Here are common reasons: It is much easier to give someone a sandwich than to do evangelism, which requires considerable training and courage. We see immediate results and we feel good or gratified when we give someone a sandwich. We usually are rebuffed, or fear we will be, when we evangelize. There is currently tremendous cultural or personal pressure to do social action and none to do personal evangelism. We [many Christians] are made to feel badly, or even bad, by social activists, when we do not do social action, but no one [in most churches] is making us feel badly if we fail to evangelize. I suspect that many Christians no longer believe that all people are lost sinners in need of personal salvation (or that that is through Christ alone) or that regeneration is required for all. Even if we profess we still believe all that, in practice, we are convinced people's material and social needs are far more urgent and important.

Truth is, in spite of our affirmations, I have become convinced many of us do not believe in personal evangelism or the evangelistic message. [When was the last time you intentionally attempted to lead someone to make a decision for Christ? Have you ever done that? Most Christians have not, even though evangelism is the heart of being evangelical.] What is different now, compared to even 20 years ago, and the major reason we do not evangelize today, is that many of us have discarded all the original definitions of the Gospel, Jesus, Ministry, Missions and Christian outreach and have adopted the current, popular meanings of these terms. Perhaps many of us naively do not realize this has been done and that these new meanings contradict the old ones. Having become convinced that we are selling our evangelistic heritage for, literally, a food handout (see the story of Esau -Genesis 25:29-34), I have decided, enough already- I must protest!

I came to saving faith at 17, through reading my Bible (specifically, John 15:5c) and immediately became a "soul winner". I had read that Dwight L. Moody never went to bed unless he had shared the Gospel with someone that day. That became my rule, too. I witnessed on the school bus, in classes and in the hall ways. When I went to college, I continued to witness and to seek to lead others to Christ. I shared the Gospel with people everywhere, especially with fellow students. I preached evangelistic messages in meetings on campus, on the streets and in parks, at rescue Missions, in jails, at Youth Rallies and in churches and at summer camps. One summer, I worked in the inner city with Pocket Testament League (PTL) and with Child Evangelism Fellowship in housing projects. I witnessed to other men on my summer construction job. After college I became a Social Worker for the Department of Child Welfare in a major City. I had a caseload of 91 boys who were, or became, wards of the State. All of them had many personal problems. My days were spent with them (usually about a dozen at a time were in crisis) in the (mostly Black) ghetto, where they lived and hung out, in Juvenile Court and visiting them in Reform Schools. I could see that they needed Christ and so I shared the Gospel with many of them. I was called on the carpet several times for doing that, as I was a State employee. Refer them to the churches and clergy, I was told. Fact was, most churches and Pastors had no time or interest for these kids. They had professional counselors and psychologists and educators. They had foster homes and medical care. They needed Christ. They needed regeneration, forgiveness, hope, the indwelling Holy Spirit and Eternal Life. They had none of these. Jesus himself was tempted to adopt a ministry of social welfare ("Turn the stones into bread", the Devil said to him.) He rejected that option and went on the road to the Cross, that sinners, like my boys, might be saved. That was a big lesson for me to learn. Through the years, I have often felt the need to do the stones into bread thing, but, like now, I keep coming back to the basics. Whether they are poor or rich, all folks are sinners in need of salvation. As Jesus himself said, what good is it if a man has ever advantage the world offers, but loses his soul. Working to save souls is still our first and primary mission, always! That is what evangelicals have always been about and we must not forget it. I left Social Work and became an inner city Pastor. My ordination certificate says I was ordained to Gospel Ministry. That is our calling: not social activism, Gospel Ministry. Now here is the rub. Somehow in recent years, Gospel Ministry has been changed into Social Action. That is Gospel Ministry, I am told now. No, it is not! In 1961, when I was ordained, "Gospel Ministry" meant one thing: preaching the

Gospel. The Gospel was found primarily in the Book of Romans: all have sinned; the wages of sin is death; God manifested His love for sinners by sending His Son to die an atoning death for them (Paul said: "for me."); Justification (the forgiveness of sins and a right standing in God's sight) was possible for all sinners who repent and have faith in the atoning death of Jesus ("The Blood"). Salvation was about hell-bound sinners being made right with a holy God. The Good News was that this was possible! Repentant, believing sinners are now "in Christ", adopted as sons of God and redeemed; they have been saved by grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone and they are eternally secure in that salvation. This was the Gospel, in a nut shell, when I became a Christian. It still is. I have preached it in churches and revival meetings in all 5 of the New England States, Indiana, Illinois and in Jamaica, going back over more than 45 years. Through the years, by God's grace, many have responded and come to Christ. There is nothing in the Gospel about Social Action, not a word about caring for the poor and homeless or the marginalized. These activities are not what Gospel Ministry is about, unless the meaning of "Gospel" is radically changed. The latter is exactly what is happening everywhere today. I am sticking with Paul (although I know even Paul and Romans are now being revamped, too. "Revamped" means renovated, revised, reconstructed and made over- in keeping with contemporary, "post modern" tastes) Behind this rejection of the classic Gospel and the revamping of Paul is the rejection of several classic doctrines, especially the ones that teach all people are sinners and lost, facing Hell. The very words sin and sinners are rejected by many "evangelicals" today. Instead, agreeing with secularists, they say we have people who are victims of their circumstances. We have people who are deprived of advantages and do what they must to survive, even if that includes socially unacceptable or dangerous or even self-destructive behavior. We do not have sin or sinners. The word Sin implies or requires God. Sinners are those who, by definition, are guilty of trespassing His Laws. Such notions are very outmoded and passé. Certainly the concept of a God who is offended by "sin" and who requires satisfaction for trespassing His commands is totally unacceptable today. The concept that God has wrath and executes judgment is not Christian. Certainly Jesus never taught such a concept. And Hell? How medieval can we get? Surely a God of Love does not condone such an idea. Actually, an increasingly popular view among "evangelicals" is that all people are already redeemed or saved. God supposedly has a "covenant" with Humanity. People simply do not know it. They need to hear this good news. No one is alienated from God or spiritually dead. How negative, how depressing that teaching is if it were true. Another popular version is that all people are on a spiritual journey to God. We just need to help them along. Ultimately, no one will be eternally separated from the God of Love. I hear and read of these concepts in many places. They are absolutely not Scriptural, but they do explain why the classic Gospel itself is rejected and a "new and improved" one has become popular. I have come to see that we old time evangelists were wrong on several counts. That reality has contributed to today's confusion and further errors. When we warned about sin, we often did not use Scriptural definitions for it. We called people to repentance for behavior that our (Victorian) church culture said was sinful at the time, such as dancing, going to movies, swearing, smoking, gambling, playing cards and dressing or behaving in ways that were considered immoral or accepting welfare (that was for lazy people who would not work). Sometimes we preached against racial intermarriage or the Communists or Union organizers. Ironically, this same mistake is repeated today by critics of it. Instead of the "sins" of yesteryear, they substitute the "sins" of today's culture. They commit the same error of not using Scriptural definitions for sin. God has never voided the original Ten Commandments. He has never repealed the universal Norms of the Torah. Elaborating on them would require another essay (or book). My point here is that, using true Biblical definitions derived from the Law of God (not from Society), evangelism must continue to preach the need for repentance. Another crucial error made by evangelists in the past is failure to clarify what comes after Justification: Sanctification. The justified sinners shall be sanctified, becoming holy in Christ- a life-long process that will eventually end in Glory with Christ. This process is possible and secure because the justified have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, upon their union with Christ. This means the Spirit, from the moment of justification, indwells them, gifting and enabling them to mature as Believers and to live righteous lives for the Lord. We evangelists (and Pastors and Sunday School Teachers and Youth Workers) often failed to teach what the Scripture says about the Holy Spirit, His person and work, in the Believer's life. This meant many Believers led defeated and spiritually powerless lives. It meant they did not discover and use gifts for ministries God intended them to enter. It also meant that many such Believers were open to Charismatic Teachers who promised "something more" and led the "hungry" into unscriptural error and excesses. We evangelists also failed to teach new Believers what the Scripture means by "righteousness". Instead, many of us simple substituted for that righteousness, the values and cultural morals of white, middle class America, where most of us lived. (We continued the error we made of defining sin by cultural standards). This meant we did not confront many of the evils, the unrighteousness, of our white, middle class American culture and society in general. We actually perpetuated those evils, such as racism and discrimination, materialism and greed, corporate corruption, white collar crime, hypocritical sexual behavior and the abuse of women and children- and the causes of poverty. I believe much of the repudiation of the old time Gospel comes from this neglect or false or incomplete teaching about Scriptural righteousness. Many evangelists and churches failed to teach the Justified about Sanctification, about how to actually live and behave according to God's standards and Norms, i.e. - Biblical Holiness. We tended to just jump over that step completely and go on to emphasize Glory. I personally am trying to rectify this situation and teach what God requires of His Covenant people. Being righteous includes being pro-God, pro-creation, pro-life, pro-marriage, pro-family, pro-work, pro-charity and pro-justice. Many Christians and churches today want to jump over both the first and last step (Justification and Glorification) and put all their attention on the middle one: Sanctification (although they rarely use that term- preferring to call it "discipleship") I see two major problems with doing

this. First there can be no authentic holiness (or discipleship) without Justification. The latter is absolutely essential and it must come first. Authentic Christian living comes out of regeneration and saving faith. Otherwise, what passes as discipleship is phony. And regeneration and saving faith come out of hearing (believing) the classic, Pauline, Book of Romans Gospel. They do not come out of anything else. We must accept no substitutes and I despair because many of my self-confessed evangelical friends are doing just that. The second problem is this- as stated above, Biblical Holiness is life lived according to God's Norms. These are found primarily in the Torah, as applied by the Prophets and interpreted by Jesus and His Apostles. We must not substitute all kinds of current politically correct "values" for those Norms. It really pains me to hear "Christians" champion "diversity (of lifestyles, particularly homosexual lifestyles)" and "multiculturalism" and "(moral, ethical, religious) pluralism" and claim these are the Norms that Christians should live by. Absolutely not true. Likewise, it is not true that social action, as defined by left leaning liberals or so-called Progressives, which comes out as various plans for the end of private property, for the redistribution of wealth (by government) and the growth of the Welfare State is what the Kingdom of God is all about. Actually, the latter social action is usually sanctioned by insisting that it is what Jesus wants or what the Gospel is all about. The implication is that we are not true Christians if we do not endorse and promote this agenda. Absolutely not true! We used to hear the cry: Back to the Bible. Good. But the Bible is interpreted differently than it was in the days when that slogan was popular. It doesn't mean much today. My cry is "Back to the Gospel as defined by the 16th Century Reformers!" and this corollary: "Back to classic evangelism, but with the definition of sin corrected in light of the Word and with the addition of solid Scriptural teaching about Sanctification."

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:58

Monday, January 7, 2008

BACK TO BASICS- Part 2

The mother of all "seeker friendly" churches discovers and admits it has been wrong. Willow Creek church attracts great numbers with its methods, but has failed to produce mature Christians by them. They are going back to 3 basics: teaching Believers how to do personal Bible study, pray and participate in small groups. These, they have discovered (!) are the essentials. Programs produce people who like programs. Involvement in Programs leads to- involvement in more Programs, but not growth in grace.
http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html
http://www.townhall.com/columnists/BobBurney/2007/10/30/a_shocking_%E2%80%9Cconfession%E2%80%9D_from_willow_creek_community_church?page=full&comments=true

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:10

Saturday, January 5, 2008

ENJOYING EPIPHANY

What a special time of year this has been for the Church! We observed the 4 Sunday's of Advent. We celebrated the 12 Days of Christmas, beginning with December 25. Now we enjoy Epiphany, when God in Christ is "revealed" to the Nations in the form of the 3 "Wise men". The Anglican Tradition is rich with wonderful Services of Worship (Liturgies and Rituals) and we enjoyed some of the best we have ever experienced, while in Florida with our son Loren and his family. The choral music by robed choirs (including hand bells) was excellent! The preaching was solid and inspiring. The church buildings were magnificent, filled with beauty. Many participated in the Services and did their parts well and the pews were packed. Episcopal Churches (parishes) in Central Florida are refreshingly evangelical and conservative. Their Bishop is an old college friend of ours from IVCF days. We hope this had been a blessed Season for you, as well. Now, bring on the New Year. To God be the glory!

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:08

Saturday, December 8, 2007

THANK GOD FOR MARY

We thank the Lord for folks He used to bring the Gospel and, by extension, Christ into our lives. For example the shoe salesman who witnessed to the young man who became the Evangelist, Dwight Moody. Yesterday, the Church commemorated Ambrose, who was instrumental in bringing Christ into the life of one of the most important and influential Christian theologians in the history of the Church, Augustine. Today the Church calendar commemorates Mary, the mother of Jesus. Protestants should share in the commemoration: God chose the young woman to bring His Son (Himself) into the life of the world and, by extension, into our lives. That makes Mary extremely unique and special in the history of the world. And special about her was her humble willingness to be used of God this way, her obedient servant hood and her faith that altogether made the Incarnation possible. We rightly should be thankful for Mary and honor her.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:19

Friday, December 7, 2007

NOSTALGIC IRRELEVANCE?

“In today’s world, the voice of youth is growing and can not be ignored.” “Youth are ...the primary means of impacting global culture [including] world evangelization.” The day of dominance and sole leadership by “middle-class, middle-aged, Caucasian North American males” in the world-wide missions movement are over. “Today’s average world Christian [believer in Christ committed to fulfilling the Great Commission is] a subsisting [poor] 18 year old African female from an independent charismatic denomination.” The “church must seek to intentionally make room for these arising voices... If unsuccessful, the church may be doomed to a fate of nostalgic irrelevance...” Taken from an article in the current issue of a newsletter from Gordon-Conwell Seminary

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:50

Saturday, December 1, 2007

CHURCH VERSION OF GLOBAL WARMING WARNING

Christianity Today International recently partnered with Zondervan Publishers in order to commission a study on the attitudes and behavior of professing Christians in the United States. Results? Between 70-80% of people living in the USA identify themselves as "Christian". According to this poll, there are five categories: Active, Professing, Liturgical, Private and Cultural Christians. Conservative and Liberal are not included as descriptors. I don't care for the labels.

Active Christians (19%)*Believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ*Committed churchgoers*Bible readers*Accept leadership positions*Invest in personal faith development through the local church*Feel obligated to share their faith (and 79% do so)Professing Christians (20%)*Believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ*Focus on personal relationship with God and Jesus*Similar beliefs to Active Christians, but with different actions:*Less involved in church in regard to both attending and serving*Less commitment to Bible reading and sharing faithLiturgical Christians (16%)[note: I know many "Active" and "Professing" Christians who are also "liturgical". This term must not be used to mean that people who prefer Liturgy, such as my self, are neither active not professing Believers. That is grossly inaccurate and unfair]*Regular churchgoers*High level of spiritual activity, mostly expressed by serving in church and/or community*Recognize authority of the churchPrivate Christians (24%)*Largest and youngest segment*Believe in God and doing good things*Own a Bible, but don't read it*Spiritual interest, but not within a church context*Only about one-third attend church at all*Almost none are church leadersCultural Christians (21%) [meaning only nominal]*Little outward religious behavior or attitudes*God aware, but little personal involvement with God*Do not view Jesus as essential to salvation*Affirm many ways to God*Favor universality theologyThese statistics reveal that 45% of those who identify themselves as "Christian" know and care nothing about the content of that name or they do, but are not involved in any local, i.e.- traditional church. Other survey indicate within 20 years only about 1/3 of all Americans will attend traditional churches (churches as we commonly know them today). Apparently, the future is in the hands of those faith communities that learn to "do church" differently [so-called emergent and missional or "incarnational" churches which are heavily invested in community development and social ministries. (This trend is seen among young Calvinists, too)We read and hear this warning over and over these days. It is the church equivalent of global warming!Sources"5 Kinds of Christians," reported by Helen Lee, Leadership Journal, Fall 2007, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/004/1.19.html>).

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:03

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

LOCAL CHURCH CLOSES DOORS AFTER 370 YEARS

In the very center of Springfield is a park. At one end of it is a large, magnificent church building. It is 188 years old. The congregation is 370 years old- this is its 4th Meeting House. On January 1st the doors will be boarded up and the church dissolved. The number of members has dwindled to less than 100 and they no longer can maintain this historic building. When it was dedicated in 1819, there were 3000 people present.

First Church of Christ, Congregational was the 14th church to be founded in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was the first church established in this area, having been started by William Pynchon and the first settlers who came here from Roxbury [near Boston] in 1636. [Pynchon had also founded that City] Formal worship began in 1637. Rev. George Moxon was the first Pastor. He and the settlers (every citizen in town) were Calvinists-Puritans. Through its almost 4 centuries, the Church became increasingly liberal. It played an important part in the history of Springfield and many famous people have spoken there, but it is known and will be remembered for its advocacy of the social Gospel and its activism for various social causes. As a member of the United Church of Christ Denomination, it was proud to be "open and affirming". It had long ago given up its Calvinist Heritage. What has happened to Old First Church is an object lesson for all churches. The Church in which I was ordained, a fundamental Baptist church, dissolved after maybe 70 years. Local churches [and even Denominations] are like people- they require a lot of nurture and care for healthy growth, but all die eventually. Some churches long out live their usefulness, while others barely get started. The last Church I helped plant lasted about 7 years. But in all cases, the true Church of Christ lives on forever and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. It just keeps showing up in new places.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:29

Tuesday, November 27, 2007

WARNING FROM GOD TO PASTORS

Jer 23:1 KJV Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. 2 Therefore thus saith the LORD God against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock ... and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:04

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE AND CHURCH RENEWAL

Protestants in the Calvinist or Reformed Tradition try to follow the Regulative Principle. It is based on the conviction that God knows how He wants us to worship Him and that He has told us how in Scripture. That makes sense. How we worship is not a matter of personal preference or custom. In practice, the Regulative Principle means that our corporate worship as a church should be governed by what God has commanded by word or example. Anything not so commanded is not to be permitted. God rejects it as "false" or "foreign" worship. Reformed Christians do not agree on specifics, e.g.- the use of instruments and hymnals (versus a cappella singing and use of the Psalter only) And there is the debate about exercising the charismata in church services- forbidden or not? This has also been the basis of debate over observance of Holy Days such as "Christmas"

The opposite view is called the Normative Principle: anything agreeable to a congregation or church is permitted in corporate worship unless it has been specifically forbidden by God in Scripture or is contrary to Scriptural teaching. I have usually gone along with this concept. What has been agreeable to the churches I have served has been your basic, traditional Baptist type Service which is the same as a Service in Reformed churches. However, as churches have started experimenting with new ways of Worship and as I have had to study this subject more closely, I have come around to the Regulative Principle (trying not to take it to an extreme as some seem prone to do in Reformed circles) If we allow personal preference to prevail in determining what goes into our Worship Services, it is conceivable that churches might omit what God expects (as well as have elements that He rejects). Churches, more than ever in this day of change and confusion, need a guideline- direction from God Himself- to help them to evaluate and plan their Services. The Regulative Principle is it (see below). Scripture applying the Regulative Principle to corporate worship is primarily concerned with idolatry and the adoption of pagan customs by the People of God (which today would include the use of Christmas Trees in church). Historically, the primary concern of those who wrote on this subject was with the use by Protestants of Roman Catholic practices (usually connected with the Mass [which itself was rejected as unscriptural] e.g.- genuflecting and kneeling before an Altar or use of statues and prayers to them or for the departed in Purgatory and the use of candles and a cross on the Table and special "priestly" garb on the Clergy.) Today, this topic of the Regulative Principle (R.P.) seems to come up most often in debates about types of music and instruments used in worship (by those who have no problem with using instruments in the first place) and then, with the related topic of music as "amusement". Using the R.P. primarily for debate about Contemporary Music is unfortunate, because it (mis)directs use of the Principle away from the major Biblical and Historical concerns that still need to be addressed (i.e.- elements of Idolatry and Romanism in our Worship) There are also those who would apply the R.P. to all of life, not only to corporate worship. That application is worthy of serious exploration and debate. This topic comes up in this Blog again, because, as we visit churches, talk to folks about the churches they attend and read relevant articles, the need for serious change in "how" traditional churches "do church" is very evident in many places because they are failing and not accomplishing their Mission. Also very evident is the confusion, resistance, and pain involved with such change- particularly with conservative folks like myself. But, if they do not do something different they will dwindle and close. We are talking of evangelical churches here. But, it is important to realize that the basic dynamics of church growth, however, seem to be the same regardless of Theology or Denomination (as much as we like to believe if we just preach the Word, God will bless and "they will come." Doesn't happen.) Assuming it is the goal desired, it is also important to realize the most effective way of achieving real evangelism (actually reaching the lost) is through church planting. An old church using new methods (e.g.- changing the type of music offered), can bring in some new people, but that is not the same. A new building for an old church will attract new people (at least for a while). That, too, is not evangelism. Church planting is increasing around the country. Even the method for that has changed, however. In my day of planting churches the concern was finding an area (a town or section of a city or a region) in which there was no Gospel-preaching church. Geography was paramount. You tried to reach every one possible in that area, casting your net wide, broadcasting seed generously. If there were already "sound" churches present, we would look for fields white unto harvest some place else. Today, the effort is geared more to reaching "affinity groups"- groups of people who connect and bond with each other because they share some interest or characteristic in common, e.g.- an ethnic or language group, skateboarders or surfers, sports, types of music or art, film or theater, computer technologies, international grad students or college students, immigrants or expats, the environment, etc. Outreach is geared to such groups, using their interests, language and styles of communication. The new church may be rather small and stay that way on purpose because they are into reproducing themselves when they reach a certain size) or in some areas, the new work may grow large. Size in itself is not important, because these new churches are not building or program oriented. They are people oriented, emphasizing personal relationships and community. These new churches will be informal and casual and offer a lot of personal space for mutual participation and co-operation. They will be egalitarian,

rather than hierarchical, with a minimum of rules and top down authority. (However, and ironically, many place official leadership in the hands of a few and are not congregational or democratic in their corporate decision making.) The old traditional churches (and old, traditional Believers like me) must make intentional effort to adopt these characteristics, having decided who it is they are trying to reach. Remember, most younger people, and many young adults as well, have not grown up in traditional churches or families. The traditional ways about anything simply do not appeal to them. Here is where the Regulative Principle comes in. New ways to "do Church", yes; but when it comes to Worship, that must be only those ways that God has commanded in the Word. His Word must regulate all changes. Many will say I have just contradicted myself- our old ways are what God has commanded. Well, are they? They are traditional and we are comfortable with them; but they may not be what God has actually commanded, only what we have always assumed He has commanded. I am convinced this is the case. We need to examine anew, in the light of the Word, all we now do as Church, particularly how we worship and see what we see. We will especially be on the watch for signs of idolatry or Roman error in our Services or places of worship. The Principle: Worship Services are to contain what God has commanded by word and example [to separate these is to open the door to many errors] Period. Preaching the Gospel (defined, at least, as the "Gospel" as understood by Evangelicals everywhere. [To me, it should be the Gospel as understood by Calvinists, with its 5 Solas in the context of Reformed Theology (T.U.L.I.P., et al)] Preaching the Gospel is not the same as preaching through the Bible (exposition of passages) or teaching on Topics like Marriage and Family. The Gospel and the Ritual that goes with it, are specifically about Salvation [God's acts of Redemption]. Getting back to that emphasis would be a big change, even for many evangelical churches. The Lord's Supper (the Eucharist, Holy Communion) is definitely commanded: "Do this" and the example in Acts (as well as in the Church from the beginning) is to do it every Lord's Day. This Ceremony goes with the Gospel. It is not to be separated from the Gospel [I see it as a Gospel Sacrament, an effective sign of the Sacrifice of Christ which communicates the effects of that sacrifice to Christians who receive it by faith.] Understanding the connection of the Meal with the Gospel and Salvation, as well as having Communion every week, would be a major change for most Protestant churches. Prayers, Singing, Teaching, Exhortation to Christian living and faithfulness are also commanded. (Interestingly, taking an offering during a Service is not.) All these are meant to be congregational, offered or shared by any believer present (not limited to Clergy or a special Team), as long as done in an orderly manner. This is the area that would require the biggest change in a traditional Church Service. And it is in this area where all the People of God are encouraged and free to be the Church. This is the "Priesthood of Believers" [a very important Protestant Doctrine] in practice. That is it. That is plenty. [I can provide many Bible verses] However else the Church does Church during the rest of the week, building community and relationships and ministering to affinity groups and demonstrating the love of God in the world, its Worship is to contain these components- no more and no less. Work through the implications of all I have just written. This would be truly revolutionary for many congregations! The Regulative Principle [as a principle, not a law] does not dictate specific details of how this Worship is to be conducted, although that is where discussions of this topic bog down. That is a shame. Matters of style in anything are optional. I definitely have my preferences, tending toward the formal and liturgical, but what matters is that these God-commanded elements of a Worship Service be front and center. That is what is major, let's not get side tracked by what is minor in comparison. "We will especially be on the watch for signs of idolatry or Roman error in our Services or places of worship." Did we find any such signs above? The most likely signs of Romanism would be in Worship Services that are Liturgical. But they would not be the obvious ones: an altar and a person robed as a priest. We all have Communion Tables and many of us either have a Pastor with a robe or, at least, choir members dressed in robes. Those are incidentals and matters of custom of preference. It is what the robed people do and what the Table is used for that should be examined for signs of false doctrine. The latter should not be assumed because of appearances. The same with the use of a Prayer Book and printed prayers and responses. We all follow some order, be it elaborate or very simple, printed or memorized. We all read and pray the Psalms or Scripture texts (which is what the "Lord's Prayer" is, after all). We must be careful with guilt by association. Mormons sing and pray. Does that make all singing and praying Mormon? Again, we need to know the actual meaning and purpose of what is said or done before we judge. I have been worshipping as an Anglican (Episcopalian) for some 26 years (with time out for a few years). I am well grounded in Bible and Reformation Doctrine and find absolutely nothing in Anglican Worship itself to be "wrong"; on the contrary, I find it to be better and more Scriptural in many ways, than a typical Protestant Service. It still needs serious improvement, as explained above. As to idolatry, Catholic-type worship is said to look idolatrous, what with statues (including a large crucifix) and all that kneeling. Well, Protestant Services are full of visual images these days (and many Protestants still value their stained glass windows with many images in them) and is kneeling really worse than standing and clapping or arm waving? The kneeling during Communion might be questioned. Historically, Protestants have criticized that practice as idolatrous because they associated the kneeling with a doctrine that says the Body of Christ is literally present in the elements and the kneeling (as well as genuflecting and bowing) is done in deference to that Presence. When the Queen of England has an audience, people bow before her, as they do before many other dignitaries around the world. When you greet someone from Japan, bowing rather than a handshake is customary. In these latter cases, no worship is implied- no idolatry, just respect. The Anglican worshipper does not have to believe that God is on the Altar as the reason for bowing or kneeling before it. He may simply be trying to express respect and adopting a posture that conveys humbleness and submission to the Lord. The main Greek word translated as "worship" is the word that means "prostration"- the proper attitude before Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer and King. That brings us to idolatry in a Protestant Service. Front and center these days in most places is a

