

What is RIGHT with the Church

Prayer: Lord, your word both challenges and strengthens us. Come to us today in the words that are spoken. Where we are weak, strength us; where we are complacent, challenge us; where we are hurting, heal us. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

There once was a man who got married.

He had long been enamored with the idea of marriage,
So when he met the "woman of his dreams" he proposed.

Things went well at first.

He told his friends that his new wife was "*all that I ever hoped for in a woman*".

She was beautiful, intelligent, and witty.

His friends thought it was "*a match made in heaven*".

Unfortunately, this initial bliss didn't last.

Gradually, in day-to-day living the man began to notice certain
Imperfections in his new wife.

She was beautiful...but not always.

Sometimes, say before 8 am, she was downright ordinary.

She could look stunning for parties and social occasions, but marriage meant that he had to look at her before she got her makeup on in the morning.

Yes, she was intelligent, you couldn't take that away from her,
 But there were gaps in her knowledge, sometimes large gaps.
She could discuss art, and wine, and politics,
 But she had not interest in the finer points of literary criticism.
That distressed him greatly.

He was afraid that there might be a time when she would embarrass him by
making some ill-considered statement in public,
 Thus revealing to the world her intellectual imperfections.
 That really bugged him.

Slowly but surely, he found himself growing cool to this woman.
Marriage was proving to be different than he thought.

It had been fun to be with her on a Saturday night,
 To dance with her in to the wee hours of the morning,
 But marriage wasn't like that at all.

Marriage is cornflakes at breakfast,
 And someone who snores when they sleep.
Marriage is disagreements over finances.
Marriage is visits from the Prince George relatives and
 that grotesque lamp she bought for the living room.

The man still believed in love, in fact he believed in it more than ever.
He longed for the perfect partner,

He continued to cling to the idea, and the ideal, of marriage.

The ideal of marriage was fine
it was his personal experience of it that bothered him.

The man who marries “the woman of his dreams”
The woman who marries “Mr. Right”
Each will discover that their experience of Mr. or Mrs. Right
is quite different than the ideal.

.... just ask my wife Carol.

By now you are wondering – what the heck are you taking about Paul,
The sermon title said this sermon was about the church.

And it is....the man in the story is a parable that we can apply to the
experience that many people have with the church.

Like the person fascinated by the idea of marriage, many people approve
of the idea of following Jesus and the concept of the church.

They are however, horrified by the squalid particulars.

One person said “*I could believe in Jesus if he didn’t drag behind him
His hideous bride – the church*”

Well... yah.

How many of us sometimes feel that way?

It's easy to point out the flaws we see in the church.

Most of us see things we'd like to change.

We see things we'd like done differently.

We want a new emphasis in some areas

And we want less emphasis in other areas.

And that thinking has been around since the beginning of the church.

Don't believe me – read the book of Acts.

It is so easy to latch on to the negative.

It's natural to be critical and notice what irritates us and rubs us the wrong way.

But this morning, let's recognize that there are lots of things

That are RIGHT with the Church.

What is right with the church you ask?

Well, to begin with, the church is right because it draws us into a community, and God wants us to live our lives with others.

In our modern society there is a mistake idea concerning what a Christian is.

Somehow, the idea has developed that sitting in front of a television set with a religious program on makes a person a Christian.

But the New Testament knows nothing about solitary Christians.

Jesus gathered a group of people TOGETHER and said:

*“by this all people with know that you are my disciples,
That you love one another”*

That’s crucial for us to remember.

There is a sense in which the church is doing something right – by simply existing.

There are times when that is all we need to do.... BE THE CHURCH

The church is an end in itself

(not the committees or denominations but rather a group of Christians gathering together to worship God)

The church is an end to itself because when we gather and work at being a family of faith, we are experiencing what God wants the human race to experience – community, acceptance, relationships, friendships.

James Taylor, a U.C. layperson and author writes about “Big Art” in his book *Two Worlds in One*.

Jim writes:

Big Art Gibbs stand about 6 foot 18” and wighs as much as two of me. \ Because of my respect for yhou, I’m willing to risk writing about him in a way that may seem unflattering.

Big Art is a police sergeant. For four years he was chief ushe in our congregation.

When he first took over as chief usher, he wore his police boots. At least, they sounded like boots at the back of the church. It took a while to convince him to wear soft-soled shoes.

Big Art also had a parade-ground voice, incapable of whispering. He did a great job of bringing in new people as ushers. But when he gave his novice ushers the word to carry to offering forward to be dedicated, everyone could hear him. And when we said the Lord’s Prayer in unison, the congregation was as likely to follow his voice – even without a microphone – as the ministers.

