

Because Jesus... We are Enough
Menno Mennonite Church
Online Worship
June 21, 2020

Purpose: To declare God's presence and working in and through all things, placing God rightly in the center of the work of the world

Message: The work of building the kingdom while tasked to us is not, ultimately, our responsibility.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 [I will read]; Mark 4:26-34 (Please read)

Synopsis: It can all seem like so much. There is so much to be done, so much pain in the world, so much suffering to be addressed. As followers of Christ, it doesn't take all that long for us to unwind our laundry list of those things that we SHOULD be doing, or the ways in we ought to be about the work of the kingdom. Yet, almost everything we undertaken feels incomplete and insufficient to say the least. We can, in time, begin to think ourselves as unworthy of the work of faith, and certainly unable to meet its steep demands, let alone the dire needs of a waiting world. It is ONLY because of Jesus, and that we do what we do in the name of Jesus that we are privileged to be part of God's growing kingdom.

1 Corinthians [MESSAGE] 3: 1-17

But for right now, friends,
I'm completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings
with each other and with God.
You're acting like infants in relation to Christ,
capable of nothing much more than nursing at the breast.
Well, then, I'll nurse you since you don't seem capable of anything more.
As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important,
are you really much different than a babe at the breast,
content only when everything's going your way
? When one of you says, "I'm on Paul's side,"
and another says, "I'm for Apollos," aren't you being totally infantile?
5-9 Who do you think Paul is, anyway?
Or Apollos, for that matter?
Servants, both of us—servants who waited on you
as you gradually learned to entrust your lives
to our mutual Master.
We each carried out our servant assignment.
I planted the seed,
Apollos watered the plants,
but God made you grow.

It's not the one who plants or the one who waters
who is at the center of this process but God,
who makes things grow.
Planting and watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages.
What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving.
You happen to be God's field in which we are working.

9-15 Or, to put it another way, you are God's house.
Using the gift God gave me as a good architect,
I designed blueprints;
Apollos is putting up the walls.
Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation!
Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ.
Take particular care in picking out your building materials.
Eventually there is going to be an inspection.
If you use cheap or inferior materials, you'll be found out.
The inspection will be thorough and rigorous.
You won't get by with a thing.
If your work passes inspection, fine;
if it doesn't, your part of the building
will be torn out and started over.
But you won't be torn out; you'll survive—but just barely.
16-17 You realize, don't you,
that you are the temple of God,
and God himself is present in you?
No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple,
you can be sure of that.
God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, are the temple.

It seems like the small is a thing in danger. Think about it—when recently have you either by default or by choice opted into “small”. It seems to have gone pronouncedly out of fashion, especially in the world of marketing. You can get a regular, regular, a Medium (by which they mean the smallest size offered), or what ever system beyond comprehension that Starbucks might have come up with. But not a small. Because, really, who would want that, and really who wants to sell that? When there is an ethos of bigger and better in all things at all times, who would settle for just SMALL. You can get a grande, size 0, piqueno, petite, kiddie, value size, a pinch a modicum and all the rest; just what ever you do don’t call it a small.

Similarly, think about how you rate “good” as in “Satisfactory” now. In those inevitable and endless customer satisfaction surveys thrown at us good is merely middle of the pack. It has to be excellent or nothing. I have had customer facing reps flat out tell me that they will be docked if I don’t give them straight across the board excellent (which bears on semblance to reality at the end of the day). The number of times I have screwed up a perfectly good project with one last polish to make it excellent and then going too far defies recollection. Like a bolt that twists off when you take that extra push for tightness, it can be sickening feeling to go from good enough to too much. You really don’t want to get me started on parenting blogs which are enough to convince even the most polyanna mom and dad that they are failing there kids by insufficiently stimulating them with one excellent experience after another. With excellence or nothing being the standard, I wonder what that does for our anxiety quotient these days.

In case you are wondering, I haven’t simply awoken this morning with my cranky pant firmly on, wanting those kids to get off my figurative lawn. We have become a people of the superlative—where everything has to be fabulous or else (or should at least look that way on Social media). We are driven to reach for the best, or die trying. Having the right brands, right ways of being, the right expectations, and the tastes to match them is not just a good thing but our right as well bred consumers. And woe betide the one who fails us. I take a small pride in taking my coffee black, and an outsized pleasure in mocking my wife’s coffee-flavored milk which she concocts. We want what we want, and that is the end of it. We disappoint ourselves when we don’t deliver what we should—a word and obligation that we are all too familiar with. The trick of existing in an individualistic and customize society is the amount of demands one have to put out there to be accommodated, and the fact that ultimately should we happen to accomplish our goals, we only have ourselves to blame.

