

Feb 19

One time a Sunday school class of children decided to play church with a minister, ushers, choir, offertory, and all. After a while they tired of playing the game, as children will, and were wanting to change it. One boy said, "I know, let's play Jesus". Well, that was a new one for the group and couended great. When the other children asked the boy to expalin the game he said that one boyr would play Jesus and the rest would be mean to himm, call him names, strike him, spit on him, tie him to a tree, and pretend to crucify him. That took a bit of the glow off the honor of palying Jesus, but they went on with the game. After a few minutes of absording the cruelty of the other children, the boy playing the part of Jesus called a halt to it and said: "Let's not play Jesus anymore, let's go back to playing church". (Walter D. Wagoner)

Well, the show fits, doesn't it. "Let's not play Jesus, let's play church". We ought to be aware of the difference.

GB Shaw saw the difference. Shaw was brilliant and cautious. Shaw was sometimes ambigious but never ambivalent. He bitterly attacked the chuch in some of its hypocritical stances. Yet thruout his writings it is clear that Shaw saw what a potent force Christian faith could be if lived out with integtiry and with passion. Listen to what he once wrote:

"if some enterprizing clergyman with a cure for souls in the slums were to hoist a board over his church door with the following inscription: Here men and women after working hours may dance without getting drunk on Fridays; hear good music on Saturdays; pray on Sundays; discuss public affairs without molestation from the police on Mondays; have a building for any honest purpose on Tuesdays; bring the children for games and...romps on Wednesdays; and volunteer a through scrubbing down on Thursdays, he could reform the whole neighborhood".

Shaw saw the church's greatest need but also the church's unlimited potential. If the Church of Jesus Christ becomes what he created it to be, a place that truly seeks to meet the needs of all God's children, the gates of hell will never be able to prevail against it.

How do we move from playing church to playing Jesus? We know that, with Martin Luther, we are to be Christ's to our world. But how? Where do we begin?

1. We begin by acknowledging who we are. We are the body of Jesus Christ. We are the temple of the living God. We are the company of the committed by a covenant and a cross. The writer of Lev knew that is where we must begin. The Lord speaks to Moses in the second chapter of this book of priestly laws and says to him: "Speak unto the congregation of the children of Israel and say unto them "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy""

The people of Israel never forgot who they were. That is

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how they have survived as a people for 3000 years under every possible adverse circumstance. The law and covenant which bound them together were not of man but of God.

Paul addresses the same issue in his letter to the Cor. He writes: "Do you not know that you are God's people and that God's spirit dwells in you?"

You are not just another group, Paul is saying. You are not just another political party. You are a holy temple.

When the church has forgotten that, it has lost its vitality. Our strength is renewed, first of all, when we are rooted in our dependence upon God.

A.J. Gossip once used this analogy. He says that for a long time scientists in tropical lands could not determine how, even in the longest droughts, when all the green things were burned up and the riverbeds dry, that tiny little cants always seem to build their little walls with a moist soil. Then it was discovered that the secret was a carefully constructed shaft which they dug downward sometimes as far as 60 feet to a perennial spring that no drought ever touches. Each night the whole busy population hurries up and down the shaft, time after time, bearing moisture to the surface.

That is an appropriate analogy to who we are as the body of Christ. Our roots go deep. We are the temple of the living God. His spirit dwells in us. It is from him that we draw our life and our strength.



But we cannot stop here or we will still be playing church rather than playing Jesus. It is clear that Jesus calls us to be more than a shrine. The church is not a place but a people - a people bound together in love and mission.

It is clear in Paul's letter to Cor that he was writing to a church torn apart by dissension.

I am reminded of a story of a shoe salesman who had shown a certain lady more than 25 pairs of shoes before she finally bought the first pair she tried on. As she paid for the shoes and was leaving the store, he said to her "Thank you for coming. I wish I had a dozen customers like you". One of the other clerks heard him and when the lady was gone, said "You told her you wished you had a dozen customers like her. Why did you say that to such an overbearing and hard to please person?" Because it is true", He said, "I have a 100 like her and I wished I only had 12".

It sounds like the church at Corinth has a hundred hard to please, disgruntled constituents. They were playing church, one group wanted one thing, another something else.

Paul scolds them fiercely. After telling them they are God's temple, he writes: "If anyone destroys God's temple. God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are". One of Jesus' most important prayers was that his followers should be one.

Now, of course, this is not to say that any church is

without its problems.

a popular psychologist was a speaker at a pastors conference. As he introduced himself to each pastor, he said "I'm sorry to hear about the problem in your church". Nearly half the preachers said "It was there before I came", the other half said, "It's improving". However, one fellow said, "What problem". After playing golf with that pastor later on, the psychologist discovered that he also lied about his score.

Every church has its problems. All of us have our own ideas on how the Kingdom of God ought to be advanced. Sometimes those ideas are hard to mesh. But we are one body. We can't afford to lose a finger or a hand or a leg. We are one body - the body of Christ. If we are going to play Jesus, we must work together, pray together, strive together in unity and common purpose, and never lose sight of the fact, that altho we disagree, we are one body.

But there is another thing to say of we are going to play Jesus. It is not enough to love God, it is not enough to love one another. We must also love the world for whom Christ died

A man came out of church one day and said to the pastor: "I love God so much that I am ready to choke anyone who dares speak a word against him". We may chuckle, but such attitudes are wrecking the world today...ready to do something

drastic if someone disagrees...that is playing church 6  
rather than serving Jesus Christ.

Jesus set out not to choke the wayward but to embrace them with the good news that they were loved, that they were forgiven, that they were a part of the family of God. That is our job as well

We are called to take the love we have received and share it with the world. That is what Jesus did and so must we. Charles Spurgeon once used this analogy. He said if a single wasp discovers a deposit of honey or other food he will return to his nest and impart the news to his companions, who will sally forth in great numbers to partake of the fare which has been discovered. Asks Spurgeon: "Shall we who have found honey in the Rock, Jesus Christ, be less considerate of our fellow man? Ought we not hasten to tell the good news

Ralph Sockman once wrote" I met a woman who had come out of a religious service all aglow. She said, 'I love everybody'. After a little conversation I discovered that there were some specific exceptions to her love. She made me think of the old fashioned woolen mittens we used to wear. They kept the hands warm but you couldn't pick anything up when you had them on. Love for God may seem to warm our hearts, but it is not real unless it helps us to take hold of our neighbors needs.

Playing Church, playing Jesus . We are the temple of the living God, we are the body of Christ. We dare not let anything tear it asunder. But neither dare we stray from our central reason for being. That is...to tell the world, in Jesus' name, that it is loved.