

July 28, 2020

*Also, I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. Isaiah 6:8*

There were two subjects raised in yesterday's podcast to which I want to respond. Some of this won't be applicable until we return to worship in a way similar to pre-corona virus times.

1. How do I get my adult children to go to Church? For whatever reason, there is typically a period in one's life when Church is no longer a priority. Hopefully, some good does come out of not going to Church. The absence of Church makes you realize that something is missing in your life.

I remember there was a time when I went to Church once every other month and I would think to myself, "My week is always a lot smoother when I go to Church on Sundays, I need to be here every week."

I didn't immediately start attending every week but I increased the frequency that I attended until it became virtually every week. A search for happiness and meaning involves testing what is important to us physically, mentally, and spiritually. It takes us a while to realize that we are looking in all the wrong places for happiness and meaning. Sometimes we have to be in our desert to see the meaning of so many of the things that we do.

So, how do we get our adult children to go to Church? We tell them why the Church is important to us. We ask them to go. If we live in the same town, we ask them to join us on Sunday mornings. If they don't want to go to "your" church for whatever reason, help them find another Church. You know your child better than most anyone else in the world, use your instincts to help them find a great place to worship. Go with them the first time that they go or go with them once a month.

It can be frightening to go to a new Church. If you don't live in the same town, go to Church when you visit them. Drive around your child's neighborhood or area of their town on a Sunday morning and see whose parking lots are full. Then, ask your child if they would like to attend that particular Church with you. If your child doesn't want to join you, take your grandchildren.

Then, turn it over to God. Don't ask your child if they went to Church on Sunday. You can continue to ask them to go to Church with you but leave it up to them and God to monitor Church attendance.

2. The podcast also talked about making the Church more relevant by incorporating popular cultural references into our teachings. You don't have to be brilliant to find Godly references in almost every form of entertainment.

There is the "Gospel according to The Simpsons", the "Gospel according to Peanuts", and U2 Eucharists to name a few. The podcast guest talked about the biblical references in Harry Potter. Many people think that the incorporation of these popular cultural sources makes the Church more relevant to a new generation.

While contemporary references and resources are fun and sometimes spiritually insightful, they are not what makes the Church more relevant. Father Jeff and I have officiated at many U2 Eucharists. During these services, the music of the band U2 is played and sung. The band's music is amazingly spiritual when you dissect the lyrics. However, a U2 Eucharist in and of itself will not make the Church more relevant. These things are fun to do as Sunday School classes or youth events but they don't sustain a Church long-term.

What makes a Church relevant is the truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." John 14:6

A church that does as it preaches and teaches will be relevant.

When I first went to law school, people wanted to be like "Perry Mason" or the attorneys on "LA Law". After I practiced law for a little while, people wanted to be like Johnnie Cochran (OJ Simpson's attorney). Overtime, however, I discovered that the most successful trial attorneys were the ones that were most honest in all aspects of their legal practice. If you stammered or struggled a bit before a jury that was okay as long as you spoke truthfully to them; telling them what you would present to them and then actually doing it.

If you were slick and promised the world but delivered very little, then juries were often skeptical. If you were truthful then a jury felt that you could be trusted even though you might not have the logic of a Perry Mason or the flash of a Johnnie Cochran. If I come into court and I'm playing a character rather than being myself then how does the jury know whether the things I am saying are the truth or just another part of a fictional story I'm presenting them.

I may be able to lure you into the Church by saying "Look how cool we are, we're playing U2 music" but if that's not who we are week-in and week-out then you're probably not coming back. It is so much better to be truthful and say this is who we are and this is what we believe.

The Church will always be relevant when it tells the truth.

Congregations do evolve and create new traditions and different ways to worship but that is typically a slow process, especially for the mainline denominations. An individual Church can't be all things to all people but it can still be relevant.

Finally, I want to share a silly story about today's scripture passage. I have a very good childhood friend who is also an Episcopal priest.

I enjoy teasing her more than anything! One of the things in her purse is an outline of her funeral service if anything should happen to her. One of the hymns she selected for her funeral service is "I the Lord of Sea and Sky" (which is more commonly referred to as "Here I am Lord").

I suggested to her that this hymn was sort of obvious to include in a funeral service. I joked, "Of course here you are you're dead and in God's presence!" I would also tell her to remember (tongue in cheek) that there was no guarantee of heaven, so it was a little presumptuous to assume that she would be in the Lord's presence while we were singing "Here I am Lord" during her funeral.

All of this was in jest and just to tease her, but whenever I read this scripture or sing that hymn, I smile!