

Easter's over, now what?

Well, last week was the Church Universal's "Super Bowl." At least that's what it is often referred to in the Church world. Most churches prepare for weeks and even months for this one Sunday, hoping that when it is all said and done that this once-a-year event will propel them into a better future: more attendance, more giving, more participation... but in fact, survey's, studies and polls show that the week after Easter is one of the least attended Sundays throughout the year. We go from an empty tomb one week, to empty pews the next.

Sure, some churches see a bump in the categories I just mentioned. Some actually will see people come to faith and even join the church as a result. But for most churches the trends hold pretty steady in our current Christian culture. Most mainstream churches are in steep decline and across the board church attendance still hasn't recovered from pre-pandemic levels. We still have a great deal of folks who only show up for the big holidays.

Perhaps part of the problem is that we, Christians and churches, keep thinking that the next "event" (if we do it bigger and better) will be the answer to our woes. By and large, our modern church culture is living in "Event driven Christianity." We just go from event to event, Sunday to Sunday, Bible study to Bible study, retreat to retreat, conference to conference, daily devotional to the next day's daily devotional.

Why? Why do we go from event to event? Because it's easy. Because it fits into the lifestyle we want. It becomes convenient. I can give God 15 minutes of my day, or a few hours one or two days out of the week...

But real Christianity isn't easy, it's hard. It's soooo hard, that you cannot do it apart from the Holy Spirit's help. Real Christianity is a lifestyle, in and of itself, not an accessory or minor addition to your life. Real Christianity is *rarely* convenient. It will interrupt your life and your plans, over and over again.

When you became a Christian, and I realize there are a myriad of ways people come into the Kingdom; did anyone warn you of the *cost* that came with that decision? Did someone tell you that it's not just about praying a prayer and one day ending up in Heaven?

Real Christianity will cost you *everything*! Because that is the exchange that we make for salvation, to be restored to relationship, to know God and as a gift, get all the benefits of knowing Him.

Jesus said, "***Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.***" (Matthew 6:33)

In **Colossians 1**, the Apostle Paul declares of Jesus, "***For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things,***

and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” (v.16-18)

Do Jesus and the Kingdom have first place in your life? Or did you just add certain “Christian behaviors” to your old life?

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” -2nd Corinthians 5:17

Paul said it best this way in **Galatians 2:20**:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

As we’ve studied for the last couple of weeks, Jesus died for us, so that through our dying to self, we could live for Him in the resurrection power of God by the Holy Spirit. He didn’t just die so that we might be forgiven; and He didn’t just die so that we would go to Heaven. He died and rose again for much, much more than that:

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” -2nd Corinthians 5:14, 15

God doesn’t just want servants; He wants Sons and Daughters. God doesn’t just want “church goers;” He wants us to *be* the Church. God doesn’t just want us to go to Heaven; He wants us to bring Heaven here on earth (**Matthew 6:10**).

Many of us have opted for Christianity “lite.” But this is not the Gospel. This is not God’s design. Many, by their lifestyle, are saying “What is the very *least* I have to do and still go to Heaven?” when they *should* be asking, “How much can I accomplish for the Kingdom of Heaven before Jesus returns?”

As I stated earlier, we make church about ministry and events, but God is about “People and Process;” He’s about Relationships and the Journey (remember paths and seasons?). How well are you loving your neighbor? (Literal neighbors, at work, at school, at church even...?)

There are things for us to accomplish in this life, both individually and as a local church body. There are Kingdom things for us to accomplish: Love, prayer, discipleship, evangelism; but we can only do these things if we know *who* we are, *Whose* we are and what gifts He has given us, again, both individually and as a church, to accomplish the work.

It's not enough just to give God some of you, or some of your time, or some of what you possess. He wants it all. He deserves it all. We can't just give Him some of our attention. We can't just show up at the major holidays and acknowledge "the man upstairs." We must live as though every day is Easter, every day is Christmas. As I've heard it said before, "Live every day as though Christ died yesterday, Rose today and is coming tomorrow!"

We are a week out from Easter 2024. I'm not curious about your plans for *next* Sunday... I'm curious if you have any Kingdom plans for Monday through Saturday...?

As we transition to Communion this morning, I want us to revisit what Paul said in **1st Corinthians 11**, as he admonishes the church at Corinth over their failure to "judge the Body rightly..." I mention this every time we do communion because in its context, it's a warning to us about eating the bread and drinking of the Cup in an unworthy manner. If we have unforgiveness, or bitterness or unrighteous judgment towards others in our hearts and we don't deal with those issues through repentance and forgiveness, we "eat and drink judgment."

I want to present this again in a different light today. What if a way that we don't judge the Body rightly is by not understanding your place IN the Body correctly? Do you know who God has declared you to be? Do you know what God has called you to do in ministry? Identity proceeds purpose. You must know who God has made you to be and then understand what He has called you to do.

Many people in the Church, never get passed "serving" in a church setting; some never get that far. They are simply spectators, pew potatoes (wait a second, you'll get it). But most will come and perform an arbitrary function of serving somewhere within the congregation based on the need of that congregation. They may not be gifted or called, but they'll fill a hole. Others will perform a task based on their skills or talents.

But God's design for our place in the Body according to **1st Corinthians 12 & 14**, and **Romans 12** has to do with spiritual gifting and calling. If you don't understand or know this, then perhaps you are not judging the Body rightly, because you don't understand or know your place IN the Body; your role and function according to your gifts and calling.

Let's take a moment to examine ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to examine us according to the Word...