

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, October 1, 2020

A Lesson from the World Church

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. —1 John 1:7

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 10:24-25

Carry one another's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. —Galatians 6:2

A few weeks back the Lancaster newspaper ran an article which caught my eye as it reported a severe stress upon the African Church caused by the COVID pandemic. The headline set me to wondering: just what is the particular problem which is making matters worse in that end of the world? Much of Africa is lacking the quality of health care which we enjoy, but that was not the problem. It also dawned on me that much of that continent does not have the advantage of digital communication which the rest of the world enjoys. This also was not the real problem for these African believers.

The problem upon which the article focused was the deep anguish suffered by these people who were so accustomed to gathering and being together. Most African cultures are much more geared toward gathering, and the separation caused by the virus was doing all kinds of harm to the minds and spirits of these isolated believers. It was sad reading and my heart went out to this scattered Church. The article looked at these African cultures with a sense of pity, and while my heart broke for these brothers and sisters, my pity was aimed in a very different direction, toward our own Western culture.

I wonder what one of our African friends would have to say of the West upon learning of how well many are doing through the isolation. What might this brother or sister think of the computer enthusiast's boasts of virtual gatherings and not really needing to be in the same place? Our African observer might believe that our cultures are different and that we are not as group oriented, and accept this with little difficulty. But an African Christian just might look at us and wonder what Bible we are reading! A close look at the New Testament reveals a gathering of believers who spent a lot of time together and took togetherness very seriously. The Bible also tells us of the

power for living and the presence of God which we experience as we physically gather.

Perhaps the Lancaster paper should run another article with a contrasting angle: “Western Church Scandalously Unfazed by Not Meeting Together!” I do wonder if we have become a little too attached to our isolated ways of life. Granted, cultures differ, and the degree to which certain people groups require together or alone time legitimately varies. It is a good and compassionate thing to look at the suffering of Africa with a caring heart. But we may do well to look back at ourselves with some concern for how easily we can isolate.

This Sunday is World Communion Sunday. This annual observance often has a ho-hum feel to it as the fact that we are a worldwide Church seems so obvious, and we usually feel little need to genuinely connect with other believers from around the world. May the isolation and separation of this pandemic set us to thinking in a new way about fellowship and all that it means, both locally and in a world perspective. I do believe that our African brethren have something to teach us.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Lord of the Church, enable your people to be the Church—a redeemed people, a holy people, a united people, a missionary people, and in all things a people gladly submissive to the truth you have shown us in yourself, Jesus Christ our Lord. —Michael Saward