Praise Team and an energetic "Worship Leader". Often the congregation will stand and clap before this Leader and the Team. Could that be interpreted as idolatrous? More often, front and center is the Preacher. He is the focus of attention through much of the Service- at least half of it in most places, even more so if he or she is well known, a Christian celebrity. The attention some Preachers receive might lead some to wonder if idolatry is going on here. If the attention is not on the Preacher himself, he often will focus the attention on the people present, as though the Service was all about them and their needs and concerns. That is also the focus of many of the people sitting in the pews- on themselves. Could that be considered idolatrous when the focus by all should be on God and His attributes and work? Some humble prostration might be a good thing for Protestants. The Regulative Principle gives us direction as to what actions should be in our Worship Service. The matters of idolatry and false beliefs are more difficult. They require going into the minds and motives (and lives) of the worshippers and that can be very different than the motions they are going through during the Service and much more important.

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:36

Friday, November 16, 2007

WHY COMMUNION (EUCHARIST) AT A FUNERAL?

The Eucharist is Food for the Journey This is based on what Jesus said at the last Supper before his crucifixion: "my Body, my Blood, i.e.- Me" and thus the idea that Jesus is literally in the Bread and Wine along with an interpretation of John 6 that combines the bread and wine and the partaking of them mentioned there with the elements and actions of the Eucharist. When Believers partake of Communion they are actually being drawn deeper into union with Christ. The Eucharist is an effective Sign of Salvation This is based on sacramental language throughout the Bible. According to that a "thing" (including a word) effects what it represents. The Bread and Wine represent the Body and Blood of Jesus. They represent his bodily sacrifice for our salvation. That salvation is applied to those who have faith in the actual body and blood. Partaking of the symbols by faith makes it easier to do the same. The Spirit makes that possible or Jesus makes it possible- He acts in and through the symbols. It is His Supper. he is the Host. When Believers receive Communion they are being helped to believe more firmly in Christ's Sacrifice for salvation. Remember, preaching, hearing a Word about Jesus and His sacrifice (the Gospel), must precede taking Communion and only those who believe in that Word, who believe in Jesus, should come to the Altar.

Why Communion at a Funeral? To draw deeper into union with Christ and to strength our faith in His work for our salvation. Both are needed always, but especially when we are facing death. However, when the preaching of the Gospel [not the same as a Eulogy or simple Homily] is missing and the prerequisite saving faith is missing, the Eucharist is perfunctory and does no one any good. When the preaching and faith are there, the Communion is still only helpful when done properly, rather than run through as an "add on", an end in itself (ironically, as many Protestant Churches do). Furthermore, the actual Liturgy at a Funeral can and should be greatly simplified (shortened) considering the emotional state of most people and the amount of time being used and the fact that the Service is public and many of those present are not Believers. The BCP includes an alternative service (Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist p.400 and Communion under Special Circumstances p.396. At least the Service at Funerals could begin with the Offertory p.361, keeping it as short as possible.

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:52

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING THE CHURCH?

"In Britain there is now this huge sense that the Christian perspective on things is very much a minority taste that should be neither seen nor heard. Regarding the tussle to shape postmodern culture, a relativistic utilitarian approach to living and decision-making prevails, and attitudes which are rooted in an omnipotent God who has revealed himself are often condemned as irrelevant, intolerant, or both." "Thus the challenge before the churches is huge. Just how do you coax people into a relationship with the believing community when a large part of it either seems totally inept, or might affirm ideas and values that the popular culture either does not understand or sees as petty and narrow-minded. My own commitment to biblical Christian values has already been roundly condemned as such by some of my nearest and dearest, even though I have overtly said very little."

"If you were to ask me what is the biggest problem facing the English church at this time, it is that in so many ways it has taken on the relativistic utilitarianism that prevails in so much British thinking. Thus, instead of expressing conviction and living it out, it shrugs its shoulders and says we must be tolerant, committed to diversity, non-judgmental, living and letting live." These are comments of a former evangelical Episcopal Priest (and friend of our son, Loren) who has moved back to England to be on staff at Ridley Hall at Cambridge. Is this the future for Churches vis-a-vis culture in USA? Is he describing the way it will soon be in our Society? http://richardkew.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:46

Saturday, November 10, 2007

TO LIGHTEN THINGS UP

After my last post (below) perhaps these two sites might lighten things up a bit-<http://home.flash.net/~go4crown/lightbulb.htm><http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/we-are-light-of-world-but-who-changed.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:05

Saturday, November 3, 2007

A PROPHECY FOR THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Romans 11:1-6, 11-12, 25-29 adapted with The Episcopal Church [TEC] in mind: a prophecy I ask, then, has God rejected [TEC]? By no means! I myself [and my family, are confirmed members]. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. [i.e.-within TEC there are those who are faithful to the Truth and the Tradition] So I ask, [has TEC] stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling [the Spiritual, Liturgical and Ecclesiastical Anglican Heritage of the Church] has come to [to those outside TEC who otherwise would never have heard of it], so as to make [TEC] jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for those [who leave TEC], and if their defeat means riches for [non-Episcopalians] how much more will their full [restoration] mean! So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon [TEC], until the full number of [the Elect] has come in. And so all [the Elect] will be saved; [The Body of Christ is catholic, extending far wider than TEC and that Body will continue to grow, now enriched by the classic Anglicanism that flows out into the world from the ruins of TEC] ... as it is written, [Christ] will banish ungodliness from [TEC] 'This is my covenant with them- I take away their sins' [someday]. As regards the gospel [the Leaders of TEC] are enemies of God for the sake [of non Episcopalians]; but as regards [the historic positions they hold] they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors. [It was God who raised TEC up in the first place more than 200 years ago and gave them their Heritage and purpose and we know] the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. God has moved on, creating a new Church-building on the Anglican Heritage TEC is squandering. Someday, it shall repent and rejoin the New People of God.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:10

PURGING ALL SOULS' DAY

Some of you will realize I did not mention All Souls Day- the day that comes after All Saints Day [Halloween, of course, takes its name from All Hallow Even- the night before All Saints Day. The word "saint" comes from holy or hallowed. Halloween is the night before the day in which we honor the hallowed dead. This meaning has obviously been lost for most people] I conflate honoring all the dead (the "dearly departed") with honoring those heroes of the Church, commonly known as "Saints") into one Day. It is like the secular Memorial Day. All Souls Day, historically, is the Day in Roman Catholic Church when souls, supposedly in Purgatory, are prayed for that their time there may be shortened and they may move on into Heaven. Of course, as a Protestant, while I believe in the Communion of Saints, living and dead (we confess that Doctrine in the Apostles Creed), I do not believe in Purgatory or, obviously, for praying for souls there. Hence, no mention here of All Souls Day. I purged it from my Calendar

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:04

Thursday, November 1, 2007

ALL SAINTS DAY

Lo! round the throne, a glorious band, the saints in countless myriads stand, of every tongue redeemed to God, arrayed in garments washed in blood. Through tribulation great they came; they bore the cross, despised the shame; from all their labors now they rest, in God's eternal glory blest. They see their Savior face to face, and sing the triumphs of his grace; him day and night they ceaseless praise, to him the loud thanksgiving raise: "Worthy the Lamb, for sinners slain, through endless years to live and reign; thou hast redeemed us by thy blood, and made us kings and priests to God." O may we tread the sacred road that saints and holy martyrs trod; wage to the end the glorious strife, and win, like them, a crown of life. -old Hymn copied from Oremus

Posted by Cal in Church at 22:20

Tuesday, October 16. 2007

JOEL OSTEEN: HERETIC?

A friend wondered if I had seen the segment on the 60 Minutes TV program last Sunday about Joel Osteen, Sr. Pastor of perhaps the largest church in America and what I thought of it. Yes, we watched that segment. Mr Osteen is very, very good at what he does. He is a smooth, personable and passionate speaker and has reached millions (?) through his TV and radio shows, Conferences and books including more than 40,000 people every weekend at his church in Houston, Texas! Amazing. One person interviewed in the segment for his analysis of Mr Osteen was a noted Reformed Theologian, Michael Horton. Dr Horton described Mr. Osteen's message as "cotton candy Gospel"- God is nice and wants to be nice to us. He claimed Mr. Osteen is preaching heresy: God is a resource to help each of us realize our potential, to be all we can be. Mr. Osteen message is all about us, not about God.

Well, the Statement of Faith of Lakewood Church is one that most every evangelical today would be comfortable with. I presume, as the Pastor, Mr Osteen agrees with it and does not contradict it in his preaching or books. That would make him an evangelical to most people. I have never heard Mr Osteen preach nor have I read any of his books so I can not say if he is heretical in his doctrine. I suspect that it is his interpretation of the last of the doctrines in his church's Statement that is at issue here. "WE BELIEVE...as children of God, we are overcomers and more than conquerors and God intends for each of us to experience the abundant life He has in store for us"http://www.lakewood.cc/site/PageServer?pagename=LCH_ourbeliefsAs always- definitions! The Statement is true as it stands. I gather Mr. Osteen majors on this more than the other Doctrines in the Statement and the issue of contention is the definition of "experience the abundant life". For some this could lead to preaching what is called the "Health, Wealth and Prosperity" Gospel. That is a false Gospel.Sadly, many of today's evangelicals in churches everywhere would value and enjoy Mr. Osteen's message and see nothing heretical in it. No, Mr Osteen is apparently not preaching the classic Gospel in his sermons (especially the reality of sin and the need for repentance, forgiveness and regeneration as well as a call to righteous living). Actually, I suspect that many evangelical Pastors are not preaching the classic Gospel either. Mr. Osteen is giving people what they want and he does it bigger and better than most. There are many other men and women Speakers and "Bible Teachers", who are very popular among evangelicals with the same positive message, using it to give people inspiration, hope and confidence. Many Pastors are attempting to do the same as he does. It is what people perceive they need. All that, not just Mr. Osteen, is very disturbing to me. I just keep doing what I do. Each servant of the Lord will one day answer to the Lord for how he has served Him. Hopefully, the classic Gospel will yet prevail.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:56

MARTYRS REMEMBERED

Today the Church commemorates Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London, and Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, Martyrs, 1555On this day, 452 years ago in England, two of the most important and stalwart Protestant Reformers were burned to death at the stake for Christ and the Gospel of Grace [the Gospel as understood and preached by Luther and Calvin], condemned by Mary ("Bloody Mary"), the devout Roman Catholic Queen of that time. I don't know if there is any connection, but my father's mother's English family were Ridleys. I am thankful, however, to be spiritually related to Nicholas Ridley, who helped Thomas Cranmer [also martyred by Mary] author or edit the first Book of Common Prayer and to thus contribute to the reformation of the then Roman Catholic Church in England into the Protestant Church of England.It is very painful to observe how far many of today's Protestant Churches have come from the Faith and Church for which these men gave their lives. But the flames that consumed them lit a Light which still does burn in the hearts of millions around the world. <http://chi.gospelcom.net/DAILYF/2003/10/daily-10-16-2003.shtml>

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:49

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

THE HEART OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

The Post after this one [below] declares that the heart of the Gospel is Jesus' sacrifice of himself (by dying on the cross), as a penal substitute for sinners, atoning for their sin that the justice of God could be satisfied and those sinners forgiven. It follows that the heart of corporate Worship offered by People redeemed by the Savior's Blood, is the commemoration of that Sacrifice, re-presenting it with emblems and acts and (formulaic) words used in what is called Holy Communion. For the great majority of Christians (Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican) around the world and through the centuries, all corporate Worship has included and focused on this commemoration, accompanied, of course, with Preaching. Protestant Christians (since the 16th Century) have instead typically put the focus on the Pulpit rather than the Table, observing the Lord's Supper perhaps once a month and then simplifying it into a mere symbolic ritual- a remembrance, but not a re-presentation, an ordinance to be obeyed, but not a Sacrament by which to receive grace and be edified.

Reformed Christians adhere to what is called The Regulative Principle. Corporate Worship must include those "parts" commanded by God and must not include anything which God has not commanded. Thus a Reformed Service every week will include prayers, Scripture Readings, singing and preaching, as well as the Lord's Supper maybe once a month. Many Reformed Churches also include a Confession of Faith in every Service and an Offering is normally taken. There is no agreement as to the exact order or content of each of these parts. When the Church in England underwent transformation influenced by the Protestant Reformation, the order of Worship (the Liturgy) came to include all these parts but they were arranged in a unique way so as not only to focus on Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Gospel, but to take the worshippers through the Gospel itself. This makes classic Anglican Worship totally, from prelude to postlude, very Protestant (Reformed) and potentially very evangelistic. Thomas Cranmer designed a Liturgy in 1552, later revised in 1662, which contained 3 cycles of a 3-fold sequence. The sequence involved repentance and the confession of sin; announcing grace and forgiveness and a call to the response of faith. These 3 Gospel Themes were repeated 3 times each in different ways, in each Service. This has been the framework for every version of the Anglican Liturgy used around the world since Cranmer's time. It has increasingly been modernized (liberalized) over the years. Interestingly, the Liturgy that comes closest to preserving the 1662 version in the USA today is the one used by the Reformed Episcopal Church.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:20

Saturday, October 6, 2007

THE GOSPEL COALITION

A new Gospel Coalition was formally announced this week. It is a very encouraging and positive development in which many outstanding Reformed Leaders from a variety of Reformed Churches and Organizations have come together to restate the Gospel we share and to reconfigure the way we can work together and new ways in which we can minister in today's Culture. Check out their new website, including the links found there to some good resources.
<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:58

Saturday, September 29, 2007

MORAL AUTHORITY?

We must wonder why people of good will and well-meaning hearts, in the current leadership (and membership) of old line Denominations like the United Church of Christ and The Episcopal Church, are so committed to being “welcoming, affirming and inclusive” of people who are homosexual into their Churches [this means they approve of, even celebrate, homosexuality as both a sexual orientation and a lifestyle and believe gay and lesbian people should be welcome into positions of leadership, the same as heterosexual people, and not subject to any negative discrimination whatsoever on these matters] and willing to pay whatever price necessary to do so when there are other people of good will and well-meaning hearts in the same Denominations who are not committed to being welcoming, affirming and inclusive of people who are homosexual into their Churches. What explains the tenacity (obduracy) of each group, especially when each insists and sincerely believes it is being faithful to Christ? Why do some believe a policy of inclusion is absolutely essential to a Christian Church and are (ironically) willing to exclude those who disagree? Why are feelings so rampant on both sides of this issue? It is not going away. Neither group of (at least nominal) Christians is going to back down or give in to the other.

I believe the issue is the nature and source of Moral Authority, not sexuality (in spite of incessant reporting in the media to the contrary). Moral Authority was found in the Bible in all Denominations, well into the middle of the 19th Century. By the beginning of the 20th Century, scholars, seminaries, clergy and laity (in that order) had come to be skeptical and seriously doubt (reject) the Scripture as God’s inspired and inerrant Word and, thus, as their Moral Authority (Eve had the same problem back in the Garden). Various Philosophies about the nature of reality and knowledge and language (Rationalism, Logical Positivism, Naturalism) were causing serious doubt among the faithful. What became known as “Higher Criticism” was leading to the downgrading of the Bible text (sources, composition, editing, dating) from supernatural to very natural- a flawed human book. Physical and Social Sciences were very influential (Darwinism and Freudianism). There was a reaction to all of this. Many Christians in all the Denominations, seeing the changes, at first resisted and fought for the traditional, classic Doctrines, including the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, but the battle was lost. A series of books written to defending what were considered absolutely essential- the “Fundamentals.” Advocates came from all major denominations. Many eventually separated into new Denominations and became known collectively as “Fundamentalists”. The conflict raged from at least the 1920’s through the 1950’s. Regrettably, today’s generation does not remember the conflict, nor would they fight it. During the 1950’s, many Fundamentalists were concerned their movement had gone too far. It had become very separatist and had intentionally become very much out of touch with developments in the world, as well as very ingrown. It was, they said, “no fun, all damn and no mental”. Some began a new movement that wanted to engage the intellectual, theological and social developments of society while still holding on to the fundamentals. These Fundamentalists became known as Evangelicals. Their Moral Authority remained the Scripture. They were found in the new Denominations and independent Churches. Some remained in the Old Line Denominations to carry on the fight there with the “Modernists” who were gaining ever more control. Major Wars and Social Upheavals (especially the great Depression and later the “Sixties”) changed accepted values, big time. Revolutions in Society concerning Civil Rights (especially for Women and African Americans and for “The Poor”) captured the minds and passions of Americans everywhere. A revolution in sexual morality and practices also took hold and its consequent effect on traditional marriage practices. As the Century entered its third quarter, several intellectual movements (known collectively as Post Modernism) came to the fore. Among other things, PoMo theories greatly influenced how books, including the Bible, are read and how meaning (and “truth”) are understood. Diversity and Multiculturalism became dominant values in American culture. Add to that the growth in global travel, multinational business (a global economy) and inter-national relations. Now Americans everywhere have a strong belief in the importance of pluralism, with a consciousness and appreciation of peoples (and diverse moral values) everywhere. Many people in the Old Line Denominations have bought into all of this. (Why? is a good question, but that is a given now). Their current policies and practices as Churches reflect these influences and values. (We also can increasingly see the results of these influences and changes among Evangelicals. They have come a long way from their Fundamentalist origins). It is counter productive for Conservatives to criticize, let alone condemn, “Liberals” for choosing to reject the Bible and its Morality, understood in the traditional, classic sense. Accepting all the aforementioned influences makes it impossible for them to do other wise. For them, all of these factors together are what collectively provide the Moral Authority for what they do. They also value relevancy. They are determined to be in fashion and connected with today’s world. This is seen especially in their adoption of the latest trend in hermeneutics. Determining the Word of God (“God is still speaking”), i.e.- what is the right and righteous thing to do- is best done in community. They believe that truth (the right thing) is not absolute or timeless. Truth and what is moral certainly are not bound up in written propositions, bound within the Bible). Truth and what is moral, they insist, is constructed or determined now by a local community listening to the voices of culture around them and to each other in dialogue with one another. Conservatives (Fundamentalists and Evangelicals alike) need to grasp all that. Surprisingly, we still tend to ignore or downplay the zeitgeist and simply take

our stand on the Morality (and Theology in general) as it has been taught and believed by the universal church for hundreds of years, even millennia. Period. Thus we lock horns with people who disagree and do not understand why they do. "The Bible says... Why don't they see that?" The Bible is our Moral Authority on topics such as Marriage or the subtopic of sexual practices. It is not the Moral Authority for the folks in the other group (whatever label we chose for them). We Conservatives, if we are going to debate (what we used to call) Modernists, must confront all of the influences catalogued here and more. I have not seen much evidence of that on the popular level. Actually, if they have not kept up, this will be a daunting task for most lay people. It is too late to turn back the clock. Mainline Leaders are not going to repudiate all of these influences. They are totally and hopelessly controlled by them. It is a fait accompli. (Actually, it has been that for more than 50 years.) There is another very important matter. That is the absolute determination of people who are homosexual to find legitimacy in our society. I am persuaded the profession of faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel made by many of them, within these Old Line Denominations, is a cover up for that objective- a means to achieve validity in our Society. What better way? Not just ordination, but consecration as Bishops in the Church is great affirmation. If that is openly approved and accepted, then why not Marriage? And that is not the end. I strongly suspect both Ordination and Marriage, for the gay community, is not about ordination and marriage. Those are means by which they believe they will gain full validation as homosexuals in straight Society. Mainline Denominations, by virtue of their commitment to the popular values and mores of Society as their authority for Morality, as well as their disavowal of the Bible as Moral Authority, give people who are homosexual a natural haven and ally. Thus many members of that group have settled in there. I am convinced well-meaning non-homosexual people in these Churches are being duped and used because of their faulty understanding of what the Gospel is, as well as their substitution of a false foundation for their Moral Authority. Conservatives in these Denominations need to accept that reality. If they can still serve the Lord faithfully in their own congregations, great. They may well be called to be a Light in the Dark, shining where they believe God has put them, faithful witnesses. Otherwise, they should move on.

