

There is no “I” in Christianity

Vision Statement Part II – *Helping each other with mutual care & support*

October 23, 2011

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 4:32-35 (NIV)

This morning we are continuing our series looking at the five elements of our vision statement. The five being Evangelism – “Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with our neighbors and friend, Helping each other with mutual care & support, Aiming to Worship God in Spirit & Truth, Responding to the Needs of Hurting People in our community and around the world, and Equipping children, youth and adults for Christian Discipleship. Last week Alex began by looking at Evangelism with the great title, “Evangelism – A Dirty Word.” Since churches are made up of people, human beings, and every person has strengths and weaknesses, then every church has strengths and weaknesses. Occasionally it is important to look at ourselves and do an assessment. Evangelism – “Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ,” at least through words, is a weakness of the Mennonite Church in general. It is a weakness among ourselves in particular, for a variety of reasons: One, throughout much of our history, especially the past 100 years or so, we have placed an emphasis on works and service (not necessarily a bad thing because as James says “faith without works is dead” [James 2:26], but just as “faith without works is dead,” so is works without verbally expressing the Good News of why we do what we do. Another reason is our emphasis on “humility” and on being “the quiet in the land.” Humility is a good, biblical, quality to have. “The quiet in the land,” not so biblical.

Jesus did lots of good things while he was here on earth: feeding the hungry, driving out demons, freeing the oppressed, forgiving sinners, and he was almost always outspoken in telling others why he did what he did. He came to preach the Good News that the kingdom of God had arrived.

As I shared during one of our devotions in Haiti, why is it that we feel we need to travel to such faraway places and 3rd world countries to share the Good News of Jesus Christ? We have a huge mission field right here in our own backyard. A lot of people who claim to be Christian but have never really committed their lives to Him. “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord (pray) for the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt. 9:37-38). Who was the last person you invited to church? Studies tell us that approx. 75 percent of unchurched adults begin attending church when someone personally invites them to a worship service. Are you fulfilling your part of the Great Commission?

This morning we are looking at the second part of our vision statement, “Helping each other with mutual care and support.” I think if we are really honest with ourselves in our assessment of part II, it is both a strength and a weakness. If it is about helping each other out financially, then I think we do a very good job, especially with something like our *Share & Care Fund* or even the amount that is given through the offering every single Sunday. But when was the last time anyone of you sold your home, or your land, or your possessions and just took your money and laid it at the church leaders feet, to be distributed and used by those in need? In a land, that even in spite of some current economic hardships, where there is so much prosperity and wealth, giving money is often the easiest thing for us to do.

But there is a lot more to “*Mutual Care and Support*” than just money. The apostle Paul was an encourager. It is evident in just about every single one of his letters. At the beginning, the end, and throughout.

Therefore encourage each other . . . 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11

We live in a society and culture which is all about bringing people down. The political debates – they aren’t so much about what the candidates are going to do, or their own character. They are about what the others are not doing. And politics is just a reflection of the bigger society. Are you an encourager or a discourager? How do other people see you?

In his 2nd letter to his young protégé, Timothy, Paul writes:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.
2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV)

While Paul might have been writing personally to Timothy, who would become a leader in the early church, I don’t believe that passage is just reserved for Preachers and Pastors. We are all called to “Preach the Word,” in both our actions and words. All the time – that’s what the phrase “in season and out of season” means. “Correct, rebuke and encourage.”

To Titus, Paul said: “*Encourage and rebuke with all authority*” (Titus 2:15).

In his letter to the early Christians in Colosse, Paul writes:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom . . .”
Colossians 3:16 (NIV)

So, when was the last time you corrected, rebuked or admonished one of your brother's or sister's in Christ? The words correct, rebuke, admonish all have the same connotation. The word rebuke means to criticize or reprove sharply. The word "admonish" is probably the least harsh – "to reprove mildly or kindly but seriously. In our everything goes, feel good, society, those words are difficult to swallow. Nobody likes getting corrected, rebuked or admonished, but it is part of our God given responsibility as Christians. The key is how we do it and perhaps Jesus gives us the best instruction in Matthew 18:

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."
Matthew 18:15 (NIV)

That's not what we usually do. We don't go to the person directly. We point out the sin to others. It is also important the Spirit in which we approach the person. In his letter to the Christians in Colosse, before Paul tells them to "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom," he tells them the Spirit they must have:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
Colossians 3:12-14

Helping each other is about a lot more than just financial. "Encourage one another, admonish, correct, and rebuke one another, forgive one another."

