

What Are We Supposed to be Doing?

Sunrise Presbyterian Church

July 24, 2016

The years of my 20s were a turbulent time in my life. I counted it up one time, and discovered that I had lived in 12 different places during that 10 year period. Three places in Hutchinson, three in Wichita, several in upstate New York, and a couple in Salina. And so, when I moved to Salina in 1978, my heart was ready to settle down. During most of those years of my 20s, I did not attend a church. For a year or so after I moved here, I visited some churches. And then one day, one of my friends invited me to come to church here—at Sunrise—with her. The very first day, I knew that this was my heart's home. I stood behind Bill Anschutz (the choir director). At the end of the service, he turned around and said, "You need to be in the choir." I was welcomed by Lois Sweley, and visited that week by Dick and Lois. Soon, I was teaching Sunday School.

And so, I have been saddened as over the years our membership slowly declined, and it seemed as if we were slowly drifting down. I/we complained and grumbled and hung our heads down like Eeyore.

And then, a little over a year ago, Sunrise began this thing called New Beginnings. In the past year and a half, two prayer workshops, two new book studies last fall, CASTLE going better than ever, Heartland day camp, the summer food program, we've hosted more community meetings, hosted a national speaker on gun violence, new carpet, new pew cushions, the 211 project, prayer shawl ministry, franks and fellowship, there's a women's retreat coming up, an international mission trip is in the works, commodities distribution. And, there are many of us, as always, involved in activities outside these walls—doing God's work. If you are not in on the action, you need to be.

Sunrise is not as big as it used to be, but there is life in this place. There is a sweet, sweet spirit.

I LOVE this place! Thank you for helping to make it my home.

Now, that's really not what I planned to talk about this morning, but I just had to share it with you.

No, what I really want to talk about is what is supposed to happen in this room on Sunday mornings. So much of the actual work of the church—167 hours a week—goes on outside of this one hour on Sunday morning.

So, what should be happening here in this one hour?

The Book of Order states: Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. As they respond to God's claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, believers are transformed and renewed. In worship the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world. (Directory for Worship, W-1.1001)

For the past two years, nearly every day I have read part of one of the epistles—the books that the apostle Paul wrote to the first churches in the world.

Let me pause for a minute to say that I had always been slightly suspicious of Paul—after all, he said that wives should submit themselves to their husbands! How's that working out for you, Ed? And, I believe that he said that women should be quiet in worship. How's that working out for you, Sunrise?

Anyway, when I really got to reading, I discovered this wonderful, energetic, thoughtful, amazing leader.

Rev. Reid talked a couple of weeks ago about some of the things that Paul said about how we as individuals should live our lives.

But, since Paul was writing to the churches, he also had some very specific things to say about how churches should live their lives. And, he was pretty emphatic about it. The introduction to the Timothy books in the Message Bible says: Christians are quite serious in believing that when they gather together for worship and work, God is present and sovereign. God creates and guides, God saves and heals, God corrects and blesses, God calls and judges.

The first piece of that section from the Book of order says that in worship, we are to praise God and to acknowledge God as present in the world and in our lives. We call this worship.

From a time when Clarke and I were teaching 5th and 6th grade Sunday School, I remember that the materials said: In worship we are not the audience. God is the audience. In other words, it is not about us. We should be coming here to praise and thank God.

If the service doesn't quite suit us, we should be looking at ourselves. Did we prepare our hearts for worship? Did we come looking to be entertained? Were our hearts right? Were we open to the Message(s) that God has for us?

Second: the Book of Order says, believers are transformed and renewed AND offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world.

Do we come ready to be challenged, to be better, to be different, to be more of what God calls us to be?

There are people, I am told, that feel we should leave church every Sunday morning "feeling good".

Well, I happen to disagree. Of course, I love coming here, because it is my church home, and I get to see people here that I really love. And, I love being in the choir. And I love the music. And I love my Sunday School class.

But: In my opinion there is a much larger purpose here than just making me/us feel good.

In our country, it seems like many of us have the idea that life should be easy. Fast food, one minute in the microwave, increase the speed limit.

But I think that God calls us to more.

In a book called "Take the Stairs", author Rory Vaden says that if we always take the easy way, we sell ourselves and the world short. The book is about success in the business world, but for me, it applies even more in our faith lives. Mr. Vaden says "...The vast majority of Western societies have adopted an "escalator mentality"—one that says getting what we want shouldn't require much work, and that there are always shortcuts in business and in life.....We want everything now, and we want it without earning it." He advocates taking the stairs in more than just a literal way.

As a lay preacher, the basic idea of the sermon on a Sunday morning, according to what I have been taught is this: The Presbyterian pastor generally is to take the

scripture, study it, pray about it, and seek to find the message that God has in that scripture for the people on that particular day. Now, if the pastor is following that line of thinking, sometimes what comes out is not necessarily going to make us feel good. Sometimes it should make us examine ourselves. Sometimes—in my opinion—it should sting a little bit.

Sometimes the sermon should be about hard topics. Topics that we need to think about, to wrestle with: Hunger and our part in it; violence and our part in it; racism and our part in it; inequality and our part in it. Sometimes we just need to learn and to grow. What does it mean to live as a child of God? What does being a Christian mean? What are my beliefs?

We have some friends who loved their son a great deal. And, their idea of the best way to love him and raise him was always to praise. They always helped, always encouraged—which parents should do—but they always came across as if their son was the best. But, pretty much, only praise. Everyone should be a winner all the time.

It didn't turn out the best for the son when he faced the real world. When he got to college, he had no reasonable self assessment skills, and got discouraged and quit.

So, for me, a sermon that is just a pat on the back, and you are so nice and so good, and go back out there and be good some more isn't enough.

Now, that may sound a hard. But, I encourage you to get into your Bible and read some of the stuff that Paul wrote! He went right after the people of those churches.

And, if we really believe what we say--that God is here with us, in this place and in this time, we may not find that the message for this morning is in the sermon. We may find that it is in the music or one of the prayers, or in Sunday School, or in the face of a friend that we've known for two weeks or 30 years, or in the grasp of a hand when that is just what we need.

The Worldwide English translation of the Bible says our scripture for today this way: All that is written in the holy writings comes from the Spirit of God. The holy writings are good for these things: to teach people, to

show them when they are wrong, to make them see what is right, to teach them to do what is right.

Where will that happen if not here?

And so, before we come here on Sunday morning, we should prepare our hearts to worship and to learn and to hear God calling us. We, too, during every week should be doing some of the work of finding out what God has in mind for us.

A 20 minute sermon out of 10,080 minutes in a week to feed our souls (about 2/1000 of the week, 6/1000 for the whole hour). If that was the percentage of the time we fed our bodies, we would starve to death. Let's not starve our souls. Don't hang it all on Martha or whoever is preaching. Part of the job is ours.

There is life in Christ. There is life in this church—living, breathing life. There is life in you! May you be blessed, may you be encouraged, may you sometimes be made to feel uncomfortable, and may you learn and grow. Amen.

