

SOMETHING FOR YOU TO READ - ARTICLE 1

The Ransacking of The Church

It was Tuesday, March 18, 2008 when one of our Pilgrim organists left an article with us entitled *The Final Witness*. The article addressed the importance of funerals held in the church setting. It was written in 1990 by Rev. David T. Shoemaker, then pastor of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, San Jose, California. One of the paragraphs reads:

The church building is the logical place in which to hold this (funeral) service. From birth to death, our lives are contained in the loving hand of God. The church has the symbols, history and setting to worship, praise, receive comfort from and direct our hearts to Him who died and rose again for our salvation. Pastors see the memorial service as a profoundly meaningful and important event in which to offer the love of God in Jesus Christ. For the Church, the burial of her dead is a privilege and an honor.
(The Lutheran Witness, *The Final Witness*, Rev. David T. Shoemaker, March 1990, p. 21).

Back on April 5, 2007, one of our former members now living in the Atlanta, Georgia area faxed a copy of an ad for "His Hands Church" also located in the same area. Here's the main portion of the ad:

A non-religious, rock music, wear your jeans,
bring in your coffee, all-out worship to God
kind of place where you can be yourself
and know that you are loved.

The two items are quite a contrast, aren't they? One accurately reminding us of the distinct witness of the church by virtue of its symbols, history and setting to worship, etc., and, of course, the importance of the pure Word of God and the clear preaching of Law and Gospel. The other claiming a "non-religious...worship to God kind of place." One, traditional. The other, contemporary. One that makes sense. The other full of nonsense. Non-religious worship?

One of Webster's definitions of worship is "...reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power...". (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition). And one of Webster's definitions of religious is "...relating to or manifesting faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity..." (Ibid). So how can anyone really have "A non-religious...all-out worship to God kind of place..."? Non-religious worship?

This is, of course, representative of what is often billed as the Church Growth Movement/ Contemporary Worship style. Lot's of flash, but little to no substance. Out of one side of the mouth the cry is, "The Word of God, the Word of God." Out of the other side of their mouth the cry is "A new paradigm. A new vision." Visionaries, indeed! Visions of forsaking the Word of Christ for human innovation and, with it, a seemingly endless and mindless quest for cultural relevancy. Oh, if only the prophets of the Old Testament had sought cultural relevancy. Think of how much suffering they would have avoided. If only John the Baptist would have preached a different message and appealed to the felt needs of others he would have died with his head attached to his shoulders.

And with all this the cry: "The church has to grow!" But it doesn't, you understand? The church doesn't have to do anything but remain faithful to the Word of God - at all costs! The fact is, the growth of so-called mega-churches proves nothing other than the fact that a good coffee bar, some classes in psycho-babble and a steady diet of entertainment (mostly second rate, at best) largely attracts the weak and erring from older, existing congregations; especially congregations that have diligently fought to be faithful to the Word. Most of the weak and erring that flit from church to church remain just that: weak and erring. After all, the last thing a sinner wants to hear is anything about their sin. Evidently, Jesus words - "and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" - apply to others. And, of course, the one thing those looking for happiness in this world want to avoid is the Jesus of the Bible Who always directs us to the fact that we are sinners, after all, and our best intentions and efforts will last only so long, and what we need every day are forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. You know...that "My kingdom is not of this world," statement and all it means! (John 18:36).

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, gives the following as one of the definitions for the word "ransack": "to search through to commit robbery: plunder...". The popular church in America has this to claim as its success: ransacking the church! Not a winning over of the eternally lost to Jesus Christ, but divisiveness and a re-fitting of the church to make it appealing to a culture that has rejected the Word of God; the Word of God which says: "Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the Lord. 'Is not my word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" (Jeremiah 23:28-29).

What we don't need is more Jesus of the happy hour, but the Jesus Who loves us now and forever - in spite of ourselves; the One revealed to us in the Word.

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