And sometimes he ushered wearing a fluorescent-blue sports jacket.

Frankly, his mannerisms bothered a lot of people. Including me.

One day, we were in the narthex together. Big Art greeted some old folks arriving, towering over them like an iceberg over a dory. Watching him, I wondered what he must be like to like with. Did he drive his wife up the wall?

At that moment I realized that she was watching him too.

What I saw in her eyes, in that unguarded moment, was not frustration or anger or despair, but love.

He just happened to have a few awkward limbs attached to an enormous heart.

When I tried to see him that same way, through the eyes of love, it made a world of difference. I began to see the time and dedication he gave his church, the tenderness he showed his grandchildren, the depth and strength of his faith.

Recently, Big Art had half his jaw and tongue removed in cancer surgery. It was a shock for many people. They missed hearing his voice boom out the Lord's Prayer. It wasn't until they realized they could lose him that they saw him with different eyes.

He wasn't really any different. He lost a lot of weight, and spoke with difficulty – and for the first time, in a whisper.

But he was still the same Big Art.

The difference was in the way they looked at him.

If we are to be the kingdom, as Jesus was, then we will have to learn to see people the way Jesus did.

Many of the people he healed were seen by the able-bodied as frustrations or inconveniences. The lame, the blind, the deaf, the victims of leprosy, were objects to be avoided if possible. But Jesus looked at them with the eyes of love.

We need to learn to do the same.

When we try to see others as Jesus saw them, through his eyes, to hear them through his ears, to allow ourselves to be touched by them as he was, then we shall be learning how to live in the Kingdom.

*Love doesn't depend on the other person being loveable.
It starts with our attitude. As we become loving, we grow into the Kingdom.*

We do it with our own loved ones. We know their shortcomings and weaknesses better than anyone else. But we also see more to them than their faults and failures. Because we love them.

And we do it for ourselves.

Do we dare risk looking at others as if we loved them too?

So writes Jim Taylor.

The church is a community.

The church is "right" when it is a community of caring, accepting, joyous followers of Jesus.

The church is "right" when it brings people together,

when it sustains and nurtures the individual

when it calls people into unity

while respecting; honouring, and celebrating their uniqueness.

What else is RIGHT with the church?

Well, the church is also “right” when it becomes active in the needs of the world. Including working for improvements and changes through the economic and political systems that affect people’s lives.

That can be a touchy subject for some people.

Someone – don’t know who – once said:

*“You can separate church and state
But you can’t separate God and good government”*

When some suggest that the church should not get involved in politics, I am reminded that the church has been involved ever since God said to Moses *“God down and tell Pharaoh to let me people go”*

Makes people uncomfortable but we shouldn’t apologize.

Our faith affects both our personal lifestyle and our political choices

- In economics, foreign affairs, immigration, budget setting
- Housing, health, schools, roads... everything.

Whether you vote Conservative, Liberal, N.D.P. or for the Rhinoceros party

Ultimately, as a Christian, your ultimate loyalty and responsibility is to God.

We should continually ask the “God question”

Not “what will work”

Not “what is popular”

Not “what is acceptable”

Rather, we should be asking... “what would Jesus do?”

The church, this community of faith, is “right” when we collectively, and individually, try to improve our society and the world.

But how can we do this??

We can’t – on our own – we need to power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our congregation.

Author Judith Brocklehurst wrote of our hunger for the eternal in an article called “Give us God”

She said *“We need God – something good happens inside us when our hearts are at peace with the Creator whom Jesus shows us.”*

That is what is RIGHT with the church... it points us,

No ... it calls us... to God

This rag-tag group of believers here at Summerland United....YOU!

This motley crew of grumpy, impatient, stubborn, thin-skinned,
Loving, caring, long suffering, supportive, prayerful people

YOU - who are the church –

Are the instrument that can lead each other, and others, into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus.

God is what is RIGHT with the church!
 You are what is RIGHT with the church

Sure there is stuff that is wrong with the church – but there is SO MUCH THAT IS RIGHT!

As you leave the sanctuary today, please remember what is RIGHT with the church, and remember St. Paul's words to 1st century Christians...

**“finally bretheren, whatever is true, what ever is honorable,
 whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
 whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence
 if there is anything worthy of praise – think about these things.”**
**What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do:
 And the God of peace will be with you.**

Let us pray: Lord, send your spirit to us so that we might be right for the world Amen