

Smoky Mountain Reflections, October 2013 "sixers" #5

This is one of my favorite times of year, when the canopy of green that has filled out trees for the past six or seven months starts to burst into a sea of yellows, oranges, reds and even some dark purple. As we in our neck of the woods prepare for the flock of leaf peeping tourists, we watch the leaves, as well as a few acorns, soon fall. The falling of such a seed on the head of a fictitious chicken is the source of a well-known fable warning us against worrying about things we have no control over. Scripture also warns us against worry, revealing it to be a lack of trust in God's provision for all our needs.

We do sadly find so many ways to creatively worry, while calling it 'concern' for the kingdom of God. We ask questions like, 'How do we as Christians determine what the best course of action is for our church?' All concerned members of the body of Christ should prayerfully ask themselves what the wisest course of action should be, shouldn't they? While I am a big fan of responsible evaluation of our practices in light of scripture and our confessions, there is a big difference between 'evaluation' and ecclesiastical hand wringing. The business world has a lot of good information that can be very helpful in managing the business aspects of an organization with memberships, facilities and staff to maintain, but the world has little to offer in the way of helping the church to be 'in' while not 'of' the world.

So what are we to do if we are to be conscientious Christians seeking to share the great news of the Gospel as best we can while not corrupting or causing offense to that same Gospel? I would say there is a big difference between damage control and honest biblical outreach. We can honestly look around us and learn from the mistakes of others, identify our own warts, and press on doing what it is God has called us to do, trusting in Him to do His will in His church in His good time.

First visit some of the mistakes of others. The 'seven sisters' mainline Protestantism; The Methodist UMC, Lutheran ELCA, Presbyterian PCUSA, Baptist ABCUSA, Episcopal, Church of Christ UCC, and the DCC have a few things in common. One of the reasons they are so large is because of their liberal, historical, critical position on scripture. That position, while appealing to logic and public opinion, leads to poor theological decision making such as female clergy and support of the LGBT agenda. These departures from scriptural truth have led to them also experiencing the greatest declines in membership of all American Christian church bodies. The Lord clearly warns us against such practices. (2 Peter 2:1-2) ***"There will be false teachers among you, who will surreptitiously introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful, licentious ways."*** and in (1 Peter 1:14-15) ***"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you formerly had when you lived in ignorance. Instead, just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"*** and finally in (Romans 12:2) ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."***

Second, we have to acknowledge the things that have caused our own church bodies decline. In the words of our synod president, Matthew Harrison "The people of the LCMS marry much later and are having far fewer children. Our outreach (conversion) has not been sufficient to stem that decline. So, we need to look at how we encourage and support families and we need to invite our unchurched neighbors to church. 80% of people who join a church do so because they were invited by someone, they know a friend or family member."

Finally while we diligently seek to share His truth in love we also must trust Him and His word and His sacraments to do His will in His good time. The responsibility to share His truth belongs to each and every one of us in our own daily vocations. The responsibility to save the lost belongs to Christ and He took care of that on Good Friday.

Jesus will build, protect and sustain His church in accord with His words in Matthew 16:18 ***And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock (his confession that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*** God grants the increase and sustains us through any difficult times. 1 Cor 3:6 ***I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*** So be diligent, do not worry and enjoy the fall colors.
In Christ Pastor Portier