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:16

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

LIGHT IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH DARKNESS

Many evangelicals I know question why we attend (actually, we are confirmed members of) the Episcopal Church. We worship in a local Parish that is conservative and has an orthodox Pastor (Rector). There are many such Parishes in the National Church. One of our sons is the Rector of one in Florida. But most Parishes and Clergy in TEC do not seem to be even remotely conservative or orthodox. Many, including Bishops, are outright heretics. There is a major announcement expected next week from the Bishops of TEC which will indicate whether the National Church wants to remain in the predominantly conservative world wide Anglican Communion (the third largest Christian Body in the world, behind The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches). Very possibly it will not. Individual Clergy, Parishes and Dioceses will then be on the spot as to their future loyalties. Some will, as others have already done, leave TEC to seek affiliation with conservative Anglicans elsewhere [long, complicated story] I myself am not committed to TEC, but I do want to continue to be Anglican, in solidarity with men such as John Stott and J.I. Packer and our son, Loren. One major bright light in this dark picture is Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (TESM) It is in Ambridge, PA (near Pittsburgh). Our son is a graduate of this Seminary. The School is solid Reformed and Evangelical. Every year faculty and Staff reaffirm their commitment to its Statement of Faith. You can read it here. I thank God for TESH. Millie and I have been helping to support it from our tithe for many years. Please pray for TEC and the faithful remnant within it in these days of decision. <http://www.tesm.edu/sh/2007-5/Seed%20and%20Harvest%202007-5.pdf>

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:21

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church is the Covenant People of God gathered for corporate worship and edification and scattered as the soldiers of Christ to extend His Kingdom in the world. Specifically, the Church is marked by its celebration of God's Holy Name on His Holy Day, assembled to partake His Holy Meal ("food for the journey"), studying His Holy Word and going forth to live as His Holy People in the world.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:04

Saturday, September 8, 2007

AM I BEING AN OLD FOGEY?

Rev. Provocateur. That is what the current Christianity Today calls Mark Driscoll, the latest hot celebrity in the ecclesiastical world. A few months ago it was Ted Haggard and before that was Rick Warren. And then there was Dallas Willard. Even we Christians love our celebrities (Mr. Driscoll shares this issue of CT with Tony Dungy, whose name is in larger type on the cover.) Mr. Driscoll, who is 36, started a church, Mars Hill, in Seattle some 11 years ago, it now has 6000 in attendance and his goal is 20,000. According to men I respect, Mr. Driscoll is a Calvinist in his Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology) and apparently is saved, a brother in Christ. But his methods are over the top Emergent church- very, very contemporary. The large photo of him in the CT story shows him preaching in what is his standard garb: well worn (sloppy) blue jeans, untucked sports shirt, open at the top, with old comfortable shoes. According to the article, his language and illustrations are unapologetically crude and his demeanor is "in your face" and sarcastic. Knowing this about him, I would not attend any Service where he was preaching. If what this article says is true, I would find him very offensive. Interestingly, the largest segment of the mostly young, hip crowd that does gather to hear him are young single women. Trying to sort out my reaction to him, I don't want to be just a reactionary old fogey, stuck in my traditional ways. What objective reasons could I have for my disapproval of Mr. Driscoll's methods and others who also use them?

Mr. Driscoll seems to want to appear as though he were the same kinda people as the folks in his audience. He wants to connect with them, relate and communicate with them. He might very well prefer and enjoy the persona he has, in itself. What seems missing, in a nutshell, is respect for the Holy, the Altogether Different, the Transcendent. If he does respect the Holy how does he show that? I am showing respect for Mark Driscoll by calling him Mister.God has a holy Name, a Holy Day, a holy Place, a holy Meal, a holy People and a holy Book. This means the Name, Day, Place, Meal, People and Book are not the same as every other name, day, place, meal, people and book. They are altogether unique and different. How do we show we believe this? A major part of the problem we are addressing is that many of today's Preachers and "Christians" do not believe this. But the question for those of us who do believe is how do we show reverence to these holy things? People in the Catholic Tradition use Sanctuaries, Altars, Sacraments, Rituals, Symbols and Signs, special Language, Special Days and Celebrations and vested Clergy. Supposedly, many young adults are turned off by all this "holy" stuff. Tell that to the growing numbers of youth attracted to the Catholic Tradition with all these elements. Tell that to all the young adults who are attracted to the mystical (chants, candles, contemplative prayer, etc) and seek holy places and practice holy rituals, albeit not the Catholic ones. (Maybe the would-be preachers in contemporary churches are the ones who are turned off by the Traditional and they use the young generation as their rational.) That Mr. Driscoll is attracting large crowds does not prove what he does is good or right, but only that it attracts large crowds of certain types of people. What is good or right must be determined by the Scripture, not by crowds of the unsaved or by whether it is "successful" by today's standards. Scripture calls for respect of what is Holy. That is the standard we need. The clothing Mr. Driscoll wears while functioning publicly as the Senior Pastor of Mars Hill Church, as well as the language and techniques he uses, show great respect for his audience. What they like and want is what he gives to them. He does believe in showing (them) respect. It is important to realize that his audience is of a certain type of young adults who reflect the culture and values of a particular time and place, mostly today's urban Seattle (and other places like it). He is not respecting or trying to please or connect with other audiences of other types, places and values. He is not respecting the segment of the population to which I belong (even though Scripture is full of admonitions to honor, i.e.- respect, Parents and the Elderly). This topic does not concern just Mark Driscoll. There are many Mark Driscoll wannabes in churches around the country. They look and sound like him, in varying degrees. What we are discussing here applies to them all. My question is: what clothing and language and techniques used by a Pastor during a Church Service show respect for God and what is Holy, according to Scripture? Actually, this is the standard by which to judge everything about the Service and everyone in it. It might well turn out that some "Pastors" and some "Worship Services" are really not about respecting God and what is Holy at all. At best, these men and their meetings might best be described as public meetings for the purpose of "evangelism", ministering primarily to so-called seekers and non Christians. The Meeting is not about Worship at all, it is not primarily for Christians and the preacher is not functioning as a Pastor. That would explain a lot. In that case, maybe the rules and expectations for everyone and everything might be very different. What Mark Driscoll does and says and looks like might make some sense to me in that case. But, Mr. Driscoll's meetings are said to be to be Church Worship Services. New Testament worship was centered in the (weekly) Lord's Supper. It included prayers, Scripture and Preaching. It is interesting that by the 4th Century the Service had two parts. The first part was public and featured the prayers, Scripture and Preaching. When it came time to celebrate the Eucharist, that first part of the meeting ended and the "public" left. The members remained for the second half. Only those who had come to faith and had been baptized and

confirmed, having been catechized, were welcome to stay for The Supper. Perhaps this practice could be a useful model for today, ministering to both the inquirers and the faithful. The test would be whether what is done in the first meeting leads to people going into the second. If the hip young adults of Seattle and elsewhere that come for the public meetings, never come to saving faith, do not get baptized or catechized and publicly confirm their faith and thus become members of the Church, those public meetings fail the grade. The Church Service is not about evangelism. It is for Christians. It is about Worship, Eucharistic Worship. Back to the matter of showing respect to God and the Holy. The word "Respect" means the following-Dictionary definitions for "respect", noun and verb-To have or show esteem for or to have or show a sense of the worth or excellence of ...To give deference to a right, privilege, privileged position, or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges; proper acceptance or courtesy;To give reverence, veneration, honor, esteemThe Name (person) of God, Sunday and Worship, the Lord's Supper, the Church and the Bible are Holy and all are to be treated with respect, as defined. The question is: How are we to demonstrate reverence, veneration, honor and esteem to each of them? This is not really a difficult question. The answer simply calls for Believers to gather on the Lord's day in a place set aside as unto the Lord, consecrated, holy- the House of God. Everything about it should convey this purpose. Nothing about it should detract from this purpose. Walking in, anyone should "get this message".There should be two focal points: a Pulpit (or lectern) for preaching and a Holy Table for celebrating Holy Communion at each Service. The preaching should be based on the Bible, revered and treated as the very Word of God written. Standing to listen to it read would convey respect. Respect for the Lord's Supper would be shown by how it is conducted and by whom. The Table and the Elements used would all be treated as holy. Kneeling would convey respect. Who is allowed to participate and how they do it should also demonstrate reverence and respect.The behavior of the congregation, how they talk and sing and pray, must demonstrate that they respect themselves as the Holy People of God and what their business is for which they have assembled. (The meaning of the word "liturgy" is "the work of the people".) The clothing of all the congregants and particularly of the Clergy and Worship Leaders (including the ushers) should show that they are dressed to do holy work and are ministering to a Holy God. In Synagogues today, Rabbis wear a skull cap to show their respect for being in the presence of God and a prayer shawl around their shoulders, over their business suits to indicate what they are about. Jesus and Paul would have done the same, when they ministered in the synagogues of their day. Am I just being an old fogey? No! There are important theological and Biblical concepts at stake in this discussion of Mark Driscoll and others like him. We are talking about what the Church is about and what the Services of the Church are for. We are talking about what is Holy and how to respect it. We are talking about how to please and honor God when we gather in His Name in His House around His Table to hear His Word and to be His People.

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:00

Tuesday, September 4, 2007

WHERE DO YOU GO TO CHURCH? WHY?

I mentioned in Monday's QT Thots that I am often frustrated at corporate Worship, not only in the Church we attend, but elsewhere. My conclusion was that the key is in my own heart. Regardless of whatever is happening around me during corporate Worship, wherever that is, I must look for the Lord within and commune with Him there, worshipping Him in spirit as Jesus taught. I guess my frustration comes from not doing that. I really am influenced by whatever is happening around me and during corporate Worship. What should aid my worship actually often impedes or distracts from it. Friends who have moved into this area are looking for a new church home. They are used to dynamic, contemporary worship (including music) and strong Bible preaching. They asked where we attend. I am struck by the fact that I am very uncomfortable answering that question and by the fact that I would not invite them (or anyone else) to attend with us.

We worship in a small Episcopal parish. It is liturgical worship (which we like, but we know our friends, who are strong Protestant evangelicals, would not care for) and nothing about the Service is dynamic. The parish has grown a little over the last 4 years. Sunday there may have been 40 at the Service we attended. "Well, after all, it is Labor day." About 10 miles down the road, an evangelical church had more than 400 in attendance. It was Labor Day for them, too. So why do we still attend this small Episcopal Church? I'm writing this to help sort out an answer. I write as one who was ordained as a conservative Baptist Pastor more than 45 years ago. In recent years, I have come to prefer and value formal Liturgical Worship, which includes Communion every week. Going forward and kneeling (or standing) before the Altar every week, confessing sin, receiving the elements that are effective symbols of the Sacrifice for that sin, accepting forgiveness of that sin and then renewing our covenant promises to obey and serve the Lord is all very meaningful and important to us. The Episcopal Church (for all of its admitted many problems and shortcomings) is the only Church that offers this and our quiet small Parish is the most convenient place around here where we can worship as we like. Of course, before celebrating the Eucharist (the Episcopal Church name for the Lord's Supper), the vested Priest-Pastor has preached a short sermon [from a Pulpit] based on the three passages of Scripture for the day. A lot of Scripture is read in an Episcopal Worship Service- more than in many evangelical churches. Most of the Bible is covered every 3 years. That is always a blessing. The passages are printed on a leaflet included in the Bulletin. That is very helpful, too. Our particular Priest-Pastor is a conservative evangelical and a good number of those who attend and are active in this Parish seem to really know the Lord and are friends of ours from when we lived in Springfield before we went to Vermont. In contrast, we do not value or prefer the kind of worship services we have experienced in other churches in the area. These are far more dynamic and in churches that are growing and very active with a lot of programming for all ages and stages of seekers and finders. They are especially geared to appeal to today's young adults. To that end, they make much use of the latest audio visual technology and contemporary music. Messages are presented in a very casual, conversational, story-telling manner by a Pastor dressed like everyone else in the congregation, often walking around among them as he talks. He does not stay behind a pulpit. Some of my response to this kind of Service are influenced, no doubt, by my Senior Citizen status. But I have other issues as well. These latter churches are, in a word, horizontal; with an emphasis on the social relationships between worshippers. There is always an extended meet and greet time before and during the Service and extended Fellowship Hour after or between Services. Liturgical Services, in contrast, are vertical. Worship is corporate: We confess our Faith, "We believe..." and prayers and the many congregational responses throughout the Service are offered in unison. But, the emphasis throughout is on the spiritual relationship of the worshippers and God rather than with each other. This difference is typically reflected in the architecture of the buildings. Often today's contemporary churches have low roofs. In fact, they are often converted business buildings. People look at each other. God is found in the fellowship. Classic liturgical church buildings have vaulted ceilings. God is found by looking up, above: Our Father is found in Heaven. Granted I have oversimplified. Episcopal parishes attempting to attract new people are experimenting with some of the forms of contemporary evangelical churches with mixed success. Visitors to one of them will find a confusing mix of both types of Worship. I am a purist and pray that God will revive traditional parishes and the Holy Spirit will fill the classic forms of liturgical worship with new power and life. I won't have any problem inviting folks to such a Service. In fact, I will want to.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:27

Friday, August 17, 2007

WHAT CHURCH DID I MEAN?

I mentioned in today's QT Thots, the devotional I write and send out by e-mail twice weekly to anyone who asks for it, that we attend a Church that is going through a lot of turmoil and is facing possible division soon. Some wondered what I was talking about since they know where we attend and didn't think we have such trouble there. Well here is the explanation. We don't care for the casual, informal contemporary Worship Services common and popular in many churches. Therefore, we worship at what is called "St David's Episcopal Church". We appreciate the traditional, formal and reverent Service with its weekly Communion. What my inquirers seem to be unaware of, or are forgetting, is that St Davids is not really a Church. It is a Parish in a Diocese of the Episcopal Church. As a Parish it is healthy and doing well. The Pastor is an evangelical, in fact, a graduate of a very conservative Reformed Seminary (Westminster). Most of the members of the Parish are evangelical or, at least, traditional and conservative. There is unity and peace among them, no turmoil. But the Church is another matter. St Davids is not independent. It is a part of a national organization. That organization, the Episcopal Church, is in turmoil and faces serious division. In fact, that has begun around the Country on several levels. It was to that Church and its trouble that I made reference in my QT Thots. Prayers for it are welcome. One of our sons is the Pastor-Priest of another Parish in another Diocese of the same Church.

Posted by Cal in Church at 17:57

Tuesday, July 31. 2007

AN HONOR AND PRIVILEGE

A newsletter came today from Gordon Conwell Seminary. The feature article was "Stemming the Tide" (of Pastors leaving their Vocation) This has been an increasing phenomenon for many years. The school's attempt to help struggling Pastors is to offer opportunities for Pastors to gather once a month for guided discussions about key issues being faced by them today. I have been on both sides, in Pulpit and in Pew. I know a number of churches and Pastors who are struggling. I certainly did and I prematurely left my Vocation under duress. Gordon's monthly workshops may be very helpful to some individuals, mostly in the way of fellowship (misery loves company). I have been to many such pastor's fellowships through the years. The camaraderie with like-minded colleagues can be refreshing. But I believe what Gordon is doing with this attempt misses the mark.

Another article in the newsletter gives a clue. It is about the Seminary's struggle to meet changing demands upon it to become more practical, less academic. More and more of its students are going into parachurch ministries, not the Pastorate. They want training for that, not for a church centered ministry. These two subjects go hand in glove. Two sides of the same problem. A third article also illustrates this issue. It is about promoting egalitarian marriage over hierarchical marriage. The major problem that must be addressed and that causes a lot of the frustration is that the roles of Pastors, Churches (and Spouses) have been changing greatly in our society in recent years. Anyone trained for, and expecting to be in, traditional roles is going to be disappointed and frustrated. And no seems to agree on what the new roles should be, only that the old ones are no longer valued. It does not sound like Gordon's monthly meeting will address this change. Church members do not agree on what they expect a Pastor to do. Increasingly, a core group thinks it can lead the Church better than any professional Pastor. This is especially evident in the trend to have "Elder Rule" (which is not the same as having ruling Elders) On the other hand, many of today's Seminary graduates do not see themselves as the Pastor of the church in any traditional sense. They do not want to do what was traditionally expected of Pastors when I entered my first Pastor more than 45 years ago, such as making regular house calls (my motto used to be "A home going Pastor makes a church going people"). Preferring to tell stories rather than preach, they eschew the pulpit as too authoritarian. They dress and act casual rather than with dignity as befits their Calling (at least during Services) They often do not respect the traditions, denominational distinctives and even the name of the church that called them to be their Pastor. This is seen by the cavalier way many of them change the Order and Content of the Worship Service(s) and the various church programs ("Oh, we are not going to do that anymore) and disregard for Church By-laws, often choosing to work around the elected leaders and procedures in pursuit of a personal agenda. Many new Pastors will come with a vision of the church very different than the one that the church has had for years. This could be good, except when dishonesty and deception is used to promote the new Vision. Laypeople are often very unprepared for serious changes. They do not realize, for example, that a "missional" church does not mean a church that supports missions. All of this leads to frustration of both the church and the Pastor. What is the answer? I don't know. I have dropped out and moved on. I used to believe being a Pastor was a great honor and privilege. Many folks don't seem to agree with that either.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:08

Monday, July 30, 2007

WHY DO SOME CHURCHES GROW?

A new church began in a storefront, about half a block from where we used to live here in Springfield. That was 17 years ago. Yesterday, they broke ground for the construction of a 1.5 million dollar facility a few miles away. That new site is immediately across the street from a small church which has been there, and basically the same, for 50 years. I wonder what makes the difference between these two faith communities?

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:58

Monday, July 23, 2007

ANGLICANS AND SCRIPTURE

I have often said, I am an Anglican, rather than an Episcopalian. Here is part of a statement made by an Anglican Archbishop about the importance of Scripture "We in the Church of Uganda are convinced that Scripture must be reasserted as the central authority in our communion. The basis of our commitment to Anglicanism is that it provides a wider forum for holding each other accountable to Scripture, which is the seed of faith and the foundation of the Church in Uganda." "As the Bible came with the authority of Christ, it revealed a God that is greater than the evil spirits and the kingdom of darkness that controlled so many people's lives. In Uganda, the Bible has grown into a cherished source of authority that is central to Christian faith, practice, and mission. For all God's people, obedience to this Bible is the source of confidence, abundant life, and joy. It is an absolute treasure that no one can take away. Isaiah, later quoted by Peter, wrote, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). The grass on which our cattle feed, the grass from which our roofs are thatched—all this withers. But the Word of God has withstood the test of time. The Bible is at the heart of our Anglican identity, and we Ugandan Anglicans joyfully submit to its life-giving and transforming authority." http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=6002

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:45

Monday, July 16, 2007

GRAVEYARD OR LABORATORY?

The July issue of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research (IBMR) is about the future of the Church in Europe. The cover asks- "Europe: Christendom Graveyard or Christian Laboratory?" This week, Pope Benedict issued a statement that the Roman Church is the Church which Christ founded. It is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I do not know where those denominational leaders have been, who expressed surprise and dismay over the Pope's paper. This has been the official teaching of the RC Church from its beginning (which officially was in 1054: The Great Schism with the Orthodox Church, which also claims to be the original Church founded by Christ!) After all, the argument goes, the Roman Church has the "Vicar of Christ" (the Bishop of Rome), Apostolic Succession and therefore the only valid ordination, as well as the Sacraments which are essential to salvation. The statistics in the lead articles, in this IBMR, are convincingly that, no matter what the Pope may say, the days of the institutional Church (of any kind) in Europe seem numbered. Only a minority of citizens attend Service anywhere (with some notable exceptions, such as in Poland and former Communist Bloc countries), while the nations in the EU seem hopelessly secular and increasingly opposed to organized Religion of any kind. Is the situation hopeless for the institutional Church (Roman, Orthodox or Protestant)?

The Church out side the institutional Church is booming. Hundreds of thousands are seeking God and worship Him and are active in Christian ministries.. Is this good? It depends. The new expressions of Christian Faith are a mix of doctrine and practice. They are predominately "evangelical" and charismatic- even the nominally Roman groups are. They are groups we would call "Emerging" here in the States. In addition, there is a massive influx of Christian immigrants from the Global South into Europe. This phenomenon many see as positive. These non-white, non-European groups are predominately Pentecostal, with a strong emphasis on the miraculous "gifts" and miracles. Perhaps the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church has overflowed its historic banks and is now flowing in new channels. The alternatives? Apparently, more secularization or more Islam. Moslem immigrants are also streaming into Europe and England. It is a race to see which groups, which forces, which Faiths will survive and thrive. The only thing sure is that the historic institutional Church and its old ways, Roman or Protestant, is in serious decline. Many are saying that is the future here in America as well. Some mourn the loss and others rejoice in it, seeing it as making possible a better future for the Faith. It remains to be seen whether that future Faith will be the one once and for all delivered by the Apostles (Jude 1:3).

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:56

Saturday, June 16, 2007

THUNDER STORMS ARE FORECAST

I see at least 3 foreboding clouds in the sky over Evangelicaldom. Open Theism, which rejects some very basic traditional attributes of God and replaces them with what amounts to a new God who is in process and ever changing; the rejection of the classic doctrine of the hierarchical Trinity, replacing it with an egalitarian Trinity which is "being-in-community, power-in-mutuality and unity-through-difference" and the adoption of the tenets of Unitarianism with the concurrent slide into the old Social Gospel.

Accompanying these ominous clouds is another: a very different social- economic hermeneutic or way of interpreting Scripture which rejects, again, the traditional historical-grammatical approach. This is not to mention a very different way of doing or being "church". Lots of dark clouds on the horizon. Thunder storms are coming which will bring destruction of the Faith and Practice some of us have know our entire lives. If the Foundations are destroyed what happens to the buildings? That is a current problem with the Jefferson Memorial in DC.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061502436.html?referrer=em>That could be a headline over your Church in the near futureMy wife and I have been reading about the Yellow Fever Epidemic which ravaged Philadelphia in 1793. It took people by surprise. They were not prepared and were in denial at first of its danger. One tenth of the citizens there died horribly. We recently visited a large State Forest in Maryland. Settlers in the 1880s brought garlic mustard plants to that area for spice and medicinal purposes. Those seemingly innocent plants have spread through the Forest, and along with other imported species, are threatening its well-being. Pick your analogy: the above aberrant doctrines are spreading among Evangelicals like the Fever or the garlic mustard. Beware!http://www.mdinvasivesp.org/archived_invaders/archived_invaders_2003_05.html

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:15

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

WE ARE WHAT WE SING

“Our classic hymns reveal evangelicalism at its best.” Mark A. Noll 7/12/1999 Christianity Today“Evangelicalism at its best is the religion displayed in its classic hymns. The classic evangelical hymns contain the clearest, most memorable, cohesive, and widely repeated expressions of what it has meant to be an evangelical.”<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/july12/9t8037.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:17

Sunday, May 27, 2007

DID YOU WEAR RED TODAY?

Today, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, given by the Ascended Christ, to permanently indwell His Body on earth, the Church. Every time we confess our Faith, using the historic Creeds, we declare we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Today, Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate it's birth. We should be glad. The Church is not a building. We have heard that often enough- usually by people who like to believe they are the Church. Wrong. The Church is the corporate Body of Christ, in which dwells the real presence (the Holy Spirit) of the Risen Christ in His Word preached and Sacraments celebrated. We have eternal life, through the work of that Spirit, in that Word and Sacrament. Thus, in that sense, the Church is our Mother. There is no salvation (new birth and serious spiritual growth) outside of Her. **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOTHER! PS This is all classic Protestant Doctrine**

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:10

Friday, May 25, 2007

PROFESSORS OR PASTORS?

Dr. James White is the Pastor of a 5000 member church he founded in Charlotte N. Carolina. For less than a year now, Pastor White has also been the President of Gordon-Conwell Seminary here in Massachusetts. He resigned about 2 weeks ago (I just read about it). He gave "personal reasons" as the reason for the resignation. He never did move his family and home to the North Shore from Charlotte and has been commuting all this time. When Pastor White was appointed, I had serious reservations about it and that is why I am calling him Pastor White. He holds a Ph.D. and has written 13 books, but he is not a scholar like his predecessor, Walter Kaiser Jr. See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/mayweb-only/121-33.0.html> The man is a Pastor, a very good Pastor, by all accounts. Apparently this could be the issue behind the issue. Are Seminaries schools to train and turn out scholars, who will go on to academic careers and, hopefully, thus serve the wider Church or Pastors, who will serve local churches and "practical" hands on ministries. Deciding that first goes a long way to determining the job-description and expectations of Officers and Faculty and of the school. Hopefully, it does not have to be either-or; however, there are strong proponents on each side and, until now, the academicians have been dominant at Gordon.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:40

Thursday, May 24, 2007

AN AWFUL LOST WAR (NOT IRAQ)

The latest magazine put out by Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry, the conservative, evangelical Seminary affiliated with the Episcopal Church (TEC) came today. The Dean and President's column made an interesting announcement. If I understand Paul Zahn, the battle for TEC is lost and it is no longer worthwhile to fight it ("It is an awful lost war"). He counsels acceptance and moving on- not into another splinter Anglican group, but into local ministry. In his words, "Forget the horizon and the Big Country, the vistas and the mountains. Go local. This means focus on the local congregation, the local family of aspiring Christian people, the little group and the smallish band."

