

From the very beginning, there have been Christians who understood ~~that~~ the gospel message to mean that if you have faith it really doesn't matter what you do with your life. Yet, Jesus' teachings and example demand more than that. As the followers of Jesus we are called unto a ministry of demonstrating our faith thru works of love. Having accepted the reality that God accepted us, having professed our trust in God's goodness and his promise of fulfillment, we enter into the Christian ministry, we take up our cross, and follow Jesus' example. As members of the community of faith, we gather for worship and praise and thank him for his gift of life and of faith. And, as members of the community of faith, we go forth to be doers of the Word: A people of compassion; a servant people, a "salt of the earth and a light of the world" people. It is so easy to say we have faith, but this faith "is as dead as a body without breath" the book of James tells us, unless it is demonstrated in our love for all others. "There are in the end three things that last: faith hope and love" Paul has written, "and the greatest of these is love".

Our faith is expressed thru specific concrete, practical works. When John Wesley was 6 years old, the parsonage in which he lived caught fire. The alarm was given and the parents thought that everyone was out of the house safely. But when

2
started counting, they discovered that John was missing. And to their horror they saw John at an upper story window, caught in the burning building. The Father, a devout Anglican priest, immediately dropped to his knees, praying that God would save the boy. His mother, who not only was a woman of great faith but also a very practical woman, immediately ran next door, got a neighbor with a ladder and working with the neighbors, rescued her son from the flaming house. There are times when the best way to express our faith is to get off our knees and go get a neighbor with a ladder, and do what has to be done. Apart from works of love, your faith is dead — "as lifeless as a corpse"

My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it. As it is written: "Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them "Good-bye and good luck. Keep warm and well-fed" but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that. So it is with faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless" (Jas 2:14-17)

Paul's letter to the Romans is a masterpiece. He had never been to Rome, but was planning on going. He felt that it was important to have a strong Christian community in Rome, the capital of the then known world. So he sent the letter ahead of him as a kind of introduction of his faith.

Now Corinthians is something else again. Corinth was the "sin city" of the ancient world. We can imagine the difficulties

3

involved in trying to sustain a strong Christian community in that kind of environment. How does one live the Christian life in that kind of environment. Paul's letters to the Corinthians are written in that spirit. But in Romans and Corinthians both Paul discusses and describes the Holy Spirit. And when we put both together we get a fairly clear view of what the full Christian life is meant to be.

When the Nt writers talk about the Holy Spirit they are telling us that God wants us to move from an occasional experience of his presence into a rich, immediate, and on-going experience. They speak of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, which really means to be immersed in his presence. They speak of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which means to be filled with God. As we begin to experience the Spirit, the particular, unique talents, gifts, insights, abilities of each of us are called forth. They begin to develop. They begin to flower. The best that is in us begins to well up and spill over, if you will.

Everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ is offered the fullness of God presence. Paul helps us to explore the results of this deep religious experience.

1. One of the results of the coming of the HS in our life is that the particular unique gifts of each one of us are used for the common good. God rejoices in our gifts because he loves us, and we rejoice in them by sharing them. We rejoice in

gifts of others and they rejoice in our gifts. "To each person ~~is~~ the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good", Paul says (vs 7). "If I speak with human tongues and angelic ones as well, but do not have love, I am ~~nothing~~ a noisy clanging symbol...if I have faith great enough to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing". Paul writes in Romans 13: We have gifts that differ". Each of us has our unique contribution to make to the common good of all in the spirit of love. Paul goes on: "You love must be sincere...love one another with the affection of brothers. Anticipate each other in showing respect...look on the needs of others as your own; be generous in hospitality. Bless your persecutors...rejoice with those who rejoice...weep with those who weep... if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...conquer evil with good."

John Killinger has written a little book with the thought provoking title THE SECOND COMING OF THE CHURCH. In it he describes what he sees as the weaknesses in today's institutional church. The book is full of hope as the author expresses his ~~hope~~ belief in Church renewal.

Actually the book revolves around a conversation which the author had with a young woman on an air flight. The woman was well educated and was going to NYC on business. She asked John Killinger what he did for a living and he said he was a minister teaching in a seminary. Her disinterested response prompted him

5
to ask "What church do you stay away from?" And she replied:
"All of them". He asked if she had a bad experience in church.
She said no, but thought the church to be hopelessly antique.
Then she went on to describe her version of a whole new approach
to church building architecture. Some of her ideas were quite
thought provoking. As she continued to talk, she began to ex-
pose who longed to belong to a Church community in which she
could be her real self. Finally this modern young professional
woman said: "I would like to be part of a Church in which all
the particularities of myself are accepted as important"

To be a part of a Church community where we accept each
others particularities as important is precisely what Paul is
talking about in Roman and Corinthians. To do whatever needs to
be done to bring this to life in our relationships with one
another with precisely what James was talking about. And it is
precisely what Jesus is talking about in today's gospel lesson.

Jesus has returned to Nazareth, and as his custom was he went
to church. He stands up in the Synagogue to do the lay
reading. And he reads:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me;
Therefore he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captive
Recovery of sight to the blind
and release to the prisoners,
To announce a year of favor from the Lord.

Jesus devoted his life and ministry to carrying out this
mandate. He didn't just talk about the poor, and the captives,

and the blind in abstract ways. He saw particular persons with particular needs and he used his unique, particular gifts to bring them hope, to bring them healing, to set them free from the bonds of despair, free to embrace the gift of the new life he was offering.

Christians who believe that if you have faith it really doesn't matter what you do with your life are grossly misunderstanding the gospel message.

The gospel truth is "because we have faith we are called into a ministry of demonstrating that faith thru works of love. To give life to the world our faith must be demonstrated in on-going particular ways.

When it comes to our faith, let's be particular...let's be practical. When it comes to our church, let us each contribute it is second~~y~~ coming in practical useage of the gifts the Lord has given us.