"For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."
Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV)

I'm not so sure why we have left those verses out of the Lord's Prayer he taught his disciples to pray, other than we already have been instructed to pray, "forgive us our debts/trespasses as we forgive our debtors."

"Encourage one another," "Admonish, correct, and rebuke one another," "Forgive one another," "Love one another."

The apostle Peter, as translated in the New Living Translation, says to "serve one another: *"And all of you, serve each other in humility"* 1 Peter 5:5-6 (NLT).

"Encourage one another," "Admonish, correct, and rebuke one another," "Forgive one another," "Love one another," "Serve each other." We are also called to pray together and for one another. What was the reason for the success of the early church?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
Acts 2:42a (NIV)

They all joined together constantly in prayer. Acts 1:14a (NIV)

Above all else, we are called to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Is it selfish? Well, then Jesus was selfish because in his model prayer, not the one he taught found in his *Sermon on the Mount*, but the one he prayed, found in John 17:

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” John 17:9 (NIV)

But it wasn't just for them, it was for also for those who would come to believe through their message:

“My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” John 17:20 (NIV)

Jesus prayed for his disciples, the ones whom God had given him, and he prayed for those who would come to believe through their message.

There is no way we can overstate the importance of prayer. Why is it that the church is growing in places like China, Korea, Africa, and South America, while shrinking in Europe and North America? Could it be we have lost the focus of what Christianity is all about? That we are looking to ourselves and not to God? David Cho, is the Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, begun in 1958 as a small house church, and today is believed to be the largest church in the world. Some 250,000 people in attendance on any given Sunday, 150,000 at its main church and about 100,000 in its regional campuses around Seoul. Seven services throughout the day, that which begins at 5:00 a.m. with several thousand gathering for prayer. Many of the house churches gather every morning at 5:00 a.m. for prayer before beginning their day. Cho says that the church in South Korea has grown because they have placed their emphasis on three pillars. He refers to them as the three legs on a three legged stool. Take away one of the three legs and the stool will not stand. Take away one of the three pillars of the church and it will not stand. The three pillars in which they have built the church: 1) Prayer; 2) small groups or house churches where each person is accountable to one another; and 3) “touch not thy glory.”

What if we really got serious about evangelism and prayer? There is a connection between prayer, evangelism, and the Holy Spirit:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

Acts 4:31 (NIV)

As Christians we say we believe in God, that He exists as three in one – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but we often live like he doesn't exist. We really don't expect God to do all that much. What Craig Groeschel refers to as “Christian atheism.”

What if we really took it seriously to pray on Wednesday evenings, the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month, and prayed for God to grow the church. God didn't say it was our responsibility to

grow the church. What he calls us to do is to be faithful. But even as I say that I know that come Wednesday evening it will be the same faithful few who come out for prayer. And then we wonder why God is not faithful.

Read Acts 2:42-47 . . . *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

The writer of the Book of Hebrews understood the importance of the time we are in:

“See to it, brothers (and sisters), that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:12-13

“Therefore, brothers (and sisters), since we have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:19-25

Let us “spur” on one another.” “Together.” “Love one another.” “Encourage one another.” “Correct one another.” “Forgive one another.” “Pray together and for each other.” Are you starting to get the drift? Christianity is not an individual sport. It is a team sport and just as they say there is no “I” in team, there is no “I” in Christianity. Well, actually there are three small “i’s,” as in letters, but there are no individual “I’s,” as in people. For those that say they can be Christian and not be part of the church, that is plain bad theology. That is our own sinful, highly individualistic culture talking. Christians are the church and church is something that we are called to do together, with one another. And, “touch not the glory,” because the glory is reserved for God. As theologian and pastor John Piper says, “Christ does not exist to make much of us. We exist in order to enjoy making much of Him.”