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:47

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

THEOLOGY OF THE CITY

Required reading if you are interested in Urban Ministry, written by Tim Keller, a PCA church planter in Manhattan NY <http://www.e-n.org.uk/1869-A-biblical-theology-of-the-city.htm>

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:21

BEING AN URBAN CHRISTIAN

Here is an excellent article with strategies for reaching and transforming Cities for Christ. http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2006/06/a_new_kind_of_urban_christian.html

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:08

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

CHURCH BANS ALL WEDDINGS

OK, we self-professed “evangelicals” have got to get our act together! We evangelicals, loosely defined as believers in the Gospel (literally, the Evangel or Good News), committed to sharing it with others (evangelism), must settle on the meaning of “The Gospel”, or more specifically, on the definition of the word “Gospel”. Most typical evangelicals seem to use “Gospel” simply to mean the Good News that God loves us, sent his son to die for us and wants to save us if we “accept” Jesus as our Savior. Many of us naively and ignorantly use the word as though everyone agreed on what it means. We assume everyone understands and uses it the same way we do. They most emphatically do not! And we must get this straight before muddied waters get any murkier. Many groups use the word “Gospel” to explain what they are all about. Some define the Gospel as the story of Jesus and how he sacrificed his life helping and caring for people, especially the poor. The Gospel is about love and a way of life. To live by the Gospel, like Jesus, means to live a life of service to the down and out. To others, the Gospel is about the cross where Jesus died to reconcile sinners to God. This works out, in practice, to mean ministries of reconciliation of people who are estranged or divided from each other. The Gospel is about peace, about diverse people learning to live in mutual respect and acceptance. All of these interpretations are misleading and very inadequate and different from how the Bible defines and uses the word. My illustration of the problem [below] comes from some folks in the Episcopal Church.

... the Episcopal Church [has been given] a deadline of September 30 by which it must declare that it will not consecrate gays and lesbians as bishops, and will not authorize rites for blessing same-sex unions – or risk expulsion from the Anglican Communion. ... But what’s more important, of course, ... is that the Episcopal Church remain faithful to the Gospel. What does it mean if we deny gays and lesbians full membership in the Body of Christ? How can we do that when Jesus has given us a vision of the reign of God in which the hungry are fed, the poor are welcomed, and the oppressed are set free? How can we do that when, in the baptism that begins our journey with Christ, we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons,” to “strive for justice and peace among all people” and “to respect the dignity of every human being”? This quote is part of a message, posted on line, preached by Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas of Grace Church, Amherst, MA on March 4, 2007. This message contains examples of very poor logic, mostly do to a failure to define terms or to substitute one term for another, as though they have the same meaning. That leads to invalid conclusions. The subject of this sermon is “blessing same-sex unions” by The Episcopal Church and its Clergy. According to the Speaker, not to offer this “blessing” is to deny gays and lesbians full membership in the Body of Christ? How so? What does A have to do with B? Are they somehow related? The Speaker implies that they are equivalent. How is that possible? What does a civil-union, or any marital status, have to do with full membership in the Body of Christ? Don’t Baptism and Confirmation secure that? How can we do that [deny blessing same-sex unions] when Jesus has given us a vision of the reign of God in which the hungry are fed, the poor are welcomed, and the oppressed are set free? How is all of that equated with not blessing same-sex unions? Are gays and lesbians, as a group, equivalent to “the hungry”, “the poor”? Is blessing their union the equivalent to setting free the oppressed? How so? According to whom or what? How can we do that [not bless same-sex unions] when, in the baptism that begins our journey with Christ, we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons,” to “strive for justice and peace among all people” and “to respect the dignity of every human being”? Again, how is doing these things equivalent to blessing same-sex marriages. Many, who have devoted their lives to keeping such promises through the years (centuries), have done so without seeing any connection between that and endorsing same-sex unions. How is that possible? Who says, on what authority, that respecting the dignity of every human being involves or requires blessing same-sex unions? On the other hand, How can we do that [offer the Blessing] when, in the baptism that begins our journey with Christ, we also promise to persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? The Baptismal vows continue: Question: Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? Answer: I renounce them. Question: Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? Answer: I renounce them. If we define same-sex unions or gay marriage [legal in Massachusetts] as evil, or the result of sinful desires or the Gay Rights Movement itself as something which corrupts and destroys (our Church and Culture), then indeed, How can we do that [offer the Blessing] when, in the baptism that begins our journey with Christ, we make all these Promises? The Speaker will vigorously object to what I have just written. Notice the argument on both sides depends on definitions for validity. The Speaker chooses definitions (and phrases) that support the position that same-sex unions or gay marriages are not “evil”, but good. According to whom? On what authority? This is the real issue in The Episcopal Church on this, and other subjects: Authority. The traditional interpretation of Scripture, as well as millennia of Church Tradition (Roman, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant), say that civil unions or gay marriages are evil or at least wrong or unacceptable. If that is not clear enough, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer itself says that Marriage is between a Man and a Woman. Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; ... and that the marriage conform to ... the canons of this Church. Then the Celebrant, facing the

people and the persons to be married, with the woman to the right and the man to the left, addresses the congregation and says Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and...Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God. So on what Authority does the Speaker I am quoting above, or any one else, have the right to say otherwise, against the Bible, universal classic Church Tradition and Teaching and the Prayer Book? Why should her definitions stand and be acceptable to the rest of us who hold to the usual Standards? Her answer is: the authority of the Gospel. But what's more important, of course, [she says]...is that the Episcopal Church remain faithful to the Gospel. That begs the same question: what is the Gospel? How is it defined? She has indicated her understanding of the Gospel by her statement Jesus has given us a vision of the reign of God in which the hungry are fed, the poor are welcomed, and the oppressed are set free? ... in the baptism that begins our journey with Christ, we promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons," to "strive for justice and peace among all people" and "to respect the dignity of every human being. For her, this includes advocating for gay rights (particularly the "right" to having their "unions" blessed. Who says this is the "Gospel"? On what authority? On the Sunday after the above Message was preached, another priest of Grace Church, made the announcement that Weddings will no longer be performed there, until certain relevant changes are made in national Church policy. The following are excerpts of a Message preached by the Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld Grace Church, Amherst on 11 March, 2007; posted here- http://www.gracechurchamherst.org/sermons/sermon_lent307.html seek to serve Christ as a priest in Christ's Church here at Grace Church. As all the priests have here, I have taken vows. To quote the ordination service of the Book of Common Prayer, those vows are "to endeavor so to minister the Word of God and the sacraments of the New Covenant, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received." Each of you who are baptized have committed yourselves to these vows: "to proclaim, by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being." Over the course of my years as a priest I have experienced in myself a kind of inner dissonance, a tension that I now able to claim is nothing less than a holy fear. When I perform a wedding ceremony between a man and a woman, I now register in myself a fear that I am now willing to say is the spirit of God calling me, as from out of a burning bush. When I say these words: (you can look them up in the prayer book on page 423) "the bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and, further, It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people," I feel that holy fear most intensely. Gays and lesbians are part of Christ's body, the church. They are the church, as much, if not more, as I am as a straight white man. But this sacrament, and the grace it is meant to convey, is not available to them. "So," says the voice in my soul, "what mysterious unity is this holy matrimony a sign of at this time in our history, this portion of our journey Christ?" After years of prayer and reflection, study, and discussion about this, I have come to the conclusion that I am now called to a holy fast. If our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori calls our Church to a fast, as she has, from performing blessings between two persons of the same gender, in my considered and respectful view, we are called to an even deeper fast. We are called, I believe, to join the fast that our homosexual brothers and sisters in Christ have had to observe all their lives. We are called to abstain from any wedding or marriage ceremony, hetero or homosexual, until such time as my bishop, in agreement with the Episcopal Church, allows us to celebrate the holy faithful relationships of all persons. I can no longer hold together my own integrity as a priest who has made vows to minister faithfully the sacraments of the reconciling love of Christ, if indeed to perform such sacrament (sp) means deeper, more wrenching, more agonizing tearing of the Body of Christ to which I am called to support and nourish. This Priest holds the same views on this subject of blessing same-sex unions or "marriages" as the first Priest. Reading closely, we gather what he means by Authority. I seek to serve Christ as a priest in Christ's Church ... I have taken vows. To quote the ordination service of the Book of Common Prayer, those vows are "to endeavor so to minister the Word of God and the sacraments of the New Covenant, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received." ... I can no longer hold together my own integrity as a priest who has made vows to minister faithfully the sacraments of the reconciling love of Christ, His authority is not the Bible or Church Tradition and Teaching, It comes down to his ordination to minister faithfully the sacraments of the reconciling love of Christ as he interprets the meaning of that ministry. Others Episcopal priests, who have taken the same vows, do not agree with his interpretation. He includes to minister the Word of God, but the context makes plain that his struggle as a Priest is not about preaching; but it concerns his administration of the sacrament of Marriage- Gays and lesbians are part of Christ's body, the church. ... But this sacrament, and the grace it is meant to convey, is not available to them. I fail to see how that, if it were true (the Book of Common Prayer teaches that the Episcopal Church believes in only two Sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist, pp.858, 872), justifies denying that grace and the reconciling love of Christ to heterosexuals, the majority of those come for weddings. Where are those members of the Church to go for their sacramental grace? Isn't that punishing them for something about which they have no control? The Priests will not be hurting here, as these parishioners will. How are they being loved and served at this critical, major stage of their lives? Certainly, the good Priest is not saying these heterosexual couples should "live in sin", while he and the other Priests take their principled

stand against Church policy. I think it is safe to say that this Priest defines or understand the Gospel in these terms: Each of you who are baptized have committed yourselves to these vows: "to proclaim, by word and example the Good News of God in Christ [the Gospel]; to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being." That is the Gospel to him and, as he defines it, the Gospel requires advocating for the blessing of "same-sex unions". Does the Gospel require that of Evangelicals? Why not? Because we define "Gospel" differently. He may be ordained, but he is not evangelical. Definitions matter. Exactly how do you define "Gospel" and what are the consequences of that definition for you? Do not be fooled by substitutions!

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:55

Monday, March 12, 2007

TIME TO GET BACK TO THE "TRUE STARBUCKS EXPERIENCE"

Today's American culture, across all lines, has been described as EPIC. (I think Leonard Sweet came up with this) EPIC stands for Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich and Communal. It is often suggested that churches and ministries, especially to youth and young adults, should reflect these cultural characteristics. It is even suggested that church Services be modeled after Starbucks Coffee Houses. An increasing number of churches are seeking to do just that. Everything is casual, informal, relaxed. The trend is for "Pastors" to wear open neck sports shirts, dockers and loafers and not to use a Pulpit, but walk around having a conversation with all the guests and seekers who may be sitting or standing around, while enjoying their coffee. (Yesterday, as guest Preacher, I conducted both Services wearing my Genevan gown over my business suit, white shirt and tie with business shoes. We sang Hymns, with a robed choir master and choir, and I preached from the Pulpit.) It should be of interest to the chic trend-setters, that Starbucks is in trouble and losing market share. Actually, the CEO says, they are 'losing their soul'. Very interesting choice of words; but an even more strong message to today's ecclesiastical avant garde is this, from the CEO- "It's time to get back to the core ... to evoke the heritage, tradition and ... passion" for the 'true Starbucks experience.'" <http://www.slate.com/id/2161504/entry/2161505?nav=tap3>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:58

Thursday, March 8, 2007

WHAT IT TAKES TO GET GOD TO GO TO CHURCH

Jeremiah 7.1-20 [ADAPTED]Hear the word of the Lord, all ... you that enter [the Lord's House] to worship the Lord. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers [i.e.- a place were robbers seek refuge] ...? Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods ... and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are [saved]'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, ... Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' You know, I am watching, says the Lord. ... when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer ... Therefore thus says the Lord God: My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place ... [BUT]...If you truly amend your your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ...do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood then I will dwell with you in this place...These Believers steal, deceive, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, oppress the destitute, worship false gods [in other words, they break the 10 Commandments] and also go to Church. They need to know God is not there [remember "Ichabod"] as long as they behave this way. Only if they stop breaking His laws, will He live in His House and meet with them there. Otherwise, going to church is for naught. Far from impressing God and securing His blessing, such hypocrisy will only bring His condemnation.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:08

Wednesday, March 7, 2007

CLOSED COMMUNION?

Greg Baus of <http://honest2blog.blogspot.com> asked, "what is your view of 'close/d communion'?" I will assume you define "closed Communion" as restricting the Table to those who are members in good standing of the local church [meeting the church's spiritual, doctrinal and behavioral standards] and "close" communion as restricting it to members in good standing of the same Denomination, but not necessarily to the local church [they belong somewhere else and are visiting] Closed or Close Communion would prevent "those who have a credible profession of faith in the gospel and yet who hold to "secondary" non gospel doctrines contrary to what the church teaches as authoritative biblical doctrine" from participating in the Supper. The question is whether that practice is itself "authoritative biblical doctrine". Short answer? I do not think so.

I believe in the real presence of the Risen and enthroned Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, where two or three are gathered in His Name, to observe the Memorial (Remembrance). More accurately, I believe that in Communion, the true Believer spiritually, by faith, enters into the heavenlies, where Christ is seated, and there worships in His presence. Doing this is a means of Grace. It increases assurance of union with the Lord and its benefits and imparts strength and courage to persevere in Christian life and service. The singular requisite is that the communicant be a true Believer, i.e.- have the gift of saving faith (or at least "have a credible profession of faith in the gospel"). The Church, theoretically, should look for evidence of such faith in those it welcomes at the Table, turning away those who do not.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 81. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? Answer: For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves. Question 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly? Answer: No; for by this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation; (a) therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life. Such discipline is rarely possible in churches today and when it is attempted, it often leads, not to restoration and reconciliation, but alienation with bitterness. This policy, historically, has led to much self-righteousness and hypocrisy on the part of those who do the excluding, as well as spiritual abuse toward those whom they judge. More commonly, the actual practice is acceptance by the Church or Elders of subscription to a Statement of Faith or Creed for saving faith or the outward appearance of public respectability, culturally determined, for Scriptural righteousness. Besides an on-going effort to teach members Biblical (or at least, church) Standards of Faith and Practice, probably the best a church can do on "Communion Sunday" is "fence the Table" with stern admonition for would-be communicants to examine themselves, test themselves, to ascertain assurance that they are indeed "in Christ" and will partake worthily. This is more Biblical; 2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV- Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? --unless indeed you fail to meet the test! Ultimately any blessing or condemnation that may happen during the Meal, depends on what transpires personally between the Lord and those who receive the Bread and Wine.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:48

Saturday, March 3, 2007

ANYONE INTERESTED IN STARTING THIS KIND OF CHURCH?

1. Grounded in Calvinist Theology: A. Proclaiming the wonders of all that God is and Promoting the Crown Rights of Christ. B. Preaching the Doctrines of Grace (TULIP) Total Depravity (meaning corruption at the root of human nature, effecting the entire person, as a result of the Fall, putting the will into the bondage of sin with accompanying animosity toward God- the antithesis); Unconditional Election (meaning Election to salvation by God, based on His purposes alone, not on his knowledge beforehand of who would believe); Limited Atonement (meaning Christ's Sacrifice was sufficient for all sin, but efficacious for only the Elect); Irresistible Grace (effectual calling: regeneration of the corrupt heart by the Holy Spirit, upon hearing the Gospel, freeing the will to then chose Christ); Perseverance of the Elect which means those who are given the gift of faith will be kept in that faith. C. Evangelizing with the Gospel of 5 Solas (Latin for "only") Sinners are saved by Grace only, through the death and resurrection of Christ only, requiring saving faith in Christ and his atoning death and bodily resurrection only, to the glory of God only. And these truths are based on the Scripture, taken as the verbally inspired revelation of God, only.

2. Reformed Worship: Corporate worship regulated by the principle that it must include only what God has deemed appropriate. A short summary is found in Acts 2:42: Teaching Apostolic Doctrine, celebrating the Lord's Supper (spiritual communion with the Christ who is truly Present, every week), Praying and Sharing (Praying includes singing, Sharing includes an Offering) The Service would be reverent and orderly.

3. Ecclesiology: Presbyterian polity (Elder rule), Covenant Community (with strong, extended, intergenerational families); Baptism for new Believers and Pedobaptism with Confirmation for their children (no pedocommunion), Corporate (incarnational) Ministry- family to family and to the neighborhood. All members of such a church would be "disciples", learners, students. This Church would be a "Schola" sko-lah (The Re/formational Institute)

4. Eschatology: the Kingdom is both present and to come; the Church is the Covenant People of God (not Israel) and it is the primary means Christ uses to advance His Kingdom on earth.

5. Neo-Calvinist World View: Creation/Fall/Redemption (Creation is good, fallen and redeemed); Cultural Mandate (to multiply, fill, cultivate and care for Creation for the glory of God and the good of all); Common Grace shared by all human beings (the connection between all people); Holistic Christian Humanism; Lifestyle of Personal Righteousness; and the pursuit of Social and Economic Justice for all.

6. Kuyperian "Sovereignty of the Spheres" (Marriage, Family, Church, Civic Associations and Civil Government); Compassionate Capitalism (no Welfare State, no Socialism)

7. Presuppositionalist (C. Van Til) Apologetics (not evidentialist) : The Antithesis, Reformed Epistemology (Reformed Education) Anyone interested in starting such a Church? Let me know!

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:34

Monday, February 26, 2007

COMMUNION FOR VERY YOUNG CHILDREN?

[In many evangelical churches, The Lord's Supper is an occasion for]... "an individual and subjective remembering of Jesus and his work, But it is not clear that this is the primary intent of what Jesus established since, in the Scriptures, a "memorial" is not so much a subjective remembering but an objective commemoration before the face of God and people... Arguably, it is such a notion of an objective memorial that the Westminster Confession has in mind when it speaks of the Supper as "a commemoration of that one offering up" of Christ (29.7). On this understanding, the action of the Eucharist is one by which the people of God make remembrance of Christ's one sacrifice and do so before the face of the Father himself, confessing thereby that Christ alone is our propitiation and life, and pleading the promises held forth in him. This view is standard among Reformed divines as diverse as Perkins, du Molin, de Mornay, Turretin, and Polanus. Richard Baxter, for example, writes that the Supper is a means by which the church, "might show the Father that sacrifice, made once for sin, in which they trust, and for which it is that they expect all the acceptance of their persons with God, and hope for audience, when they beg for mercy, and offer up prayer or praises to him" (The Christian Directory II.xxiv. Direction II.ii). If this is what Jesus meant by establishing the Supper as a "memorial," then we may also ask if this is the manner in which the Supper "proclaims the Lord's death" and if God is a primary audience for that proclamation." This quote is from an article on <http://www.joelgarver.com/writ/revi/bread.htm> and is part of the view of Communion I now hold, which I have expressed several times on this Blog. "...the action of the eucharist is one by which the people of God make remembrance of Christ's one sacrifice and do so before the face of the Father himself, confessing thereby that Christ alone is our propitiation and life, and pleading the promises held forth in him." "the Supper is a means by which the church, 'might show the Father that sacrifice, made once for sin, in which they trust, and for which it is that they expect all the acceptance of their persons with God, and hope for audience, when they beg for mercy' ... "Note the verbs: confessing, pleading, ... trust, expect, hope, beg. The Apostle Paul commands in 1 Cor. 11:27 -Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Some commentators understand that the self-examination is about discerning the Body. In a much wider context, in 1 Corinthians, the "Body" refers to the Church. It has divisions. Before sharing in the one Cup and Loaf, we must be sure we are right with everyone in the Church- not divided, i.e.- sinning against anyone else present. Other commentators argue that the immediate context is the Supper itself. We are to be sure we are taking Communion, discerning (believing) that the elements are in fact the Body and Blood of Christ, approaching them appropriately. In either case, it is very important that every person eating and drinking must first examine himself [about either or both of these possibilities] and only upon being convinced that he is participating in a worthy manner, eat and drink. Not to do this would be to bring judgment upon themselves. The Greek word for "examine" (11:28) is used for "test" in 2 Corinthians 13:5 - Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? --unless indeed you fail to meet the test! The Church where we worshipped yesterday has open Communion. Whoever has been baptized is welcome to participate. This includes infants and very young children. They were given the elements and gladly munched on the wafer while walking happily back to their seats. Before, during and after, I saw no evidence of serious reflection and self examination as required by the Scripture and the occasion itself. Indeed, I doubt if any of these children would have been capable of doing that. So why were they being "communed"? The common answer, by those who advocate such pedocommunion, is that the parents of these children are presumably Believers and, thus, these little ones are members of the Covenant and entitled to its signs and privileges (especially taking part in the Covenant Meal, even if it is just done mechanically and without Scriptural meaning to them). Others defend the practice by the argument that since these children have been baptized, they are members of the Church, presumably Christians; therefore, they have the privilege of receiving Communion. In fact, to deny them as a group would be committing the same sin that Paul supposedly forbid- dividing the Church. The latter argument totally ignores Paul's command that every single person coming to the Table must examine and test themselves. Infants and very young children can not do that. The other argument made is by those who have a more Roman Catholic concept of the Sacrament. The element, the wafer alone is sufficient, communicates the results of Christ's sacrifice to those who receive it. Just ingesting the element gives the Grace necessary to salvation. It is spiritual food, advocates say. Just as kids do not have to know about the chemical and nutritional components of any other food they may eat in order to be nourished, so, likewise with the wafer that is the Bread of Life. Just eat it! Needless to say, I find this mechanical view of Communion, as well as pedocommunion and these various arguments in its defense, totally unacceptable. At the very least, Confirmation should precede first Communion. Better yet, a credible confession of faith (which is theoretically what Confirmation includes) should be made before the Church,

before first Communion. Of course, the same should apply to adults. And every Communion Service should include "fencing the Table"- the practice of admonishing everyone who would participate to do the self examination required by Scripture. Increasingly, Reformed and Presbyterian Churches are practicing pedocommunion. Ironically, the Church we were at yesterday is an Episcopal Church. The following are excerpts from that Church's Book of Common Prayer. They prohibit pedocommunion. From the Articles of Religion-The Sacraments are not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith. The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith.... such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ; yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing. Taken from the words used in the Service itself- ...if we are to share rightly in the celebration of those holy Mysteries, and be nourished by that spiritual Food, we must remember the dignity of that holy Sacrament. I therefore call upon you to consider how Saint Paul exhorts all persons to prepare themselves carefully before eating of that Bread and drinking of that Cup. For, as the benefit is great, if with penitent hearts and living faith we receive the holy Sacrament, so is the danger great, if we receive it improperly, not recognizing the Lord's Body. Judge yourselves, therefore, lest you be judged by the Lord. Examine your lives and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, that you may perceive wherein you have offended in what you have done or left undone, whether in thought, word, or deed. And acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly Food. Granted, these instructions are from Rite I and are no longer in favor and often omitted in TEC Services, where Rite II or Alternatives are preferred today [another important subject and a sign of how the Church has become more "liberal"] The following text is used- The Breaking of the Bread (The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread.) Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; Therefore let us keep the feast. (Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation) The Gifts of God for the People of God. (and may add) Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving. Often omitted, the latter words are essential. Anyone failing to follow any part of this instruction has not truly taken Communion, whatever their age; this admonition definitely prohibits the practice of pedocommunion.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:48

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

PEKING DUCK?

KFC, McDonalds and Starbucks are doing business in China. It is a huge market and they want to profit there. To do it, they are willing to adapt their product to Chinese taste. Tea, duck, fish- they will, and are, selling what the Chinese consumer's want. What these Companies really market is a model for "fast food" restaurants. That is what they offer and what brings them profit. The actual food cooked and sold by that Model is only a means to an end: it makes no difference to them whether they fry potatoes or noodles. They are adapting to the local culture. The Church might be considered a delivery system for its product, the Gospel. Let's call that "hamburger". Whatever model for that system is most successful is the model we should use (whether fast food, bought at a counter or drive through or presented by a wait person, on a fancy plate, at a posh dining establishment).

