

## What do we do about the Church?

Acts 2: 42-47

I shared earlier this week, that I wished Brian McLaren had asked a different question than what he did. Well, actually he did. Maybe it was my old eyes or maybe it was because subconsciously, I really didn't want to deal with his question but I read: What do we do as the church? When in reality, his question is what do we do about the Church? Slightly different question but that difference leads us to have two very different conversations.

What do we do as the Church calls us to look at our mission and ministries. It invites us to analyze our outreach programs and tweak them if we need to so that we can become the community of faith God calls us to be. The other question: What do we do about the Church...well, that names that there's an issue and puts it back on us to get everything back on track.

I think I like my question better because McLaren's question pulls the cover off our eyes and forces to realize, forces to name, forces us to own that what we are doing as the Church just isn't working anymore. Brian McLaren's question points out that the church is missing point every time we begin longing for those good old days. And here's why I say that: As the Church, we can no longer threaten people with the fear of hell and expect our pews to be filled. We can no longer hold on to

the notion that it is a central value for the wider culture that people go to church on Sunday mornings. As the Church, we can no longer assume we are relevant for generations of people.

See why I liked my question better. If we had stuck with it, we could have easily said we just need to do what we are already doing better then, we could all go home and keep on with life as usual. But McLaren's question...What do we do about the Church...well, it pulls the rug out from underneath us and suddenly our foundations are crumbling. Not a good feeling at all. I completely blame the minister for starting this whole sermon series. Someone should go talk to her and tell her that she is pushing us out of comfort zones and I for one don't like it.

However maybe we should cut her a little slack. As she is often fond of saying, it is her job to help us recognize our growing areas as a community of faith. So maybe she is just trying to help us realize that although we as the wider Church might not be asking this question, everyone else around us is. And now is the time we stop sticking our heads in the sand and stop hoping things go back to the way they used to be. Maybe it's time we realize that the "role of the Church is to cultivate people who can risk being peaceful in a violent world, risk being kind in competitive society, risk being faithful in an age of cynicism, all because we have the confidence that in Christ, we have been reborn into a new reality."

The Church may not be asking the questions that challenge our systems of institutionalism but the rest of the world is. Now of course, they are saying it differently. They are saying things like: What's the purpose of the Church? Why go to church at all when I can experience God on a mountaintop somewhere? Why do we even need the Church? All it is is a worn-out institution which has added to the brokenness of the world rather than healing it.

And on some days, I completely agree with all these statements. We read the reports on the Catholic abuse scandals, how priests who were known abusers were moved congregation to congregation while someone in power knew what was going on and did nothing to stop it. We hear the stories of churches who have passed laws within their own denomination, deciding who is in and who is out, laws which deem who is worthy to be recognized as Beloved Children of God. We see ministers proclaiming the prosperity gospel while living in fancy mansions, driving sports cars, arguing that they need their own private jets for the sake of their ministries while children are going hungry in the communities in which their multi million dollar churches reside.

I get it. And I would be lying if I said there weren't days in which I just want to wash my hands of it all and go do something else, what that would be I'm not sure, sometimes it is selling ice cream at the beach because everyone love ice cream right? However, just when I am ready to disown the wider Church because

of all its rules and regulations, because all the hurt and brokenness which it has caused over the years, just when I am ready to throw up my hands, ready to quit because I don't know what to do about the church anymore because of all its hypocrisy, something always stops me from walking away.

Something always reminds me that the Church has a deeper meaning and purpose. Something always reminds that the Church is still relevant in our world. Something always reminds me that the work we do as the Church is important, needed, and can be done by no other group of people.

Some days that something is my vocation as minister. It allows me to be a part of some of the intimate moments in peoples' lives. I have the honor of being invited to sit beside hospital beds when new life comes into the world. And I also have the honor of being invited beside those same hospital beds as conversations about losing a loved one happen. As a minister, I have the honor celebrating new beginnings through marriage and I also have the honor of being a part of gatherings which celebrate the lives of those who passed.

