



I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-14

*And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back
and take you to be with me that you
also may be where I am.
You know the way to the place where I
am going.*

May 14, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7 • 1 Peter 2:4-9 • John 14:1-12

Let's say that Jesus Christ should choose one Sunday morning to wander into a Christian church in San Francisco or New Orleans or New York City. If he were to look about he would immediately notice the variety of different national identities and he might well say to himself: "Wow, is this what I started? In my time it was mainly Jewish and Greek-speaking folks who came to explore the meaning of the Good News of the kingdom of God." If the Lord were to turn and ask me what this was all about, I would probably say, Lord, what you are looking at in those pews is all about natural migration. People wander around the globe searching for a place and a community that will welcome them; when they do move about, they often seek out those who are of their own background and nationality. Fortunately, the church the Lord established so long ago is large enough to accommodate any number and variety of folks who may choose to gather there.

It is my recollection from my younger days that the Christian folks who gathered at any given church had a certain assumption that Christians of their ethnic background would naturally want to associate with their "kind."

Jumping ahead a hundred years or so, most churches look like a *mélange*, a mixture of people from almost any country in the world. Even more interesting is the fact that they all manage to live and worship in peace. Of course, occasionally there may be differences over language or religious customs that folks have brought with them from the "old country."

We might imagine that the church that sprang into being, say, fifty years after Jesus' return to the Father was the ideal one. The numbers were limited and they came mainly from either a Jewish or Greek background.

So, you would assume that life in the church of the First Century should have been smooth sailing. Ah, but such was not the case. By the eighties there was already some dysfunction occurring. One of the problems that arose was over the distribution of food. It appears that the Jewish leaders were favoring their own people. This caused uproar among the Greek-speaking Christians. The solution? Seven deacons were assigned to balance the distribution. We know that because their names were all Greek!

The interesting point in this solution is that the deacons were not assigned only to wait on table. Within a short period of time some of them were baptizing new converts and preaching in various places.

So, how was this first problem in the church solved? Not simply by way of political negotiations. Rather, the early Christians were reminded that, no matter what their nationality happened to be, they were fundamentally “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation a people God means to have as his own. In other words Jews and Greeks were reminded that they were all of one piece, the people of God. Remembering that would solve any problem that might arise.

In 1st Peter, they were again reminded that they were not simply a random pile of rocks or stones strewn across the land but rather, they should consider themselves as stones belonging to a structure built on Christ the cornerstone. It is an image of belonging.

Finally, as a life-long Community of Christ member, it appears to me that being a Christian is not such a complicated matter. What seems more complex, however, is the effort to find common ground among all the various forms of Christianity. It’s here that such things as culture, history, nationality and other matters often seem to get in the way. Perhaps the church of those early Christians, Greek and Jewish, can still teach us a few things, mainly to remember that we are all members of the body of Christ. Everything else is mostly marginal.

The Path of Life

The Lord Jesus said that we could not be trusted with the true riches of the kingdom until we learned to handle earthly riches. It has been estimated that from one-third to one-half of the biblical teachings on righteousness have to do with stewardship.

Obviously, managing well what has been entrusted to us is what the Lord considers fundamental to righteousness. Not doing this is why one was called “wicked, lazy slave” in the Parable of the Talents (see Matthew 25:26). Doing this well got the other commended with “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things: I will put you in charge of many things” (Matthew 25:21 NIV). Stewardship is vital for us to learn if we are to be trusted with much.

It would be wonderful to be trusted with the resources to buy five thousand poor a meal every day. It would be better to have the authority to multiply one hamburger into enough to feed five thousand every day, which is the kingdom authority that the Lord demonstrated when He fed the five thousand from one little boy’s lunch. That is the difference between earthly wealth and kingdom wealth. However, we must manage the earthly wealth right to be trusted with kingdom authority.

We are living in a time when most of the power and most of the problems are economic. Many of the teachings in churches today seem to revolve around economic issues. This is not necessarily wrong, but a reflection of the times in which we live and the need to address the pressing issues of most people.

Even so, we could use a drastic change of perspective about where the real power is, where the real wealth is, and what is really important.