Adapting our delivery system to the culture is smart. The similarities with KFC, et al, end there. Our product must remain the same. We are committed to selling "hamburgers", no matter what the consumer demands or other businesses do. If consumers want fish or duck, we still do not sell it. We do not change our product to conform to their taste. Another thing- our product can not be a substitute look-alike. A tofu veggie burger is not a hamburger. We can not grind up turkey, grill it, hide it in a bun and called it a hamburger. What we tell the customers is a hamburger must be a hamburger, made out of beef, not ground turkey or anything else. We try different methods to promote hamburgers (maybe with various garnishes, plain or deluxe, with cheese or without) and present them in attractive packaging with great customer service; but, we are committed to our original product- a beef hamburger. Even if we do not make a profit. Our hope, of course, is that some (many) will come to appreciate the hamburger and want more of it. [my apologies to those who are in the business of selling chicken products]

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:22

Saturday, February 10, 2007

THE FUTURE CHURCH?

This is a good example of a growing movement among many young Christians today-<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/36.90.html#related>And this statement is a very good example of the vision, passion and rhetoric coming from the new "missional" Movement.<http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=209&cview=1#cmt>

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:46

KILLING THE WEST?

Here is a bold statement of what I understand to be a growing conviction of advocates within the emerging-missional church movement and which causes me great consternation.http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070207/25670_Old_Church_Model_%27Killing_the_West%27.htm

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:41

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

MORE ABOUT MISSIONAL AND EMERGENT

The current issue of Christianity Today has a very helpful article written by Scot McKnight in which he describes five characteristics ("streams") of the emerging church. They cover and synopsise my own observations. He writes from within the "Conversation", but in a very irenic and humble style. Indeed, the first of his Themes is that many writers within the emerging church movement are given to very provocative rhetoric and he implores them to cool it. He discusses the ties with academic Post Modernism, which is where a lot of critics of the movement focus their attention, especially on the subject of "Truth". McKnight insists "the vast majority of emerging Christians and churches ...don't deny truth, they don't deny that Jesus Christ is truth and they don't deny the Bible is truth." That seems true of most emergers I have read or talked with. However, the proof of that pudding is in definitions of those phrases. There are many in the movement, McKnight affirms, that "embrace the idea that we cannot know truth, or, at least, that we cannot know truth absolutely". Added to that is the serious skepticism or outright rejection of "propositional truth", which I find essential, among Leaders of the Movement. He quotes, with seeming approval, a very controversial Theologian, LeRon Shults

"...fixation with propositions can easily lead to the attempt to use the finite tool of language on an absolute Presence that transcends and embraces all finite reality. Languages are culturally constructed symbol systems that enable humans to communicate by designating one finite reality in distinction from another. The truly infinite God of Christian faith is beyond all our linguistic grasping, as all the great theologians from Irenaeus to Calvin have insisted, and so the struggle to capture God in our finite propositional structures is nothing short of linguistic idolatry." The third major characteristic of the Movement is the one that is most prominent among the emergers I know: "Praxis-oriented". Indeed, McKnight agrees "what most characterizes emerging is ... praxis- how the faith is lived out" He says they are convinced "how a person lives is more important than what he or she believes [orthopraxy before orthodoxy] Focus is almost exclusively on "the way of Jesus" and that seems to be most often encapsulated by Matthew 25. Foremost is the concern of emergers to be "Missional". McKnight says this means, first, participating with God in His redemptive work in the world. Second, participating in a community where this work is occurring [being done] and, third, participating in holistic redemptive work in the world, understood primarily as ministry to and with the Poor and Needy. The latter concern leads into another characteristic of the emergent movement- it's political activism, which means "progressive", Left and [in practice] Democratic. McKnight is worried, however, that this trend could simply lead to "the social Gospel". He further decries the lack of interest in traditional evangelism. But, that could be connected with the last Theme McKnight mentions- a disinterest in, if not a rejection of, "systematic theology". [This is connected with the jettisoning of Absolutes and Truth and propositional Revelation. McKnight doesn't connect these dots, I sure do] Truth is primarily personal. Jesus, a person, is truth. We know "truth" when we know him personally. Truth is discovered in narratives and it can not be captured and confined to some System [such as Calvinism] At the very most, we can say to another, "This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let's talk." To me, this is what many evangelicals in contemporary churches have been saying (feeling) for years. For a long time, I have been dismayed at those who simply want a simple experience with Jesus ("mere" or core "Christianity") I have heard so often, among such folks, "doctrine divides, we should just love each other". This was before such notions went public in a "Movement". The logical step from this is seen in a strong unwillingness among emergers to draw lines indicating who is in and who is out, i.e.- who is a Christian and who is not. Everyone is on a journey. What really matters, they say, is how we live. Being a Christian is ultimately loving God and loving our neighbor. McKnight ends his essay expressing his belief that the Emerging movement is not going away. He really likes its emphasis on praxis and its missional orientation and believes these will be its greatest influence on evangelicalism over time.

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:36

Monday, January 29, 2007

BEING MISSIONAL- Part 3 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Missional churches and missionary agencies that want to be missional [as described in previous posts] are concerned with "contextualizing". That simply means to express or fit a concept, in this case, the Gospel, into a particular or local cultural context (like a word into a sentence or a sentence into a paragraph, etc) The current issue of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research has an article by Francis Adeney, Professor of Evangelism and Global Mission at a Presbyterian Seminary, entitled "Contextualizing Universal Values: A Method for Christian Mission". [Note the singular "mission"]The Professor has some valuable suggestions and good illustrations for this process; she also has serious errors that undermine her argument. She states, "The translatability of the Gospel into various cultural forms is one of the special features of Christianity. Understanding different cultures and translating the Gospel into forms that are indigenous to or compatible with those settings is a crucial task of contemporary mission." This is contextualization and it is fundamental to being missional.

First error, and my most serious misgiving about this whole missional, contextualizing effort, is demonstrated by the professor moving on to saying, "the Gospel message...is embodied in certain universal values that need to be identified and translated into diverse cultural forms. If the values are not articulated and practiced in fitting ways in a particular culture, Christianity will remain a foreign religion..." Notice here that she is seeking to contextualize the "principles" and not the Gospel itself. That is the error. The ever present temptation in all efforts to be missional is to reshape, even to the point of perverting, the Gospel into "forms" that fit the local pagan culture. The Professor's Gospel becomes values. In this case, the values become "Gender Equality". What drives Professor Adeney is what she perceives to be the woeful oppression of women around the world. She gives good examples of this oppression. This is her great concern and the burden on her heart. In turn, it influences what she understand Scripture to say, the meaning of the Gospel itself and the purpose of "Mission". It is all about the liberation of oppressed women. Other Christians talk the same way about the "Poor" (the majority of whom are, in fact, women and children)"Reflecting on the woes and oppression of women and girls throughout the world may strengthen our resolve to uphold gender equality as a value that is at the core of Christ's compassion for the world." Is this really "at the core"? We have here a reworking of what the Gospel is about. This is further indicated by the author's conviction that "the power of the Gospel [is, she says,] to change cultures, shift values, reorganize structures and modify traditional practices". The Scripture says the Gospel is the power of God unto personal salvation (Romans 1:16) and is, first of all, about personal redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7 cf Luke 24:47). Out of this, out of regeneration and saving faith, come the changes in society. The many practical suggestions made, and examples give in the article, from the author's experience of several years in Indonesia (Java) for contextualizing this value are applicable to efforts to contextualize any value anywhere. These methods or strategies would work for secular values, as well as Christian ones. Mostly, they involve various ways of learning to understand the host culture and for dialoging with, mostly asking questions and listening to, the people of that culture. She sees not doing that as the greatest failure of Westerners and the greatest skill they have to learn. There is danger in this as well. The conversation either starts out with multiculturalism's values or leads to them. I have written elsewhere of the errors of multiculturalism and its cousins, moral and religious pluralism and syncretism. Another article in this same IBMR is the autobiographical account of a career missionary to India. After years of dialogue and growing appreciation for his Hindu "hosts", the Missionary says he now considers himself to be a Hindu-Christian!"As communities are reformed by the Gospel, questions about women's worth, status and roles will arise." How does Dr. Adeney come to her conclusions about the Gospel and Gender Equality? Now we come to the another serious danger in matters missional. I find that this subject (and others associated with emerging-missional churches) are often based on a particular approach to Scripture. Everyone tries to claim the authority of Scripture for what they believe and do. The claim that the root problem with old-line church denominations is with the authority of Scripture is not really accurate. I have made that claim myself, many times. I have come to realize that. Listening to them, they claim to be following the Word. My left-leaning evangelical friends make the same claim. "The Bible says..."- "no, the Bible says..." Yada, yada, yada. The real issue is hermeneutical. Dr Adeney insists strongly that, when we come to the Scripture, we absolutely must "lay aside one's own prejudices, becoming open to the 'foreign text'- in this case- another culture- as a way to acquire knowledge [of what it means]." We must do our reflection on the text "from within their culture", as well, in this case, study it in dialogue with actual oppressed women and formal studies in gender and ethics (known as "Women's Studies" in academia).When we study the Scripture, we must do so within communities which share the same concerns, in this case, Gender Equality; with a knowledge of history and tradition, especially as to the place and roles of women in Society- ours and those of the hosts; using the newer Bible translations and the latest Biblical scholarship. Most of all, "rather than basing a theology... on difficult Pauline passages, we would do better to focus on the cultural setting in which the apostle operated, which might illumine passages in a new way." Compare this with the

following statement-“We oppose appeals to isolated texts and outmoded traditions. Scriptures which were written in different times and in the context of a very different culture may reflect that culture more than they reflect Divine intent. For example, we believe those texts which absolutely forbid divorce, or require women to be subservient to their husbands, do not express the will of God for our culture.” www.lmfct.orgThis is from a Petition signed by perhaps a hundred Pro-Gay Marriage Clergy in Connecticut. The key arbiter as to what is the will of God for our culture (any culture) is “our culture“! Old-line denominational leaders and clergy insist they follow the Scripture, approaching it in this way. Our problem is with their hermeneutics. Unfortunately, many evangelicals do not have any problem with them. Eventually, it will become clear that the debate is about something deeper. More than different principles for interpreting the Scripture, the debate will reveal that there is a different understanding of the very nature of the Scripture being interpreted. The graduate school, on whose staff Dr Adeney serves, is an official theological seminary of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The Mission Statement of Louisville Seminary declares this:“We confess the Scriptures to be the unique and authoritative witness to God’s redemptive love for the world.” Notice, Scripture is “unique and authoritative” - not ultimate or final or inerrant authority. Furthermore, the Book is a “witness to”- not the verbal propositional revelation of ... and “witness to God’s redemptive love”- not to the Gospel or God’s Plan of Redemption. Truth is not even mentioned.“As an institution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Seminary has a particular responsibility to preserve and develop the values and insights of the Reformed tradition.” To me, claiming to be Reformed, this statement is an embarrassment. The school does have that responsibility, but I do not believe it has kept it. People who approach the Bible as God-breathed (verbally inspired) from beginning to end, the inerrant propositional revelation of God, will understand its meaning very differently than those who approach the Book with any other understanding of what it is. Hermeneutics are essential; but they are grounded in presuppositions that, by definition, precede hermeneutics. Such presuppositions, in turn, are grounded in Theology, particularly the nature of God and how He makes Himself known and the nature of fallen Man and how he knows. Reformed Christians, by definition are Calvinists. To claim to be Reformed and not be Calvinist is a contradiction [The way non-Calvinists get around this is by changing the classic definitions of such Calvinist basics as the 5 Doctrines of Grace (T.U.L.I.P.) I have written about them in previous posts.] The approach to Scripture taken by Dr Adeney is based, ultimately, on the idea that people are good and are capable, using natural processes, of judging what God has said. In effect, they are saying human beings and their culture determine what the Word of God means for today. They sit above the Word. And, yes, this brings us back to the topic of authority: God or Man? I guess in the end, that is what it is all about. Missional-minded people, beware!

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:49

Thursday, January 18, 2007

BEING MISSIONAL- Part 2

This article continues one posted below about "Being a Missional" Church on 12-22-06. Along with the serious changes today in the world of church, are serious changes in the world of missions. Of course, they are inseparable. Most of these changes are driven by the conviction that the Gospel must be communicated cross-culturally, if it is to be communicated effectively. What works in rural, white Appalachia will not work in the inner city Hispanic barrio or in Silicon Valley, CA. The Gospel must be contextualized, while remaining true to itself. It is a big topic. For many years now the word "missional" has been used by all kinds of missionary agencies and denomination as they seek for innovative methods to be effective communicators of the Gospel in today's many and diverse worlds (cross-culturally). Here are two links that are helpful. The second one is a long, but good, article that connects "missional" with "emergent". That is significant. <http://www.mliweb.net/index.html> http://www.mliweb.net/newsletter_june05.html The meaning and use of "missional", for many, has moved from methodology to ecclesiology. This is a major shift in the use of the term. Missional is now about the nature of the local church. Its life is missional. The original focus on how traditional agencies and churches can learn new methods by which to communicate the Gospel has become a focus on how churches themselves change in order to communicate the Gospel by who they are. The meaning and use of "missional", for many, has moved from methodology to ecclesiology. This is a major shift in the use of the term. Missional is now about the nature of the local church. Its life is missional. The original focus on how traditional agencies and churches can learn new methods by which to communicate the Gospel has become a focus on how churches themselves change in order to communicate the Gospel by who they are. Here is what I gather to be a fair description of what is happening--...the "Emergent Movement," [is] a fast-growing group of large, moderate-to-left evangelical churches passionately committed to practicing "church" as mission (i. e., the church = mission) in today's postmodern context. For too long (in the view of the Emergents), churches have viewed mission as a special vocation of the few, who have been trained and commissioned for a unique task. Rather, the church must be the mission in its very essence; it must be the incarnation of evangelism, discipleship and spiritual formation. In other words, mission is not the unique task for the few, but the life God designed for all Christians in community. This re-orientation toward reaching out to unbelievers at almost all costs has led to the questioning by some Emergents of older evangelical certitudes like the strict infallibility of the Bible and even the exclusivity of the Christian Faith; instead, it draws unbelievers into the story of Jesus' Gospel lived out in the Christian faith-community. The Emergent churches have been dramatically successful in their "missional" objective — the church is not merely to practice missions but rather to see itself as the mission: the church incarnates the reality of Christian life to a lost and dying world. This incarnational approach to the Faith squares neatly with a postmodern age little concerned with rational arguments and truth claims but alert to communal life and authenticity.--Andrew Sandlin 12-6-06 <http://www.christianculture.com> From my reading, this newer meaning of missional is becoming the dominant one. Here is how one such emergent and missional group explains itself--"We value the adoration of Jesus Christ and worshiping him through obedience, and through musical and artistic expression. We live with the prophetic call of scripture to go higher in our consecration and devotion to Jesus and his gospel. We are willing apprentices of Jesus so we can learn how to live for God, as though all we are and all we have are for his sake." Inner Traditions Ministries exists to: cultivate adoration of Jesus; fuel initiatives that encourage becoming apprenticed to Jesus Christ; facilitate caring for the poor; pioneer and encourage authentic missional community house-to-house around the world; encourage family life and the value of children; promote dialogue about community and faith in a postmodern world; re-enfranchise weak and ordinary people in faith communities; We purpose to make the daily choice to esteem: God's kingdom over religion; relationship over program; authenticity over excellence; meals together; the risk of faith over personal comfort; art and music over power; ordinary people over experts; Jesus over all. <http://www.innertraditionsministries.com/visionandvalues.htm> Here are important quotes from influential writers in this field--"The churches shaped by the Reformation were left with a view of the church that was not directly intended by the Reformers, but nevertheless resulted from the way that they spoke about the church. Those churches came to conceive the church as 'a place where certain things happened.' The Reformers emphasized as the 'marks of the true church' that such a church exists wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and (they sometimes added) church discipline exercised. . . . Over time, these 'marks' narrowed the church's definition of itself toward a 'place where' idea. . . . This perception of the church gives little attention to the church as a communal entity or presence, and it stresses even less the community's role as the bearer of missional responsibility throughout the world, both near and far away." -- (Huntsburger in *Missional Church* 1998: 79). "The calling of the church in every culture is to be mission. That is, the work of the church is not to be an agent or servant of the culture. The churches' business is not to maintain freedom or to promote wealth or to help a political party or to serve as the moral guide to culture. The church's mission is to be the presence of the kingdom. . . . The church's mission is to show the world what it looks like when a community of people live under the reign of God" (Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 2002, 133). Incarnation means that

God enables divinity to embody humanity. Christians, like Jesus, are God's incarnations, God's temples, tabernacling in human flesh (John 1:14; Phil. 2:3-8). Christians, spiritually transformed into the image of God, carry out God's ministry in God's way. Frequently incarnationalists relate to seekers from other world religions personally and empathetically (as Jesus taught Nicodemus). Sometimes, however, they declare God's social concerns by shaking up the status quo and "cleaning out the temple." The end result of incarnation in a non-Christian world is always some form of crucifixion. (Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Engaging Trends in Missions*, 2004). "The early church apologetic may be rightly called an 'incarnational apology.' The church is the continuation of the incarnation. It is the earthed reality of the presence of Jesus in and to the world. Herein lies the ancient apologetic. The church by its very existence is a witness to the presence of God in history (Eph. 3:10). There is only one actual incarnation of God and that is in Jesus Christ, but the church, being his body, sustains an incarnational dimension. The church is a witness to the presence of Jesus in the world as it embodies and lives out its faith" (Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, Baker, 2002, p. 95). "Unfortunately, evangelicals in mission still tend to proceed as though their major problems are methodological. They are not. They are theological. It would be to their everlasting credit if evangelicals would devote themselves, their organizations and their conferences to frequent and thorough studies of the Christian mission as set forth in the biblical text. By its very nature, biblical mission entails clear biblical priorities. When we set agendas in accordance with human preferences and interests, the idea that we either have, or obey, a Great Commission is belied. When we redefine mission so as to encompass anything and everything the church and believers actually do, or even ought to do, we surrender the distinctive priorities of the Christian mission and risk assignment of the word to the terminological dustbin. Rather than setting still newer agendas as some are already doing, evangelicals should first set the boundaries of evangelical mission." -- (David J. Hesselgrave, *Evangelical Mission in 2001 and Beyond--Who Will set the Agenda?*" Pre-publication of TWF article, email attachment, April 5, 2001). And this next writer moves the subject from ecclesiology to Theology proper-"Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world." (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y.:Orbis, 1991, 390.) All of this is indeed a major paradigm shift that must be reckoned with. A good summary can be found at http://www.urbana.org/_articles.cfm?RecordId=993Note this is on the Urbana (IVCF) website

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:30

Saturday, January 6, 2007

GETTING IT STRAIGHT

It is not about us, about people. Our Mission is about GOD. It is not about eliminating poverty. It is not about saving souls. It is not about helping people with personal problems. Our Mission, as Christians, as the Church, is about lifting high the Name, making Him known, declaring His Glory to all. We have it backwards. Our Message is: "Behold your God!" Read Isaiah 40:3-10 When we get this straight and we publish the Good News about Him and what He has and is doing in the world, then, but only then, will we see souls saved and society really changed for the better.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:13

CELEBRATING THE DAY WHEN KINGS SHALL BOW

Psalm 97:9 For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. 1 Chronicles 16:26 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 96:3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. Psalm 113:4 The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Today is Epiphany, the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas. It is the day on which we move the figurines of the "Three Kings" into the Manger scene. A time of great celebration for many Christians, a day to give gifts to each other. But Epiphany is not about gift giving. It is all about Missions. These figures symbolize the Gentile Nations, coming to bow before their new King, the King over all Kings and Nations. This is prophesied. This shall happen! Epiphany anticipates that Day and so should we!

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:56

Friday, December 22, 2006

BEING A "MISSIONAL" CHURCH?

There has been a movement in this country for more than 15 years: Christians emerging from conservative, traditional, institutional churches into a new way of being and doing church, shaped by, and relevant to, the current cultural values, mores and interests of young adults. Some of these "emerging" churches (not all and not inevitably) are also "missional". I am here interacting with the latter group: emergent missional churches. They are a relatively small proportion of all churches, but growing in number and influence. It has become increasingly common to read and hear that these churches are the future; indeed, they supposedly are the only hope for churches to survive. The claim is that only missional churches are relevant to today's culture; all others will become marginalized (Interestingly, I have read others who insist the future belongs to churches that are Roman, Orthodox or Pentecostal and located primarily in the Global South. American Protestant churches will become marginalized, as they are now in Britain and Western Europe.) Advocates of the missional churches see this coming and are saying Protestant churches have a choice: become missional or marginal.