Some days that something is a conversation with someone who has left the Church completely and he or she is surprised that there is a person of faith who will admit she doesn't have all the answers, that there are people of faith who will

simply sit and listen, who will simply be in relationship with that person rather than try to fix them.

Some days that something is seeing people young and old come together for the greater good, whether that is sorting bottle caps which will be turned into benches and tables for our community or gathering around the table at our monthly free community dinners, seeing all break bread with one another and catching a glimpse of the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

I'll admit my work as minister of Midway Christian Church invites me to do some really amazing life giving things. But this isn't just my work. This is all our work together as a community of faith. This is the work we are all called to as ministers of the Body of Christ here on Earth, as followers of Jesus Christ. This work reminds us that we, as the people of God, are called into community, connected by a vision of God's Kingdom come to life here on Earth. A vision where all are welcomed. A vision where all are seen and embraced as beloved children of God. A vision where all stand in solidarity with one another and justice and mercy reign.

Yes this work is humbling and overwhelming at times but I wouldn't have it any other way. Because you see, while the world sees this work as foolish, as naïve, this work to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth anchors us in hope.

It challenges us to reflect the reign of God in all we do and in all we say. This work to make this vision a reality reminds us that there is more to the narrative than the rich will keep getting richer and the poor will keep getting poorer.

This work reminds us to create space in which the Spirit of God moves in and among us, transforming us, shaping us, challenging us to become the people God created us to be so that this world will know that there is another way.

And that is where our text from Acts comes in. Sure it is an idealized portrait of the church. It doesn't take long for the warm fuzzies to fall away (see chapter 5 of Acts), but Luke gives us a vision of what the church can look like when we are on our best behavior. We ground ourselves in God's word, study it, take it in and allow it to shape us into the people that God calls us to be. We fellowship together. We break bread with each other every time we get, not just at the communion table but at all the tables of our lives...kitchen tables, dining room tables, tables at restaurants. We show active care for one another, both physically and spiritually. We hold a spirit of oneness. We worship together. We create justice together. We become signs of the Kingdom of God here on Earth for all of God's people.

The thing we need to realize as we look at this picture Luke paints is that these are not extraordinary people who got it right and over the years we have gotten it all wrong. They are ordinary people like you and me, who have

experienced God's grace in their lives, and who know that God's love will always have the last word.

Luke tells us that what we do as the church, our communal life, should never be separated from the Spirit's work of building up the Kingdom of God here on Earth. Because when we become disconnected, when we forget that we are more than just people sitting in the pews, going through the motions, when we forget that we are called to be signs of God at work in this world, we lose who we are. We lose whose we are and that is when the world starts asking....What do we do about the Church as they walk away and we become more and more irrelevant.

You see, what Luke knows is that as people of faith, as the Church, we can't share what we don't have. Let me say that again. We can't share what we don't have. We can't share the Spirit of God if we are not grounded in it. We can't share the love of God with others if we aren't practicing what we preach. We can share the vision of God's Kingdom here on Earth if we don't have this vision guiding us and leading us in the first place as the Church.

Again, I don't have all the answers. And again, I wish Brian McLaren would have asked an easier question. It sure would make our lives a lot easier if he did. Except that he asked it. Except that others are asking this question as well. And maybe it is time we start asking it ourselves as communities of faith in 2019.

So here's what I've got...although I may not have all the answers, I can tell you this...Each and every day that I have the honor to serve in ministry, I am constantly asked one question, regardless if the person is connected to a church or not, I am always asked...how in the world does someone make through life's ups and downs if they aren't connected to a community? And the answer is...they don't. They can't. Life is simply too hard sometimes to make this journey on our own. We need each other. We need a community to love us, to support us, to help us know that God is at work in this world.

So maybe the real answer to the question of What do we do about the Church is...we do what we are called to...we become signs of the Spirit of God, we become people who understand ourselves as united in purpose and identity, we become the Body of Christ here on Earth so that all will know the grace and love of God. We become more than people who sit together in our pews on Sunday morning. We become the Church. Amen.