We don't stop with our selves; we bring our selectivity and expectation to our spiritual selves as well. We also bring our expectation of exceptionality to our spirituality and to our church. We bring our expectations to the way church makes us feel, and our expectations of what should be happening within the church, within our spiritual lives. There is always something more that we should be doing, something that we should be doing better. We should be reading the bible more. Praying more. Being more disciplined. Spending more time visiting the sick and infirm. Solving the problems of those around us. Performing to that much higher of a standard on a Sunday morning. This can lead to a vicious cycle of ambition and dissatisfaction with the church (which, being a human institution is only ever going to be so healed and quasi holy). We want to be successful spiritual practitioners every bit as much as we want to be successful at every thing else in our lives.

Now there is nothing wrong with having high aspirations and standards for who we are and what we do. We can all do with the chessey motivational poster now and again—aim for the stars, even if you miss, you'll end up flying with the birds. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious, even in church, even in our spiritual lives. There is always a new way for us to grow, to more faithfully be who God is calling us to be. I dare say it is not this ambition that is our particular problem, generally. Our problem is that we think that Church, that the kingdom of God is solely responsibility to create in the first place, and relies on this ambition, and fails solely with our own underinvestment. We can easily see the gapping needs to be met and feel like our individual attempts are quite inadequate, nowhere approaching "excellent" as we expect or the excellent we recall.

But here's the thing: Spirituality is messy. Church is messier still. And the world, God knows there is too much there for us to handle. We can easily feel awash in it all, and overwhelmed by it all. Especially right now when everything just feels on edge of emergency, regardless of what is going on or not. We see the needs and we wonder how we will ever measure up to their demands, that there is no way that there can ever be enough of us to fill these gaps. Try though we might, we know that we are not enough to supply even our own needs at times, let alone the needs of our whole congregation, our whole community. It can leave us wondering both individually and corporately whether we could ever be "enough" for the challenges we face.

Like our brothers and sisters in Corinth, are far more inclined to gravitate to the program and the personalities of the church than to remember that the church and the work of the Church is not in any ultimate sense, our own. But its not. It never has been, and it never will be. God does the work. We are planters. We are waterers. God is the one who makes the growth. God is the worker of the miracles of healing, hope, and peace. We are the tools desiring to be put to good use; keeping ourselves sharp to be ready to be applied, allowing people that we are the things that we do to be used for the kingdom which is always bigger than us.

At the end of the day, the Kingdom is not our work. We are invested in it, we work for it, yes; but is God who will bring it to be. We look time and again for the formula for growth, yet at the end of it all it is God's will in conjunction with the rest that brings change. It is not our ability, our availability, our acumen or even our commitment to this project in the midst of all else that demands our time, talent and energy that makes Christ in the world work or not. We are enough because we are part of what God is doing. Because the kingdom is the work of the Jesus, the living God with us, and he is the foundation on which all else stands, we are invited to take a step back from the primary role that we love so much and wish desperately was ours and to recognize that the work is God's. God is the one who is active in this Church. Jesus is the force calling us into the places of our lives and the lives of others in need of grace, hope, and promise. The Spirit is the force blowing even now awakening the deep roots of seeds planted, plants watered, and all things growing toward a full harvest. Our calling in the midst of this is not to find the ways to make all of this happen in ways that stupefy and bring all things into right relationship with God.

We are called to be a good enough church—again not lax; not lazy—that something else that what I am talking about—but good enough to accept limits when we find them, and they us without breaking down into devastation for what might have been. We do well to recall that we are not relying on our abilities but on Christ in us to accomplish our call. We are called to be part of what God's doing in the world, not to take sole responsibility for it. We reach out in the name of Christ, congregationally and personally, and that is good. But we must remember that excellence, success, even basic effectiveness is not something that we have control over. That is God's doing. We never will be enough to satisfy the needs of ourselves, of our world as the humanity of the church by itself (and here I am speaking of the large, body church). Yet this makes the needed room for the Love of God to seep through the cracks, providing enough we trust, even we when have run completely out. At the end of the day we are not called by Christ to

be effective change makers except in this—in making disciples of all who would come, and even then that is the work of God every bit as much as it is our. We are not called to be effective; at the end of it all, we are only called to be faithful.

The working of the Spirit, the working of the church is not about us. It is about God. And no matter what, in success, failure, presence, or abandonment, God's work will continue. God will give growth. God will bring about maturity, nurturing each and every one of us as we need to be. This is good. This as it should be. For there is only one cornerstone—and that is Christ. How might we be good enough—adequate enough, open enough, present enough, to allow Christ in us, and even in spite of us to provide all that we need and so much more? Where might we be surprised by the ways of God that are beyond our imagination?

May it be so now and always. Amen