But being missional is far more than a pragmatic move for survival. There is a very definite Theology involved. When missional churches are described, we hear a lot about incarnation and cultural immersion and community and friendships and sharing and walking together on the journey of life, especially with the poor and marginalized. I certainly agree with all of that. But, behind all this, driving it, is a concept called the Mission of God ("Missio Dei") "Missional" does not mean "missions" or mission-minded in the traditional sense. It is not about a church sending out vocational Missionaries to distant places, reaching lost people with the Gospel of Grace. The Theology is that God is active in the world. He is on a mission of loving, caring and serving all people and thus redeeming their lives and the world and consequently, extending His Kingdom on earth. We do not do missions, we are "missional". To be missional is to be committed to carrying on this mission of God, or better, to be the instrument through which He fulfills His Mission, working with Him. This is what every single Christian, the entire Church (the People of God, not any particular institution), is called to do. Being missional is a mind-set, an identity: who we are and what we are all about: working with God on this mission to share His love in very practical ways, seeking to help others to also become missional ("passing it forward"). We do it, advocates say, by incarnating the Good News of God's presence and redeeming love in how we are, how we live and relate to others, everywhere we live and work, all the time. Words are futile or ineffective or counter productive apart from the incarnation of God's love and mercy and grace in our lives, in the world. The life of Jesus, as they see it, is the Model for Missional. Ideally, we are this way among the poor and marginalized- many of the advocates and practitioners of missional living are intentionally located in urban or inner city areas. There is a strong bent here toward progressive, "liberal", social and political activism. (The reality is most of us live among people of the same economic and social status as ourselves, where ever and whatever that might be. Most of us are also committed to "moving on up" in our economic and social status). I disagree with the concept of "Missio Dei". It sounds so good, so positive, so life-affirming, and so "Christian"- how could I not agree with it? The people I know who advocate being missional, and are doing so in their own way, are caring, good-hearted, idealistic people, seeking to follow Jesus (as they understand that). How could I not support them? I will try to explain. Yes, the Creator is directly involved in preserving His Creation and, yes, all people experience His common grace (even when they do not realize it). I believe in a strong Doctrine of Providence. I also believe that God has raised His Son, Jesus, to the Throne, in a literal Heaven, from which He now rules as Sovereign over all. I do not follow the Nazarene, I worship and serve the risen Lord. This is a major difference in focus and allegiance. It leads to a very different understanding of the Christian life. I believe that King Jesus is now reigning over the current events of the world. He is working out His purposes, directing all things to fulfill the Plan He has for Humanity and History to glorify His Name. One day all of the peoples and nations of the world will see and acknowledge Jesus to be God's Prophet, Priest and King. History will end with all bowing at His Feet, before His Throne. Making this happen is God's mission. I further believe that God sent Jesus to atone for the sins of the Elect. The purpose of the Incarnation was to enable God to become Man, one of us, in order to die as our Representative on the Cross. That was His Mission. Throughout all the centuries since, God has been actively calling the Elect to salvation, thus creating His Covenant People, for His Name's sake. That is His Mission. Yes, we should be living daily in terms of this mission, all of us, every Christian; but, I'm afraid none of this is what advocates of "missional" churches have in mind. Missional Christians say and believe they are orthodox, although they generally eschew Statements of Faith and seek to be very inclusive and ecumenical. Determining exactly what they believe is very difficult. I have honestly tried. Seeking harmony with all kinds of Christians and refusing to discriminate between "us and them" and trying to be non-judgmental, it is difficult to get them to articulate exactly what doctrines they adhere to. They seem

to claim something from every Denomination and Tradition and from other Religions, as well; being systematic and dogmatic goes against their grain. All of that makes me question how "orthodox", let alone evangelical, they actually are. I have read dozens of lengthy articles written by many advocates of missional churches and reviews by advocates of books written by advocates. I have read innumerable relevant Blogs and websites, both pro and con, in order to learn and develop some opinion about this Movement. I recognize that there are many variations of "missional" and various Pastors and writers are selective in what they adopt or reject from all of this. Even though I disagree with and am really disturbed by much of what I have read, nevertheless we can and must learn and benefit from its advocates. They raise important issues, justified criticisms of evangelical churches, and valuable insights about our American culture, which we dare not ignore. I share much of their assessment and dissatisfaction with contemporary churches. I really do! I think I have read enough to form a fair understanding of what the "missional" church is supposed to be about. The major advocates do not believe in the traditional, Pauline, Book-of-Romans, Reformed, Calvinist Gospel of Grace. They seem to be ignorant of, or misunderstand, or repudiate, or have radically changed the meaning of, all five of the key Calvinist Doctrines (TULIP), as well as the 5 Solas of the Reformation. Most glaring to me, in what I read, is the omission of the "Fall", the Doctrine of Total Depravity, the Bondage of the Will, the Antithesis and Curse and the need for Regeneration and that, by prevenient and irresistible Grace. Rather, there seems to be great optimism about human nature and great value put upon freedom (and ability) to make choices. They do not believe that the Church is to publish and propagate the (Reformed) Gospel around the world, bringing this Truth to Peoples who do not have Truth. To them, just saying that is presumptuous and arrogant on my part. They reject the concept of absolutes and propositional Truth (defined as correspondence, rather than coherence), let alone that the Bible contains it. (Thus, they reveal academic, post modern roots) In fact, everything I have just said above, that I believe, is nonsense or offensive to the main persons who speak for this Movement or else is simply ignored by them, not on their screen at all. To them, above all, God is Love (grounded in the nature of the Trinity) The Triune God's love is missional- it reaches out, seeking and calling everyone to Himself. If I understand them correctly, all people are on a journey to God or Jesus, whether they realize it or not. Our mission is to befriend everyone we can, walk with them on their Journey, and help them to recognize God, or Jesus, already in their lives (recognize His call and love) and help them to follow Him further, if they so chose. This is best done in Community. In fact, belonging to a Community of people, who are each helping the other on their respective journeys to Jesus, is the best way of finally becoming the person God intends for each of us to be, a person who will incarnate the love of God and intentionally pass it on, keeping the mission going. The Reformed approach is different. Sinners are called and regenerated by the Spirit of God, through hearing and believing the (Reformed) Gospel. Thus, at that moment in their life, they become justified in Christ and the adopted children of God. Consequently, they belong to the Faith Community, known as the Church. [They become one of us] Through its Sacraments, Preaching/Teaching, Discipline and Fellowship these justified Believers will then grow in grace to become the persons God intends for us to be. Such persons will be righteous. They shall seek to know and walk in the Spirit, according to the Law of God. This is the missing component in most churches. Christians often do not incarnate the grace of God in their daily lives (walk the talk) and often do not seek to live by the Principles of His Kingdom. The latter is a major problem I have with all kinds of evangelical churches- emergent, missional or traditional, charismatic and Reformed, too. Across the board, they all talk about the need to love others and to be involved in works of compassion and mercy. Increasingly, from every quarter, I read and hear about the need for evangelical Believers to engage their culture and the social issues of the world, especially Poverty. But what defines these actions? What standard is used to determine what God wants in these matters? The talk should be about Righteousness and Justice. These define what it means to Love. And the Law (Torah) defines what God means by Righteousness and Justice. The principles of the Kingdom are not selected from the teachings of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels (especially the Sermon on the Mount). They are found in the Law (Torah), interpreted and applied in light of the teachings of the Prophets, Jesus and the Apostles (through out the New Testament). The Great Commission has never been cancelled. Obeying it is the Scriptural way to be "missional". The Church, all Christians, should make it their responsibility to publish and share the Gospel about repentance and the forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus to all people groups (ethnicities and cultures) and make disciples of those who believe that Gospel, by baptizing them (into the Church) and teaching them (in the Church) to obey the Commandments. <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/567.htm> http://www.friendofmissional.org/reading_list.html <http://www.friendofmissional.org/http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/missional.pdf> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/11.57.html> <http://amazon.com/o/ASIN/0802843506/brianmclarenn-20/ref=nosim> <http://www.theofframp.org/about.html> <http://www.challies.com/archives/000710.php> <http://www.coolchurches.com/news/2005june.htm> <http://www.nextreformation.com/wp-admin/reviews/secret1.htm> <http://www.theofframp.org/emerging.html> http://theolgblog.typepad.com/theolgblog/2006/06/lesslie_newbigi.html http://www.urbana.org/_articles.cfm?RecordId=993 http://www.theofframp.org/missional_comm.html

Monday, December 4, 2006

7x5=75

The latest newsletter from Gordon Seminary has an article insisting that if we want to communicate the Bible to today's younger generations we must use the alleged preferred language and method of the Bible, i.e.- visual imagery and stories. A recent article in Touchstone Magazine states "4 billion people in our world can't, don't or won't learn through literary means. The primary way...is through oral communication...not through books." We are also told by many that efforts to teach must avoid being authoritative, i.e.- one way, from an Expert to an audience; rather, the most effective learning is cooperative and by group discovery directed by Facilitators. The preferred preaching method uses narratives and is dialogical, inviting participation by the congregation.

I think the real issue here is not method, but content; not books, but the content of the books (and the sermons). Books that contain science fiction, fantasy and romance or stories rich in color and imagery are very popular. Words and books per se are not out, here in America. Books (or sermons) that seek to transmit received truths using linear, sequential reasoning, requiring careful attention to verbal evidence and argument, leading to definite conclusions, are what is in disfavor. And my suspicion is, this is the case, because "truths", objective knowledge and reason are in disfavor. A child wrote on a chalkboard during a math class, $7 \times 5 = 75$. She said, "This may be wrong, but it is how I feel today." This story is from a book review in the current Christianity Today, written by Stephen Carter, professor of law at Yale. He is reviewing *The Decline of the Secular University*, by C.J. Sommerville. The story, he says, summarizes the book. Academia rejected Religion, then Philosophy, then Reason. "Faith is dead, reason is dying, but 'how I feel' is going strong", in Academia. This might go a long way to explaining why the people in the pew, who are products of that Academia, prefer videos and stories.

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:00

Monday, November 13, 2006

Charles Simeon, Role Model?

Was he just stubborn or arrogant or faithful? Today, the Church Calendar celebrates the life and very fruitful ministry of the Rev. Charles Simeon, Evangelical Anglican, who lived some 200 years ago and served the same Parish for 55 years- against great opposition from its members through out most of those years. They tried everything they could to get rid of him (even changed the locks on the door). He would not quit. His tenacity is mindboggling. He almost gave up when he became 60 years old, but something like a miracle happened and he renewed his commitment to stay in his pulpit for 17 more years. You can read the inspiring story at <http://www.puritansermons.com/banner/simeon.htm>

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:17

Monday, October 30, 2006

WHAT PRICE TO PAY FOR A TRADITION?

Three local Synagogues will vote this week on a plan to merge into one congregation. Their membership has been flat for a number of years and if they do not do something, they will have to close. The Problem? They are Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jews must walk to Sabbath Services (which we see them faithfully doing every week). This, they believe, is what the command not to work on the Sabbath entails. It is a sorry tale. The Law does not interpret driving a car as "work", the Orthodox tradition does. Apparently, they would rather have their Synagogues close than break this man-made tradition. Sound familiar?

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:05

PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Hopefully, your church yesterday commemorated Reformation Sunday. The only church here that advertised it was an "open and affirming", liberal UCC congregation. But, as always, definitions count. To some churches Reformation Sunday is not about the great Reformed Doctrines of Grace or about our Protestant Heritage. Apparently, to them it is a celebration of the "reforming" of the church, which means becoming more liberal. Not what I have in mind at all. Among the major doctrines of the Reformation was the one promoted by Martin Luther called the Priesthood of All Believers. For Luther the main point of this was that all believers in a congregation have the privilege and responsibility to pray for, and minister to, each other, in what ever way possible. This is being a "priest". For the Calvinists, the main point of the Doctrine (not denying the other point) was that all believers, through Christ, may approach God directly. This is being a "priest". There is no need for an intermediary, specifically an ordained Priest (not to mention Mary and the Saints). In Christ, all believers are priests (as defined by the Reformers). All have direct access into the Holiest of Holies. This is being a "priest". Some churches, of course, have particular people designated as Priests. That is confusing and sounds contradictory. It is. They try to retain the Reformation Doctrine by designating all members as "Ministers". Actually, the contradiction disappears if the definition of "Priest" is changed to mean the person officially authorized by the Denomination to preside over the Lord's Supper. Many Believers miss all these distinctions. They must be taught the Protestant Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:13

Monday, October 23, 2006

REFORMATION SUNDAY

This coming Sunday is the annual observance by Lutheran and Reformed Churches of the Day that has come to be known as the official beginning of the Protestant Reformation. For a good overview of the event, its antecedents and consequences, here are two helpful websites <http://www.stpaulskingsville.org/reformation.htm> <http://www.history.pcusa.org/cong/reformation.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:18

Tuesday, October 3, 2006

WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM

A few have wondered why I do not get back to pastoring a church. I admit that some painful personal experiences, in several churches, have made me real shy about trying again as a Pastor. But, in all honesty (and I have wrestled a lot with this) that is not the main reason I am no longer a Pastor. The Ordination Certificate hanging on my wall in this office reminds me that I was ordained to "Gospel Ministry". I assumed for years that meant the Pastorate. It does not. Gospel Ministry and the pastorate should go together, but they are not inseparable. Many people, who are not Pastors, do Gospel Ministry. I am now one of them. Actually, I miss being a Pastor. I really do. I miss preaching every week. I miss ministering to people, relating to people, as their Pastor. I do not miss church work. Mostly, I am turned off by what I see happening in churches everywhere, as churches. I do not want to be a part of them as they are now. It would not be a good fit. Nehemiah walked around Jerusalem and wept at what he saw. I weep at what I see in today's emerging churches. If you read anything I post on this Blog, you know I do not agree with a lot of the trends that are so popular, in "evangelical" churches, mainline churches and among so-called "radical" communities. They are all very upsetting to me and I am a well-grounded, solid Believer who has preached and taught the Bible for 50 years. That should mean something- a yellow, if not a red, flag to those younger people who are so enthusiastic about today's trends.

The need is for a truly radical approach and I find that in Neocalvinism and its holistic world view, seeking to extend the crown rights of Christ over all of life. I do not know of any church or community in this area that is into doing this.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF NEO-CALVINISM Creation, Fall and Redemption. God's good Creation has been disrupted by the Fall. It is still essentially good. Redemption is a restoration of Creation. Rejection of Dualism. Dualism has been rife in Christian thinking. The most notable dualism is between nature and grace. Neo-Calvinists maintain that grace restores nature. All of life is to be redeemed. Jesus' lordship extends through every area and aspect of life-it is not restricted to the sphere of church or of personal spirituality or personal morality Cultural Mandate Genesis 1:26-28 has been described as a cultural mandate. It is the mandate to cultivate and develop the Creation and this involves Culture and Civilization. The Role of Law. Law is more than the Decalogue. It is the Torah and includes the creation ordinances established by God. These laws provide the norms for living in God's world.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:11

Saturday, September 30, 2006

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Isaiah 66 (Meditation from today's OT Reading)⁷ "Before she [Jerusalem] was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. ⁸ Who has heard such a thing? ... Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? [the baby was a Nation] For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. From out of Zion [old Israel] came Christ and the Church cf Rev 12:1-6, Gal.4:21-32, esp v.26 and Heb 12:22 et al. Christians are Zion's "children".¹⁰ "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; Is this the old Jerusalem or the new one? The words are spoken to the children. They [we Christians] are to appreciate and enjoy their mother, old Jerusalem.¹¹ ... you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance." ¹² ... you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. See Rom 3:210:1f,11:1f,17f¹³ ... so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. [old Israel] ¹² ... thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; This is a prophecy. The future for old Israel is bright, but her future is in her children, not in her. She shall find peace and honor through them- not in who she once was. That old Israel is no more. Personal note to me: May this not also be true of today's ECUSA? I would be comforted by God through her historic riches and heritage. I would be nourished by her Liturgy and spiritual Tradition. She, as she is now, however, has no future. Her peace and honor is to come from new children.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:12

Friday, September 29, 2006

TRYING TO STAY RELEVANT

It is not just churches. Restaurants, Movies, TV, Radio, the Music Industry (especially Classical), Newspapers, Boy and Girl Scouts, the Auto Industry- all constantly are changing to keep up with a changing market and demanding, fickle consumers. This is a topic of constant concern in magazine articles. A current example: FFA no longer stands for "Future Farmers of America". It is now simply the "National FFA" and is now geared to attract and meet the interests of urban and suburban youth. They study everything from rocketry, textiles, robotics and dog training to nutrition and landscaping. They are not studying or being trained to become future farmers. No matter, supporters say. FFA is growing in numbers and is really about leadership development and that purpose is still being met. This comes up in an article in today's paper about the local "Big E", New England's largest agricultural Fair. There are still a few tractors and some sheep to be seen, but the almost million people who attend each year are far more interested in food, carnival rides, big name entertainers and the Home Improvement Center exhibits of all those knives that cut through brick and metal. The Fair brings in some \$80 million to the "local economy". That is what it is about, not agriculture. Can we see the future in all of this for the local churches who are constantly changing to keep up with the "market"?

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:21

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

A GREAT SHAME

During the prayers at an Episcopal Church Service, I am reminded that the local church is really but a parish in a Diocese in a Province in a National Denomination when we pray for the local Priest and the Bishop and the Presiding Bishop, as well. Many Episcopalians seem to think or act as though they were Congregationalists. These prayers alone should correct that. With prayers for the Presiding Bishop, I am reminded of the problems within the National Church. The President and Dean of the one Evangelical Episcopal Seminary (Trinity) from which our son, Loren, graduated, declared this, in his column in the current issue of the school magazine: "At its General Convention [this Summer], the Episcopal Church left orthodox Christianity behind, decisively and definitely." He listed several reasons he believes this. The first one is the election of the new Presiding Bishop, "whose views incline to heresy in faith and morals". He concludes, "We shall have to place ourselves under a different flag." Certainly, the new Presiding Bishop needs our prayers, but every time we mention her name, I am reminded of what the dean has said. To my great dismay, the local Bishop and the ECUSA Clergy, I know locally, do not seem to have any problem with the National Church, while some of us agonize over it. In fact, they seem to either marginalize or ridicule the Dean and those of us who agree with him. That is a great shame.

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:40

Saturday, September 23, 2006

THE HOUSE OF GOD

1 Kings 8.1-30 Solomon built and dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem as the House of God. He prays to the Lord and concludes with this—"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, "My name shall be there", that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive." Solomon knew that this Temple he had built was to be where God could be found and worshipped. At the same time, he knew God could not be confined to a building. God was "bigger" than that. In the New Testament, we learn that the Church is the Temple, the House, in which God dwells and can be found [no salvation outside of the Church]. Like Solomon, we know that God can not be contained in this spiritual House. He is our Father in Heaven. He dwells above and over all. Yet, we pray that tomorrow, when we gather together in His Presence, as the Church, as His Temple, we pray His eyes would be open and His ears attentive to what we say and do: that He will heed and forgive and renew us.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:55

TELLING STORIES IN CHURCH

We constantly hear that stories are the best way to communicate the truths that are in the Bible. Whatever God has revealed, we "hear" it best when it is presented in story form, especially for the younger generation that has been raised on TV, movies and music videos, more than on the written and spoken word. When they do read, novels and narratives are most effective. I appreciate all of that. There is power in stories. No debate there. The debate is when historical accuracy is important. Thus the great debate over the DaVinci Code. It is increasingly popular, because it is very effective, to use docudrama. The problem of this art form is accuracy (or historical truth). When fiction and non-fiction are combined, especially when both dialogue and monologue are invented out of a screenwriter's [or Preacher's] imagination. How do we know what to believe? This applies also to the editing that juxtaposes scenes from many sources. That too can lead to false conclusions. This has been the question with the recent cinematic work of Roger Moore, Al Gore and now the recent ABC documentary on 9/11. The following is a quote taken from an editorial in the current Sep 29, 2006 issue of The Week—"...Can we all at least now agree that docudramas "are a poor way to teach children and adults history"? said John Fund in Opinionjournal.com. It's a shame that those leveling these—justified—criticisms at ABC [about the 9/11 movie] "were silent or worse" back in 2003 when CBS produced a docudrama in which President Reagan callously shrugged off the plight of AIDS victims with the words, "They that live in sin shall die in sin." Fabricating dialogue and scenes in the name of "artistic license" and "narrative flow" might be permissible when making a movie about, say, the siege of Troy. But with events as significant, and recent, as 9/11, "history is too important to be left to storytellers who emphasize drama ahead of accuracy." This applies also to teaching what is in the Bible and Church History.

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:56

Monday, August 28, 2006

WHAT DO YOUNG CHRISTIANS WANT?

The September edition of Christianity Today juxtaposes some very interesting articles with widely different views of today's evangelical youth. The cover story is about an alleged resurgence of Calvinism among young adult Believers. They especially are drawn to the writing and teaching of John Piper- 1000s attend conferences to hear him and other Calvinists, such as the President of Southern Baptist Seminary. Other than one young man who is beginning studies at SBC this month, I personally know of no young adults interested in Calvinism and I am very skeptical of what this "comeback" of Reformed Faith might really mean. Obviously, I would be delighted if it is true. Sad to say, nothing is mentioned about any interest in Neocalvinism. Another article is about Missions and young Christians. Thousands of them are going abroad on short term "mission" trips (often two weeks to two months) during the Summers. Very few go on to become career Missionaries. They are not primarily interested in reaching the Lost with the Gospel. They go to minister in practical ways to the Poor, mostly in city ghettos (sometimes in inner cities here in the USA). According to this view of young Christian adults, the latter are not primarily interested in Truth or Doctrine (let alone Calvinism). They are far more interested in Mercy and Compassion (Social and Economic Justice). Furthermore, they are interested in working on these issues, ministering hands on with the Poor, in Community, not as career oriented individuals. This view is much closer to reality than the first, in my experience and reading. I know many of these young people. Leaders of this group are not Calvinists, but are at home in the Anabaptist Tradition. The third view of young Christians is that many are interested in "Spiritual Formation", classic spiritual Disciplines and catholic spirituality. The major influence in this movement is Dallas Willard, often working with Richard Foster. These men are not Calvinists!

Posted by Cal in Church at 21:13

Thursday, July 13, 2006

To Fight or not to Fight

Many denominations are undergoing upheaval, considering changes to their traditional doctrines and practices. It forces members to make difficult choices. To me, everyone must be honest about who they are and where they stand on the issues. I offer the following story as an illustration about what I mean- My first full-time pastorate was with a fundamental Baptist Church. It was an altogether positive experience. As Baptists, of course, we believed that the Bible was our authority for our faith and practice. During the third year or so, I became convinced that our practice as a Baptist Church was not as Biblical as it could be. The more I studied the New Testament Church, the more I wanted to see changes made, e.g.- a plurality of Elders (instead of Deacons) and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. I shared my studies and conclusions with the Leaders (Deacons). We were close friends and the church was growing. We were embarking on a building program, which actually led to a new building in the next town. What I was proposing was not "Baptist". I did not want to split the church. I believed if I could no longer agree with the practice of the church that had hired me, the only fair and honest thing to do was resign. I would not stay and try to change it from something it had been for over 75 years- a fundamental Baptist Church. This would not have been fair or honest on my part. I would not stay and cause conflict and maybe split the church. As it turned out, the next (maybe the second) Pastor they hired, led them to remove the very Baptist requirement of Believers Baptism for membership [non-baptized Believers could now become members] The camel's nose was under the tent. The next Pastor was allowed to replace the Deacons with Elders (something he later admitted he intended to do before he accepted the position) and they, in turn removed much of the authority of the congregation. Then they dropped "Baptist" from their name and are now known as a "Community" church. I was angry and disgusted with the Pastors who led these changes, for being dishonest with this old Baptist Church, as well as with the membership for allowing themselves to be persuaded into voting for these changes. They sold out their Heritage. I understand almost all of the original Baptists took their membership elsewhere. They had become outnumbered by the new, non-Baptist Believers and could do nothing to revert back to their Roots. The new Pastor and these folks had their own church. It has had great numerical growth and is well known. The church I had known and served, which had been very good to me and my family, no longer exists. To pretend I was still a Baptist, when I was not, for the sake of income (to support my wife and children) or to stay on and secretly pray and work behind the scenes to get the church to change would not have been fair or honest. I think I did the honest thing and my successors did not. I have since left other churches for similar reasons, even though the particulars were very different. I have learned the hard way to either go with the ecclesiastical flow or move on. I will never again try to change a church from what it wants to be or, if I have changed, to try to get it to change with me.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:56

Wednesday, July 12, 2006

Job Two

In the post prior to this one, the question was asked, "Whatever happened to the idea of rescuing people from Hell?" In another article from CT, the answer could be "Plenty"; but the definition of "hell" would be life in war torn Congo and the "plenty" would refer to the work of the Church there to rescue people suffering from the violence. It is very regretful that a division is made between 'saving souls" and social work. This is a false, unscriptural dichotomy. Job One is absolutely preaching the Old Time Gospel and seeking to lead sinners to a saving knowledge of Christ. Job Two is making those "saved" sinners into disciples of Christ. This is not "either/or" It is both. The majority of the people in Congo, those killing and those being killed, are professing Christians. Missionaries have been working in that area for generations. Some how, these "Christians" have never been truly regenerated ("Saved") or they have never been disciplined. Thus they are living in "Hell" today. The linked article (also see the related articles in the same issue), however, tells of the good work being done in Congo by the Lord through some wonderful individuals and agencies. There is Hope in the Heart of Darkness for sure! <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/007/10.22.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:20

Monday, July 10, 2006

Job One

"Whatever happened to the idea of rescuing people from hell?" That is the lead question in an article in the current CT by Robertson McQuilkin, former President of Columbia International University (formerly Columbia Bible College, a good, solid Bible School with a heart for old fashioned missions) Dr McQuilkin correctly notices several shifts that have effected missionary work. One is the loss of a belief in the lostness of, well, the Lost. The Bible clearly teaches that without Christ, sinners perish, lost forever. The wages of sin is eternal death (Hell). Believing this used to fire the passion for evangelism. My early years as a Christian were driven by a desire to "save the Lost". We were determined to "win souls" for Christ and Eternity. This emphasis, this doctrine, is almost lost among "Evangelicals" today. And Missionary fire has died out with it. It has been replaced with wholistic ministry (social action) or with a desire that people need a personal relationship with Christ to find meaning and purpose in their life or help with their problems. In both cases, the emphasis today is on the here and now- this world, not the next. (This, by the way, is what happened in main line churches in the last generation. This shift is seen in the exchange of the word "Mission" [as in "we are going on a mission next month"] for "Missions". And "Mission" has often been replaced by "Ministry". Every one is encouraged to go on a mission or do ministry, but rarely are people encouraged to become career missionaries to reach the billions of people who are facing an eternity in Hell. The very popular and growing practice of sending Teams on very short term Mission trips gives those who go on them a wonderful eye-opening experience, but this has not translated into furthering missionary work. I have heard that conclusion reached repeatedly by Missionaries. Before anything else, the Gospel is to be preached to all Nations and the Gospel is first and foremost about the eternal redemption of sinners. We must not forget that Christ came to shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins and to secure eternal salvation for those who come to saving faith in Christ.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:40

Friday, June 30, 2006

There are none so blind as those who will not see

The Mainline church conventions that I followed are over. Every year dire predictions are made that this will be the one in which "the issues" will finally be resolved. As usual, they were not. Movement was made, but no resolution. Supposedly, "the issues" are extremely important, life or death for the Denomination. People are called names and serious accusations are made. Then the final gavel falls and everyone goes home. Life goes on- for now. Very few mathematicians seem to care about "foundations" or the philosophy of math. They much prefer doing math, than discussing math. Actually, they seem to disdain discussion of the meaning of math or the truthfulness or even the reality of the many faith assumptions under girding math. All that is really important is that math works. Somehow, it solves problems. That is what matters- solving the immediate problem at hand in their specialty. They are pragmatists. So are the churchmen. All that really matters is getting their work done at home, on the local level. Whatever the Denomination may or may not do, however major the issues may be on the national scene, all that really counts to most Pastors is what is happening in their own local parish. Certainly that is true for the parishioners as well. I understand that very well. We all are pragmatists. What is important is what works now. In the long run, this is suicide. If the foundation, of math or of churches, crumble, all that is built upon it will fall. Be sure, the foundations are crumbling!

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:07

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Take the American Flag out of Church?

RC Sproul Jr, in an article in the current journal of his Highlands Study Center, strongly urges Christians to remove the American flag from their churches. Why?1. Conservative American Christians are prone to worshipping America. The flag in church is a reminder and temptation to do that along with our worship of God. The American flag, side by side with the Christian flag, combines and equates the worship of one with the other.2. The flag symbolizes a Nation that is at odds with God on many moral issues, eg- it condones abortion. Thus, the flag is a symbol of national shame.3. The American flag in a our local churches denies that the Church is catholic, universal, international. Before we are citizens of the United States, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God which has no national borders. Sproul grants that most churches have American flags simply out of tradition and respect for our country and that what he has said has never occurred to them. Do you think his reasons for removing the flag from church have any merit?

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:55

Friday, June 16, 2006

The Real Issue

My approach to Economics, Government, Epistemology, Logic and Mathematics (in the articles on my website) all begin with Scripture and Theology. I do not approach these subjects as a scholar in those fields. I approach them as a Christian. My purpose in posting the articles is to encourage others to also investigate all subjects from a Biblical perspective. I start with the Bible. What does it say about these subjects- not what do Scientists or Specialists say. Why? Because we, as evangelical, Reformed Christians claim the Bible is our Authority in faith and practice. I have to research the Subject in both the Scripture and in "secular" (non-Christian), academic materials in order to make the comparison. But my commitment is to go with the Scripture first, no matter what I might read elsewhere. The Word takes precedence. I mention this because this issue is lost in the current debates in both the Presbyterian (USA) and Episcopal Church (USA) Conventions. Headlines would have the public believe that the major issue in both groups is sexuality, particularly the ordination of openly gay clergy. This is not the major issue. This is only the current manifestation of it. The Major Issue is the Authority of Scripture. Former Senator Danforth, Episcopal priest, is quoted in today's paper as saying "99 percent of people couldn't care less who the bishop of diocese X or Z is [read: gay or not]." To him the debate is over an irrelevant and very minor, divisive issue. An official representative of the Diocese of Western Mass agrees. She has no problem with ordaining practicing gay Priests and Bishops. "It is hard to apologize for what you believe is the will of God", she is quoted as saying. Both of these people, and multitudes of others, ignore or miss the real issue completely: the Authority of the Bible about everything. A vote on the issue of "Gay Ordination" is not actually a vote on that. Evangelicals in the Church are deceiving themselves, if they believe otherwise.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:07

Monday, June 12, 2006

The Importance of Men being "Fathers"

I am preaching this week at the Church we have been attending most regularly since moving back to Springfield (Christ Presbyterian) It will be Father's Day. One of the major, major problems everywhere in our society is the absence of men as fathers in the lives of their children. Enough can not be said about the importance of fathers in the home, with their wives and children, together, as a family. The Biblical Model of Family and Church gives great importance to fathers. This is the major reason I oppose the installation of women as Pastors. No question, women can function admirably as father figures in families and in churches. They simply should not be. It is an essential God-given role for men to be fathers, essential in families and in the church, which is, after all. the family of God, whom we call our Father.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:17

Sunday, June 11. 2006

Heavenly Worship

As we go to Church this morning, what I would love to experience is Worship such as described in this passage from Revelation-After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here ...At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.' And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.'

Posted by Cal in Church at 07:46

Sunday, June 4, 2006

Happy Birthday

Sunday, June 4, 2006 The Day of Pentecost We have been proclaiming this wonderful truth for weeks now, since Easter Sunday- Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! So what about it? Many seem content to simply know that Jesus lives and therefore, we shall also. But where has He been? He arose some 2000 years ago. In Heaven, you say. Well, what has He been doing there all this time? Last week, we answered that question when we celebrated Ascension Day. Jesus received all power and authority, as He ascended the Throne of God the Father and began to reign over all. Today, we celebrate His first big move: He poured out His Holy Spirit, upon His Church, here on earth. His Spirit came to dwell within His Body. That means this is also the Birthday of the Church. Big Day! Happy Birthday! I hope you and your local Community of Faith will enjoy a great Celebration. Wear red. Most of all, be open to a fresh infilling of the Spirit, whose presence within us is the key to abundant Life and ministry in the Kingdom. Amen.

Posted by Cal in Church at 07:28

Tuesday, May 30, 2006

You know you are Old or "Traditional" if you know these Hymns

The Dentist's Hymn.....Crown Him With Many Crowns The Weatherman's Hymn....There shall be showers of Blessing The Contractor's Hymn.....The Church's One Foundation The Tailor's Hymn.....Holy, Holy, Holy The Golfer's Hymn.....There is A Green Hill Far Away The Politician's Hymn.....Standing on the Promises The Optometrist's Hymn.....Open My Eyes That I might See The IRS Agent's Hymn.....I Surrender All The Gossip's Hymn.....Pass It On The Electrician's Hymn.....Send the Light The Shopper's Hymn.....Sweet By and By Now, for those who speed on the highway : 45 mph.....God Will Take Care of You 55 mph.....Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah 65 mph.....Nearer My God to Thee 75 mph.....Nearer Still Nearer 85 mph.....This World Is Not My Home 95 mph.....Lord, I'm Coming Home over 100 mph.....Precious Memories Thanks to Melissa and www.2hearts.org.uk/smileschurch.htm

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:47

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Pro Rege

"Pro Rege" means "for the King". It is the purpose of living. As mentioned Tuesday, on this Blog, today is the commemoration of one of the great events in the life of Jesus: His Coronation as King of all kings. Ascension Day is the occasion upon which Jesus was crowned with all authority and power in Heaven and on Earth. "Long live the King" and may we all be his loyal lieges!

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:45

Tuesday, May 23, 2006

Days of Celebration

Yesterday (Tuesday) was Rogation Day. We were introduced to this observance at the Episcopal Church we attended here in Springfield, more than 25 years ago. The congregation made a procession around the Church building, stopping several times to ask God's blessing on Spring time growth of trees and flowers and the gardens that would soon be planted. The word "rogation" comes from a Latin word for asking (praying). This quaint custom began in England in the 6th Century. You may or may not be interested in such an observance. I know some of you do talk to your plants, so you might talk to God about them too. Another annual observance happens this week. This one should not be missed. Observing it could go a long way to correcting and improving the life of the Church. Tomorrow (Thursday) is Ascension Day. If we observe the birth of Jesus (Christmas), the death of Jesus (Good Friday) and the resurrection of Jesus (Easter), what good reason do we have for failure to observe the ascension of Jesus? It is equally as important as the other Days. After Jesus arose from the grave, what happened? He went to Heaven. But that does not mean, simply, that He was alive. It means that He ascended to the Throne to rule, with all power and authority, as Sovereign over all. His Kingdom had begun. The world would never be the same. Ascension Day celebrates Jesus' enthronement as our King. In two weeks (June 4th), we will celebrate the first official act of our Sovereign- He poured out His Holy Spirit upon His Church, His Body on earth. That Day is Pentecost. Wear red.

Posted by Cal in Church at 23:21

Hymns vs Choruses?

An old farmer goes to the city one weekend and attends the big city church. He comes home and his wife asks him how it was. "Well," says the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns." "Praise choruses," says the wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're ok. They're sort of like hymns, only different," says the farmer. "Well, what's the difference?" asks his wife. The farmer says, "Well, it's like this - If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well, that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: 'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA. The cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, the CORN, CORN, CORN.' Then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus." The same Sunday, a young, new Christian from the city attends the small town church. He returns home and his wife asks how it was. "Well," says the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs." "Hymns," says his wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're ok. They're sort of like regular songs, only different." says the young man. "What's the difference?" asks the wife. The young man says, "Well, It's like this - If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a regular song. If on the other hand, I were to say to you: Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry Inclinest thine ear to the words of my mouth. Turn thou thy whole wonderous ear by and by To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth. For the way of the animals who can explain There in their heads is no shadow of sense. Harkenest they in God's sun or his rain Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced. Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight, Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed. Then goaded by minions of darkness and night They all my mild Chilliwick sweet corn have chewed. So look to that bright shining day by and by, Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn. Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn. Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four and do a key change on the last verse, well that would be a hymn." -----submitted by a regular Reader of this Blog

Posted by Cal in Church at 22:31

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

Megachurches

I have been surprised that only 4 readers of the Blog have checked out the King of the Hill video about megachurches- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qtl2pa2m5cg> The current issue of Your Church magazine came today. There is an article about megachurches, defined as churches with weekly attendance over 2000. Average attendance is 3585. Only about 1 in 270 churches is that size but five to seven percent of all church goers attend them. The numbers are growing, nearly doubling in the last 5 years. Megachurches are overwhelmingly "evangelical" and the majority are affiliated with a denomination (26% Baptist) , as are most churches

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:46

Monday, May 8, 2006

A Perverse Propensity

The Episcopal Church remains roiled over the issue of homosexuality: marriage, ordination. The big Convention that may settle the issue once for all comes up next month. Actually, all agree that the roil is not primarily about sexuality. It is about Authority- Who or what has it. And as to the Authority of the Scripture, it is about the authority of interpretation: whose. Post Modern "Christians" have a real problem with "Authority". They rejected the classic correspondence definition of Truth in favor of the newer coherence theory of Truth. But that, apparently is hard to get a handle on. Growing in favor is the idea that Truth is subjective and always changing. The most reliable way to determine Truth about anything is in Community. Let the Community share and discuss all possible viewpoints, pray, listen to the Spirit ("God is still speaking") and seek a consensus. In other words, Authority is in the Community. Somehow, that is better than following the common sense meaning of Scripture, Creeds and time honored Tradition and universal practice in the Church. And somehow the results of such a Community effort turns out to be "open and affirming" policies favoring diversity and moral relativism. Read: approval and support of Gay and Feminist agendas. The more traditional approach does lead there. The post modern propensity for "Community" is perverse.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:20

Saturday, May 6, 2006

Tradition Lives

This morning we went to see the daughter of a friend receive First Communion at a nearby Roman Catholic Church. I keep hearing about the need for churches to use "seeker friendly" methods to attract today's generation. Well, it was a real pleasure to sit among at least 700 parishoners, mostly young or middle age contemporary families, participating in a very traditional Mass. Some 50 second graders, dressed in their very best clothes, behaved beautifully. Who says kids can't sit still in church. The Pastor delivered well a very heart felt and carefully articulated message. The focus was on Christ, the meaning of Communion and the children. The children sang and some did readings and prayers. They proceeded in and out very seriously. The building itself is a beautiful and spacious sacred space. People in the pews were very reverent and participated appropriately. It was a wonderful Service well done and without the slightest evidence of proclivity to post modernism. Imagine that!

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:20

Friday, May 5, 2006

Would Moses be welcome in today's Church?

I was struck by how politically incorrect today's OT Reading is-Exodus 24:1-18 (NRSV) There was one central authority. It was not in the Community. God was giving orders about what he wanted- The Authority was in Him. No Community was involved in any decisions He was making on behalf of the Community¹ [God] said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. God decided who was to approach Him in Worship. Some would be allowed and others would not. ² Moses alone shall come near the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." Moses' responsibility was to only pass on, faithfully, what God revealed. ³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; The Community was not involved in any of the above matters: They were not involved in determining what God said to Moses or to them. They were not involved in who would lead in Worship or what they would do. The Community had only one decision to make: to obey or not to obey what God revealed.and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." What the Lord wanted was written down. What the Community was to obey was the written Word, The Law, the Scripture⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. And he led in a Worship Service, which included the consecration and commitment of the Community to those wordsHe rose early in the morning, and built an altar ...⁵ Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." We have come a long way from Sinai to today's contemporary, post modern, emerging Church. What we read above would never happen today. What does that say about today's po mo church?

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:12

Thursday, May 4, 2006

Looking for a new church? Check out this video

Twice today, I've run into articles about the band, Mercy Me. They contain other interesting material about contemporary Christian Music.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/music/artists/mercyme.html><http://www.christianitytoday.com/music/interviews/2006/mercyme-0506.html>For the record [no pun intended], I've been reading Christianity Today since it began publication in 1956- every issue! It is the one that I consider essential to keep up on what's happening in the world of Evangelicals. That world and the magazine have changed a lot over these 50 years. An acerbic and funny (actually, sad) look at some of the changes can be seen here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtI2pa2m5cg>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:34

Friday, April 28, 2006

Cork or Screwtop?

There is a growing trend to replace cork stoppers in wine bottles with screwtops. Experts in the subject seem to agree that the screwtops are better for a number of reasons. It even preserves the quality of the wine itself. Cork actually can contaminate wine and many bottles go bad because of this. Even those who adamantly oppose using the screwtops agree with their advantages. Why then do they strongly resist using them? One reason is the association in the past of aluminum screwtops with rotgut, very cheap wine. The major reason is tradition, particularly the ritual associated with opening the bottle with the cork screw. The traditionalists want to keep the, ah, Tradition. Is there any correlation here with Christian traditionalists opposing newer ways of "doing church"? Do we really want to just keep tradition for its own sake, because we are comfortable with it, because we enjoy our own "bottle-opening" rituals? First, do we agree that new ways of doing church improve and actually better preserve the "wine" we value and have paid a very high price for over the years? If we agree, we have no argument, other than personal preference: we just like cork stoppers. If we do not agree, in fact if we can demonstrate that the "screwtops" actually change or even destroy the "wine" we have valued for centuries, then we have a good case for defending our cork stoppers. Can we do that?

Posted by Cal in Church at 17:06

Thursday, April 27, 2006

Sunday School or Spiritual Formation?

Increasingly, evangelical Churches no longer have Sunday Schools. They are being replaced by something called "Spiritual Formation" Hour. Here is a standard definition of what that involves-"What Is Spiritual Formation? Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as Sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence." —definition of the Office of Spiritual Formation, Presbyterian Church (USA) However good and worthwhile all of this is, I do not see how it is a substitute for Sunday School. The latter has been the main means for teaching Christian children (and Adults) the basic content of their Bibles along with learning such things as the Lord's prayer, Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed. It has been the time when children learn about the basics of Christian living and the History, Traditions, Worship and Distinctives of their Church and the meaning and observance of the Church Year. In some churches, Sunday School has been designed more for the evangelizing of unsaved children and so presentation of the Gospel has been the focus. "Becoming like Christ" require a life time of learning experiences, best done in a cross generational faith community as well as at home and in the real world 24/7. Sunday School typically takes place in a class room, for maybe 30-45 minutes max, on one day, often irregularly, for only a portion of the calendar year. It is best [albeit, not well] suited for its traditional purpose. What it is designed to do is very much needed and must not be replaced by "Spiritual Formation". In fact, ironically, and very regretfully, substituting "Spiritual Formation" for Sunday School actually can impede spiritual formation. Although they can be related, one strengthening the other, these are very different programs. Next time adults ask why their children are ignorant about their Church's distinctive Doctrines, Traditions, Heritage and History, I hope it is not because the church has jettisoned School on Sunday for "Spiritual Formation Hour".

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:50

Tuesday, April 25. 2006

Blessed Assurance

On a local radio station, hymns were being played this morning. An old fashioned choir sung clearly a favorite hymn: "Blessed Assurance". It brought emotion to my heart and tears to my eyes. Nostalgically, I was taken back to times my mother and I sang it together in her nursing home and further back to those churches where that was a staple song sung frequently by the congregation. An older Brother in the Lord lamented, Sunday after Service, that he, too, missed the old hymns. Older people, especially, go to church for inspiration and comfort. And that comes, especially, from the hymns they know and love. It is not right that, in their Autumn years, they must go without those hymns and patiently endure songs that do not bring them the inspiration and comfort they need. As the Day approaches, we need that Blessed Assurance more than ever.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:46

Saturday, April 22, 2006

A Great Opportunity for Evangelism

As far as evangelism is concerned, the Passion of Christ and the Lion, Witch and Wardrobe movies were not very effective, according to most surveys. Why? They appealed to Believers. They were movies for Christians and that is who most of the viewers were. When first released into Theaters, the hope was that multitudes of non-believers would attend and hear or see the Gospel. Didn't happen, in any wide numbers. Probably a far more effective movie for the purpose of evangelism will be the very unscriptural, even blasphemous movie, The Da Vinci Code. Why? Millions of non-Christians are going to flock to see it, even as 40 million people have already bought the hardback copy of the novel. This creates a huge audience ripe to hear the Truth. Some Christians want to boycott the movie. That would be a missed opportunity to share the Gospel with the unsaved who will see the film in droves. The challenge is to bone up now on the issues (the Bible, Doctrine and Church History) and then go to the movie and have a great discussion with unbelievers who have seen it and will be talking about it during the week around town or at work. Check out this site and its links and get ready! <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/special/davincicode.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:55

Outreach? What outreach?

Pastors and Churches are always searching for new "ways [read: programs] to reach out [read: evangelism] into the community [read: neighborhood] for Christ". Certainly that should include ways of corporately serving people in the neighborhood in which churches are located. One church I know here has an active tutoring ministry in the housing project across the street from the church building. One of the major barriers thwarting such efforts is the fact that church neighborhoods are hard to define and most members do not live near the building. Most of us are not really familiar with our neighbors anyway, let alone connected. Neighborhood ministry requires intentional involvement in the lives of people with whom we now have little to do. Ideally, it would involve people in a local church living near each other. Perhaps starting neighborhood groups that would be mini-churches. But such outreach is not what most church people are about. They gather on Sunday, commuting from spread out suburbs, primarily to worship God and maybe have some fellowship on the side. People that get more involved are usually the younger families with children; their ministries have to do with serving those children (Sunday School and Youth Group and Nursery and VBS in the Summer) A few enjoy making music and so might serve on the Praise Team. A handful of folks have an interest in "Missions" or maybe some other Organization that serves the Community. Finally, there is the small group who are involved with Finances and the upkeep of facilities and grounds. All of that is necessary and good. It is not sustained, intentional involvement with our neighbors, sharing the love of Christ with them, let alone the Truth of the Gospel. Until we do the neighborhood mini-church thing, ministry to neighbors remains an individual, one on one thing. That used to be called "personal evangelism" or simply "loving our neighbors." Not an organized program, but very intentional.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:26

Friday, March 17. 2006

The Work of the People

I read an article this morning which was a report on a talk given by an Emerging Church leader. Some things, he is alleged to have said have, have been perculating in my mind, as I worked on other matters. Today's Christian and seeking youth, he lectured, do not want to hear lectures, aka Sermons, when they gather for "Church". They do not want to have any one be an authority, although that is why everyone was at this conference- to hear this authority speak about the Emerging Church. These young adults do not want to read books that contain authoritative teaching yet, knowing that, the writer of the report, bemoaned the fact that attendees did not buy many books from the tables. He complained that the conferees missed out on a lot of good material by ignoring the books (including the ones written by the Speaker, who presumably wanted people to buy his books). What got me thinking the most, was the speaker's criticism of parallel seating (pews), all facing the platform. People should, he said, be seated casually as in a living room. This will faciliate story telling and sharing between all present. Besides the fact that this is true only in a small circle, with no one behind anyone else and all within conversational distance, it is in keeping with the earlier mentioned distain of an authority person giving a lecture.

Apparently, the Speaker really objected to calling corporate Worship a "Service" as in Church Service. I had not heard this criticsim before; but it reveals much about the Speaker and the youth with whom he was concerned. It reveals they have a very different concept of Worship than I do. I am told by Emergent Church advocates that I should read certain books and join the "conversation". It was suggested that I might thus learn and appreciate the trends and, just maybe, support it. Actually, I have read. And this bit about the word "Service" has been most helpful. "Service" in its many forms, means to perform work on behalf of others. It is part of the Greek word for Worship. That word, translated Liturgy, means the work of the people. In its religious context, it means Christians assembling to perform the work of offering praise, thanksgiving and tithes to God. it means to engage in the work of listening to the Word of God preached and taught. It means to do the work of praying and interceeding with God for His mercies and grace. Altogether, "Worship Service" is full of meaning and describes well what our assemblies are supposed to be all about. To jettison the name is to jettison the concept. Sitting in a circle, sharing our stories (maybe drinking coffee and noshing, too) can be enjoyable fellowship. It is not a Worship Service. If doing that replaces a true Worship Service, if it replaces bringing offerings and prayers to God, if it replaces listening to the Word of God preached well and authoritatively, it is wrong. Nothing good will emerge from that. The "work of the people", the ancient Liturgies of the Church, must continue. The focus is not mean to be on the back of someone's head- or on their face. All eyes are meant to focus on God, on Pulpit and Altar, representing Word and Sacrament. Later, after the Service, we can fellowship and I hope we will.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:24

Friday, March 10, 2006

Good News for Elders

Struggling Ford Motors has come up with a great idea: cars designed for older drivers and their physical limitations. The trick is to get young engineers to think and act like older would-be buyers when they design. The freestyle Limited and the Ford 500 are supposed to reflect this. This is a great idea.Churches should try it to. Every one talkes about youth ministry. Hey, the fastest growing segment of the American population is over 60. In fact, there will be 74 million adults between 55 and 74 within the next two dozen years. I earnestly hope young Pastors will engineer Worship and other activities with us in mind. We still want to enjoy the ride.

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:01

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Church or Intentional Community?

We still have not found a church home, after a year and half. We attend, usually at a small Presbyterian church near us, but I do not think it will become our church home. For one thing, the new and young Pastor does not need me breathing down his neck or complicating his life and ministry with my ideas. He is the Pastor and it is hard for me to sit back and let him be just that, although he and his wife have been very cordial and welcoming of us and he is off to a good start in his first pastorate. I have serious issues with most every church. Wherever we visit a new one, I come out disturbed or troubled by something. I do not need that; nor does my long-suffering wife. She is stuck in the car, listening to my complaints and criticisms. I simply want, most of all, solid, deep Biblical content, from a Reformed perspective, in a well-crafted sermon, delivered well. Also- a vital, liturgical Service with wonderful congregational hymn singing, in a worshipful atmosphere and environment. An open, friendly, warm welcome is good. Is this really expecting too much? Why is it almost impossible to find? We have heard a lot from some people about intentional community. There are thousands of such communities around the country- all kinds, not only Christian. What members seem to share in common is dissatisfaction with the churches or religions they have tried and, often, with the families they grew up in. Thus, they seek to live together with a group of other like-minded people, bound together by common values and often by a commitment to a common purpose or goal. They often also share a common purse. (Some folks consider intentional extended families, in which a married older couple, usually with children, have single young adults renting rooms in their house, to be an intentional community. We used to live that we ourselves. Of course they do some things in common during the week, but this arrangement, plus the fact there is no shared purse and the members, on their own, attend church outside the house, doesn't fit the more common definition for intentional community that I am using.)

For definitions see <http://www.ic.org/> I understand the appeal of intentional community (and the intentional extended family). Some are convinced all Christians should live in intentional communities. Should all Christians? No. Should my wife and I? No. Ultimate authority resides in God, the Creator of heaven and Earth. He is, after all, the All-Mighty. He actively reigns supreme over what He has created. He does this directly and through directed agents.

Agents of God's authority and the spheres in which they function, are (All Human Beings- over natural resources)Husbands- over wivesParents- over childrenElders [Pastors]- over the local churchRulers- over the various political structures (city, state, national)Intentional Communities are not on this list nor does God delegate any authority to their Leaders. God did not "Institute" or "ordain" them as He has these others My major problem with Intentional Communities is that they can become substitutes for families and churches. Their Leaders can become surrogate husbands and parents and Pastors. The pragmatic objection to this argument is: So what? If the families and churches have failed its members elsewhere and the Community meets the need they did not, why not be a member of it? Some are convinced that Community is even better than family and church. They are convinced the latter can never do what Community can. The answer to that is: We have no right to abandon what God has ordained for something we think will meet our needs better. Homosexuals, who see (or have experienced) broken, miserable heterosexual relationships and marriages, use the same argument: if they can find meaning and fulfillment in a same sex relationship, then they will. If God instituted traditional marriage, so what? The same argument is made by heterosexuals about marriage. If an egalitarian arrangement works well, then so what if God designed marriage to be complementarian. If purposely not having children is more convenient, then so what, if God designed marriage for procreation? If God intended families to be extended and multigenerational, so what if the nuclear family is more feasible. Actually, this argument is also used by Christians who are experimenting with new styles of worship and new ways of doing church. If God instituted a particular way in which He wants His People to worship Him, we can revise or reject it, if some other way is more appealing to today's generation. In the matter of Intentional Community- let young single Believers seek Marriage as God intends it to be. Let them embark on creating and growing a family as God intends it to be. Finally, let them be actively involved with a local church as God intends it to be. Then, and only then, if they are interested, they are ready to consider Intentional Community. I am sure they will discover that they already have found it abundantly in their marriage, family and church. If they are currently living on their own, the first thing to do is find that church. This brings us full-circle. Each person will have a different take on what the preferable church should be. But find one, we must. No matter how difficult that may be- no matter how imperfect it may be [yes, I'm reading what I am writing]. God has ordained it.

Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:51

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Where are Missionaries coming from?

We have commented frequently about America becoming ever more multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual- very different from the White, English speaking, "Yankee" world we grew up in. The day of Western dominance of the world is almost over. The rest of the world is not the "Third World" any longer. It is the Global South. The preferred term now is "The Majority World". Less than 18% of the world's people live in the West, I recently watched a "Special Report" on TV about India- with its very young and growing population of one billion people. Europe's population is no longer growing (by births) Growth is coming by immigration. Many of them are Muslims. We have noted elsewhere that the typical 'Evangelical' Christian today is a woman of color who lives in the inner city or barrio of a non-Western country. The Church may be virtually moribund in Europe and very materialistic and self-serving in America; but, it is very alive and evangelistic and booming elsewhere around the globe. Here's another startling fact: Most Missionaries are no longer white Westerners. In fact, there are an increasing number of Missionaries from the East and South working in the West. In many parts of the world, it is becoming common now to see Mission Teams consisting of Koreans, Japanese, Ethiopians, Australians and Canadians, for example. South Korea, alone, sends out more missionaries than any other country except the United States. They are now sending out more than 1000 new ones every year with a current total of 13,000. In 1973, there were approximately 3400 non-Western missionaries in the world. There are now 103,000 which is almost half of the total and the expectation is that very soon they will be the majority. Missions Incredible - Christianity Today Magazine

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:07

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

Only a Story?

The Preacher at the church we attended Sunday, delivered well a well crafted message about the Transfiguration. He said this Scripture is a story. "Stories" are very big these days among many Preachers. I have used them, of course, over 45 years of preaching. Every Pastor I know has always used stories. There is a difference today. We used them as illustrations of objective truths. Today, stories are more often used as containing the truth. The story does not illustrate truth external to it, but rather communicates truth within it. This is, "illustrated" (sorry) by what the Preacher said, Sunday, about the Transfiguration. It does not matter whether it ever happened or not. The actual story may not be true (historical) . Catch that- this Scripture may not be true. It does not have to be true. When we read it, we may find truth in it. He then explained what he thought the truth for us today might possibly be. At this point, he added another notion, also very popular among today's emerging church leaders. The story, that may not be true, came out of a community of believers. Apostolic authorship is irrelevant. It is to be discussed among us today, as a community of believers, to discover some truth in it for us (So much for "revelation" of objective, propositional truth and the writer's original intent, let alone traditional Rules of Interpretation) But hey, this Message was well crafted and well delivered.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:49

Thursday, February 23, 2006

Does the Church Need a Revolution?

There has been a lot of discussion in response to a book by George Barna, entitled "Revolution", about the state of the church in America today. <http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/pastors/1378676.html> My views are expressed in the lengthy, spiritual autobiographical sketch that follows. It was helpful to me personally to put thoughts into words. It may be of interest to a few of you. It explains where I have been and where I am going, in case you want to know :-). Some of you reading this are part of the story...I became a disciple of Jesus when I was 17 years old. I had grown up in church and Sunday School and was always interested in the life of Jesus. His life and teaching had a great attraction to me. From my earliest years, I have always been very serious about living as a Christian. I tried to imitate Jesus or do what I imagined he would do in my circumstances. Besides my mother, a children's book, "The King Nobody Wanted" and Bruce Barton's book, "The Man Nobody Knows", were major influences. I think the WWJD craze was inspired by the latter. At least, that was the question the book sought to answer. The Sermon on the Mount was the key and it led me to register as a Conscientious Objector when I turned 18. They had the draft back then.

Following my moment of commitment to Jesus himself (not simply to imitating him) for the rest of my life, I became involved in a Word of Life Bible study group for teens in our high school and in the church where its sponsors were active. Thus my earliest formation as a "born again" teenager was in a Fundamental Baptist Church. Among other things, I adopted Scofield Dispensationalism and the passion of my life was "soul winning"- personal evangelism. I did a lot of that along with becoming an Evangelist, preaching at youth rallies, jails, rescue missions, camps, public parks and churches. When my faith came under attack during freshman year at a "secular" college, I made the second most important commitment: By faith, I accepted the Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God. I would base my life on it. My true "major" in college was evangelism. I was very active in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship and at 20, during my Junior year, became the interim Pastor of a Baptist church close to the campus. During my Senior year, I was on staff as the Youth Pastor of my home church, where, eventually I would be ordained. My first full-time Pastorate was in an inner city Fundamental Baptist Church. Evangelism was still the thrust of my ministry, as well as world wide missions. We had many missionaries visit our home and speak in the church. They, too, were soul-winning Fundamentalist Christians. Most were church planters, some were educators or medical missionaries. All were seeking to win the Hell-bound Lost to Christ for personal salvation. That was the Sixties. Our country was in great turmoil. It was a time of social upheaval, riots, violence and assassinations and war. We were not involved in any of that. We were too busy winning people to Christ, ministering one-on-one and building up the local church. It eventually relocated in new facilities and has since become a large, influential contemporary evangelical "Community" church, losing its fundamental Baptist, evangelistic and traditional missions heritage. So was I, in many ways. I had become restless with the church as I knew it. I hungered for a more dynamic, New Testament, Book of Acts Spirit-filled church. I immersed (good word to use as a Baptist) myself in researching just what that might be. Studying the New Testament and church history led me into what is called the Restoration Movement. It claimed to be all I was seeking. So off we went, with our children in tow, to a Seminary in the mid-West, affiliated with that Movement. I was in the MA (N.T.) program. I immediately got into preaching Revivals and Rallies and Pulpit Supply. Soon I was helping a group of Believers start a New Testament Church in neighboring State. We relocated and I commuted to School. Eventually, I was full-time with the Church and we moved from the office building we were holding meetings in to our first building. That church, too, has gone on to be a large, growing congregation. I realized, after 4 years, that I, too, had to move on. The Restoration Churches really, it turns out, were not much different in practice than the Baptist churches I knew. I concluded the attempt to restore the primitive Church of the First Century is a chimera, not only impossible, but wrong-headed to try. There were, and are, a lot of solid, good Christians in the Baptist and Restoration churches we have known. My growing dissatisfaction was not with them individually, but with the organized churches as such. I had this growing awareness they were not as Christ intended. They very much reflected common, middle-class, conservative American social, economic and political core values. We had, concurrently, become increasingly involved with ministering to students at a nearby College. My growing personal burden was to engage the issues of our society and culture with the Mind of Christ, i.e.- Scripturally. Typical Church members do not do that. They have a Savior and seek his blessing and help on the lives they chose to live according to their common, middle-class, conservative American social, economic and political core values. Period. Not acceptable to me at all. My hope was to engage the minds and hearts of college students, helping them to engage in the issues of our times as Christians. They in turn would become change agents for Christ in our world upon graduating. Some did, and have done, just that. In my judgment, the typical church was not going to do this. I gave up expecting it to. We relocated in New England and began working full-time, by faith, with college students here. It was a wonderful time for several years. This was in the early 70's. However, the realization came that students had to spend most of their time and energy on their regular studies and, upon graduating, had to choose careers to pay debts and get on with their lives that would become like their parents and elders, lived according to common, middle-class, conservative American social, economic and political core values. (The only real difference, for some, was less

conservative and far more liberal) I gave the pastorate another shot. It was a terrible time. I went back to my enthusiastic, evangelistic style in what essentially was a mainline and very typical New England church. Many came to Christ. Old time Leaders did not like the changes. I had a melt-down and left to go back to working with students, We actually were into "community", having students living with us in a big enough house. We enjoyed doing Bible studies and worship with students. During both periods in that town, some came to Christ and learned to think Christianly, Biblically, and have served the Lord well to this very day. I did a lot of writing and I am still using some of that material in my work now, 30 years later. During these last 3 decades, I have preached and taught in a variety of churches. I have tried planting another local church, was interim at two and the full-time Pastor at another. I have definitely given the local church a lot of years and effort. Much good, in individual lives, came from that; but I am more dissatisfied with it than ever. No matter what the official Vision and Mission Statements say, churches are still doing business as usual and members are still living life as they chose, according to common, middle-class, conservative American social, economic and political core values. (only now, even less conservative and far more liberal than 30 years ago) Does the church need a revolution? No. I have had enough seminars and workshops about planting and growing healthy churches. I do not want to read any more books on that subject or about developing Leaders or about communicating or being authentic and relevant to today's world. What is needed is far more basic: not a revolution of the church; but, re-formation of the Gospel preached in churches. I said earlier that I began my Christian life with a focus on the Man, Jesus, and the Gospels (primarily Matthew, Mark and Luke). Then I was into Dispensationalism, Evangelism and Missions. That was an emphasis on Paul and the Epistles (as we they were known then). Then came a focus on Acts and the Holy Spirit-filled life and church. I had started out as a Calvinist, experimented with Arminianism, and returned, stronger than ever, to being a Calvinist- better, Reformed. Dispensationalism had been replaced, years ago, by Covenant Theology. As a Pastor, I was mostly functioning as a core evangelical for pastoral purposes. My theological and intellectual life had to take a back seat to the demands of being a solo working Pastor, involved in building up a church; as well as doing things like weddings, funerals, visitation, counseling and youth work. Along the way, I had found meaning and help in Anglican [Reformed] spirituality and practice, especially frequent Communion (as Sacrament). Anglicanism also led me to a renewed focus on a whole God: the Triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I also came back to a focus on the whole Bible, not only the New Testament or a portion of it. The biggest change for me, however, has come from understanding the Gospel in light of Genesis and the Cultural Mandate. This is the Re-formation of the Gospel that is needed and what has been missing all these years. Many start the Gospel with Romans: all have sinned; and go from there. Lately, I hear more people saying the Gospel must start with Creation and then go to the Fall and Redemption. This is a big improvement and is due to a new influence of Neo-or Dutch Calvinism. It does not go far enough. Before the Fall and after the fact of Creation, God delivered the "Cultural Mandate". You may hear a few evangelicals mention this, but when they do they usually interpret the Mandate to mean it is imperative for Christians to wage a culture war on topics like abortion and gay marriage. No, that is not what the Cultural Mandate is about. Many Evangelicals believe that the priority of the Church is the Great Commission, no matter how evangelism and missions is understood. Others, believe that the Great Commandment, understood as ministries of compassion or social activism, to be the most important concern we have. Some will try to combine the two, usually seeing the latter to be an adjunct or bridge to the former. No, again. There are three Great Mandates given by God: The Cultural Mandate, the Love Mandate and the Make Disciples Mandate. All three together. I know very few churches, none locally, that grasp this. The order of the day is not renewing churches. The order of the day is recovering these 3 Mandates and the Gospel that goes with them. Doing that will be a true Revolution. And it is what I am now all about.

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:39

Tuesday, February 21. 2006

Seeking the Seekers

“Earlier this year, the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute released its study on college students’ spiritual needs. As the project co-directors Alexander and Helen Astin noted in the study, “the relative amount of attention that colleges and universities devote to the ‘exterior’ and ‘interior’ aspects of students lives has gotten out of balance ... we have increasingly come to neglect the student’s inner development — the spheres of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality and self-understanding.” In their study, the Astins quantified for American higher education something that faculty members teaching at Christian colleges have known and experienced all along — students are looking for deeper meaning and purpose in their lives, and they are not finding much help on many of our nation’s campuses. Seventy-six percent of respondents (110,000 college and university first-year students) drawn from more than 230 campuses indicated that the search for meaning and purpose in life was important or very important to them. In similar numbers, they expressed a belief in God, a somewhat regular prayer life and frequent conversations with friends or family about matters of faith and/or spirituality. Sadly, on most college and university campuses today, few faculty are engaging students in this deeper work of meaning and purpose in life — what we might call the larger vocational questions that students are asking.” <http://www.insidehighered.com/workplace/2006/02/01/mahurin> This is a significant finding. It offers great encouragement to Christians seeking to minister to students on “secular” campuses. It also defines what being a “seeker” involves. Some of us disparage “Seeker sensitive” church services as wrong-headed because Scripture tells us no one seeks God (Rom 3:11). While this is true, it is also true, documented by this study, that the search for meaning and purpose in life was important or very important to young people. If we insist that Worship Services are exactly that, for those who know the name of God, then it remains to offer Truth about the meaning and purpose of life to those seeking that, in some other venue,

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:50

Sunday, February 12, 2006

Our God Snows

It was a beautiful Winter day- we had at least 18 inches. But, it meant that Church Services were cancelled. We stayed home. I tuned in to a Lutheran Church on the radio. The pipe organ music sounded great. The choir also had a nice sound, but what ever they were singing was impossible to understand. I would have preferred a Praise Team singing "Our God Reigns". To paraphrase Paul to the Corinthians: I would rather listen to 5 words sung that I can understand than 500 words sung that I can not. (That applies to all types of Christian music)

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:15

Saturday, February 11, 2006

Hymn Singing: Never leave Church without it!

We are planning on visiting a new church tomorrow. Those who know me, know how I love to sing hymns. It is usually the primary means by which I worship. For me to worship involves really getting into expressing my faith through meaningful, heart-felt singing. I will be really disappointed and frustrated and unhappy if I am denied the opportunity to sing tomorrow- the opportunity to worship when I am at church. It has happened often. I am spiritually disenfranchized when I am not able to participate in singing because I do not know the songs. After a life time of singing, I know hundreds of hymns by heart. More often than not, these days, I have never heard of the ones being sung, even though they are often introduced as "old favorites". (How can that be, if I have been singing in church more than 65 years and have never heard it before? I'm guessing they are old favorites to those who hear them often on CDs of contemporary songs, which I never listen to.) Being that only the words are put on the ubiquitous overhead screens, the arrangements are often spontaneous (as the Leader feels led) and the song is quickly followed by another and another- there is no opportunity to learn it, if I want to. Nor is any effort made to teach it to new comers like me. (Hymn books seem to be going the way of vinyl records and 8 track tapes. It used to be precious to watch parents point to the words and notes in hymnals shared with their young children during singing) Through the years I have learned many new songs and do enjoy singing them. I remember when "How great Thou art" was new. Actually, it is the translation of an old Swedish Hymn and became "new" when it was translated into English and was popularized by George Beverly Shea at Billy Graham Crusades. There are lessons in this. To become popular, the words had to be put into the language of those who would sing it. It had to be printed with notes so it could be read. It had to be heard and sung often, using the same melody and arrangements. The words and arrangements became traditional. If "How Great Thou Art" is announced tomorrow, that is what I expect and that is what I will greatly enjoy singing. I would hate to hear a R&B arrangement or someone trying a rap version. Think how many, many different renditions there are of "Amazing Grace" {or of the "Star Spangled Banner", for that matter] The latter raises another point. There is a major difference between music chosen for the benefit or pleasure of the Music Team and/or soloists and that chosen for congregational singing. There can be both kinds in the same Service, but they must not be confused in the minds of those who chose the music for the Service. I will enjoy a beautifully song solo tomorrow in Church. I will enjoy, even more, worshipping the Lord by means of really good congregational singing of hymns (4-part harmony would make it even sweeter)

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:01

Wednesday, February 8, 2006

A Call for a New Puritan Movement?

Joshua 7:1-13...the Israelites broke faith in regard to the [things that God hated and forbid]: ...and the anger of the Lord burned against the Israelites. [not aware of that] Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, ...So about three thousand of the people went up there; [and should have easily defeated the enemy, but] they fled before the men of Ai...Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the ground on his face before the ark of the Lord Joshua said, 'Ah, Lord God! Why...?The Lord said to Joshua, 'Stand up! Why have you fallen upon your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them. ...Therefore the Israelites are unable to stand before their enemies; ... I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the [things that I hate and have forbidden] from among you....We often bemoan the strength of the unrighteous surrounding the Church. Often the far greater danger is the unrighteousness within the Church. It must be dealt with first.

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:42

Sunday, February 5, 2006

What difference does Polity make?

There has been a recent controversy in a Presbyterian church in Tennessee. Leaders from the denomination stepped in and removed the Pastor and other Leaders. A friend said to me that he was glad for Presbyterian polity, giving concerned members someone outside the local church to call on for help. The "help" ended with the Pastor (some of whose books I use) being "defrocked" this week. I have no first hand knowledge of the case. I do not know for sure that the external authority (Presbytery, Moderator and General Assembly) did the right thing or not. From a life time of experience with churches of different kinds and with some knowledge of church history, I am convinced that the type of government (polity) is only as good as the people in it. Polity is a tool or instrument, a methodology, to facilitate the affairs of an organization. There are pros and cons to each type (congregational, episcopal and presbyterian) They all can be, and have been, used to support or facilitate evil. The mitre is only as good as the head that wears it. Far more important than polity, in preventing controversy that splits a church, is a genuine agreement by all members and leaders on the core values and vision of their church from day one. Personality conflicts and individual differences can be worked through where this fundamental unity exists. But this also, does not guarantee that sin, in the life of even only one member (especially if a person of influence), will not pervade and prevail in a local church. In that case, both polity and unity in core values will be irrelevant.

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:02

Thursday, February 2, 2006

Getting it Backwards

Isaiah 60.1-3,11a,18,19,14b Arise, shine out, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising upon you. Though night still covers the earth, and darkness the peoples; Above you the Holy One arises, and above you God's glory appears....the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your splendour. Churches, Christians generally, have it very backwards. Jesus and the Gospel are not about the needs of people. Jesus and the Gospel are about the needs of God. The miracles and exorcisms wrought by Jesus were not to help people, but were part of the battle Jesus was waging against the enemies of God. He was seeking to destroy those enemies, Satan and demons and evil powers entrenched in the structures of society, who had no part in God's world. When and where these dark forces are destroyed, people who suffer from them are delivered and healed. We see hurting, suffering people. We have compassion and want to "minister" to them- to help them. The help we offer is labeled "Jesus"- "Here, take a large dose of "Jesus" and you will feel better." This seems to have worked wonders for multitudes. Great, but that is not what Jesus is for, nor is it the best way to help needy people in the long run. Our singular calling is to exalt God and exult in His Grace. When this is done, when He is lifted up, then He will draw people unto Himself and they will be truly healed. We are dead wrong to go about doing the reverse. The order is "Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth." Only after that comes our daily bread. I have met innumerable people, living life on their own, autonomous terms, who have problems and turn to the Lord to solve those problems---and then go on living life on their own, autonomous terms. Wrong! "Autonomous" means being a law unto ones self - doing things "my way". Wrong way! At the end of the day. the question is not how many hungry people did we serve; but, was God exalted today? Did these hungry, now filled, people come to Christ. Were their hearts and minds surrendered to Him today? The nations will come to your light, and kings to your dawning brightness. For you shall be called the city of God, the dwelling of the Holy One of Israel. When God, including His Word-Law in all things, is truly exalted in our Services, when that is why we attend and participate, then He will attract sinners to Himself for their salvation. But, you say, that is what we do every week. Is it really? Are the Hymns and songs about God? Are the sermons about God? Did we learn about His Law, as well as about His Grace? Are the prayers focused on God? Is there contrition and confession of sin in His Holy Presence? When we leave, is it in our hearts to obey His Word-Law? Let the Church be known as the the dwelling of the Holy One of Israel.

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:07

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

Throwing in the Towel? No Way

In the post prior to this one [below]. do not misunderstand. I believe very deeply in the local church (otherwise, I would not despair it's disrepair. I realize most of you reading this use standards different from mine and are basically content with your church) I thoroughly enjoy serious study- I always have. One of the frustrations for many Pastors is that the demands of a busy pastorate do not allow a lot of time for study not directly related to the Ministry. Thus, I appreciate the freedom I have now to really dig in. Its great. I will focus on seeking Truth, writing what I learn and trying to share it however I can. But that is part of my despair over local churches. Members of a typical church do not value a learned Pastor or sermons that are filled with learning. "Why do you have so many books?" This is symbolized with the demise of the black academic ("Geneva") pulpit robe, marking The Pastor as The Teacher (distinct from The Priest), as well as the currently popular practice of Pastors themselves of forgoing the use of a pulpit (too authoritarian!) The problem is deeper. There is a depreciation among Christians of Theology, as well as exegetical, expository sermons- all of which require scholarship if they are done properly. This reflects a depreciation, among Christians, of loving the Lord with all one's mind and a disparagement of reason and reasoned, logical, linear discourse. (It also reflects our culture and levels and methods of education today) All of this reflects the current penchant for relational, subjective Christianity and Worship. Systematic (Classic) Theology is being replaced by "Spiritual Theology". Sunday Schools (which has been a misnomer for years) are being replaced by "Spiritual Formation Time". Being "spiritual" includes being grounded in the Great Truths.

Consequently, surveys continue to say that the great majority of church kids, who go on to secular colleges, depart whatever Faith they had. They do not have the intellectual tools and rigor needed to wrestle with, let alone pin down, the "isms" awaiting them there. They can not defend their Faith, let alone share it intelligently. "It's no secret that many kids lose their faith in college; statistics show that over 75 percent of Christian students will leave college with their faith either absent or severely damaged. Because they have no idea why they believe what they believe and have no ability to defend their beliefs, they're taken captive by ideas for which they aren't prepared." Quoted from <http://www.family.org/welcome/press/a0037569.cfm> Note: There are several reasons why students "lose faith" in college. Check out <http://www.pfm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=BreakPoint1&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=15238> here are churches and Pastors who are wonderful exceptions to what I describe; but that is the point: why are they exceptions? Will they become the rule? What will that require? When? I want to contribute and make a difference, not throw in the towel.

Posted by Cal in Church at 19:23

Trend of the Time at Gordon

Gordon-Conwell Seminary has chosen a new President. He is 44 and the Senior Pastor of one of America's influential, contemporary, seeker-friendly, Willow Creek-type megachurches. He is excited about this opportunity to influence the next generation of Church Leaders.

<http://www.mecklenburg.org/pdf/GCTSPressRelease.pdf> <http://www.mecklenburg.org/information.asp?TopicID=112> His personal website has a wealth of Resources for Ministry <http://www.seriousimes.com/Information.asp?TopicID=11>

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:12