

Off-Kilter
Saint Mark PC
March 14, 2021

When we lived in Florida we made many trips to Epcot Center in Orlando. A highlight for me were the musical acts who play as you are walking by one of the various "nation" displays. There was a band called Off-Kilter, men wearing kilts, playing rock songs with electric guitar, bass, drums and bagpipes. It appealed to my Scottish heritage and love of classic rock at the same time.

I loved those guys, but if you have ever heard bagpipes playing rock songs, you will agree that the band was well named. You left feeling just a little bit off kilter.

Off Kilter means out of balance, out of harmony. When we are a little off kilter, we can sense it, we can feel it. The word comes from an old English word from the 1500s which fell out of use, but we know instinctively what it means.

As we study the scriptures and journey through Lent, especially in our common study of Mark's gospel this year, a theme emerges that we need to be in balance, in harmony in the balanced away of Jesus Christ.

What do I mean by that? The balance is between what is traditionally known as faith and works.

The Ephesians chapter I read brings those together, and is a recipe for a discipleship which is in harmony with who Jesus is.

The Pauline writer writes that it is by grace you have been saved. What does that term "saved" mean to you?

I think the gospel passage from John 3:16-17 frames it so well, God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that who so ever believed in him shall not perish but have life eternal. For god did not send Jesus to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.

This is a Sunday in Lent when we take a pause, and zero in on the amazing truth of the Reformed Faith that it is by grace we are saved. That is what some people like to refer to as our personal faith in Christ.

But that is not the full picture of discipleship.

God doesn't give us this amazing gift just for our private enjoyment. God gives us this grace for deployment in the world. That is the other half of discipleship which keeps us from getting off-kilter in our walk with God.

Our Ephesians text uses what I call the Gospel of Prepositions to help us remember.

It's pretty simple to remember.
Prepositions:

By..through..for

By grace - through faith - for works, and I add - unto life.

If you can remember By, through, for, and unto, you have the essence of the Christian life.

By grace through faith for works unto life.

At Saint Mark we have a succinct way of saying that without prepositions.

Spirit and Service.

One of our terrific elders was on a Zoom with us this week, and she said when we talk to people unfamiliar with the church about Saint Mark we say Spirit and Service, and we mean it.

Keeping those things in harmony and in balance is the key to a rich life of faith, and a healthy church as well.

Jesus put it another way, when he calls his followers to be salt and light. Light of the world, salt of the earth.

IF you see someone trying to have the deep spiritual experience, but they are not interested in bringing light into dark places, they are off kilter.

Conversely if you see someone working so hard to be the salt of the earth, being a healing agent and a preservative, and they do not tend to the spiritual life, they are off kilter.

It all is best when it works together.

Here's another way to think of it.

On one late night show a host decided to interview a man who had just turned 100 years old. And the host said in a serious tone "I wish it was possible for you to share the secret of living to be 100 years old?"

The man said, "Oh its simple - just keep breathin!"

Its good advice and if you were to ask him what is more important, inhaling or exhaling?

He might say "Both." There is spiritual wisdom in that too.

We come to worship, to Bible study, to daily devotional to prayer groups to inhale the word of God the love and grace of God

So that

We can exhale it to the world, forgiving people, caring for people, working for justice, being salt and light.

That is spirit and service. Faith and works.

One without the other is really off kilter.

I think we know that even that churches can fall into this pattern at times. It seems today when we look into some churches across the country, they are deeply concerned with personal salvation, and individual faith, but turn a blind eye on rampant injustice, hunger or violence.

Or conversely some across the country will work to make the world a better place, try to do justice, but forget to walk humbly with God while doing so.

Don't get me wrong, the world needs lots more of both, but to realize their power, they need to be together.

It's like what happened once to Andrew Carnegie, that wealthy industrialist for Pittsburgh. He made so much money he decided to buy his own train car for travel around the country in the 1800's

It was the most luxurious train car you could imagine. He instructed his staff to not bother him while he was there.

But one night a waiter came in and said Mr. Carnegie, you really need to get off the train.

What? He said this is the best train money can buy what is wrong with it

The waiter said sheepishly, well the engine left hours ago, and your car wasn't connected to it.

The private car was sitting on the track uncoupled from the rest of the train, no matter how nice it was it was pretty useless.

In order to make the difference in the world that we want to, we have to be connected to something - the Holy Spirit, power of the living Christ, otherwise its easy to get off kilter, burned out and weary in well doing.

So wherever you see the full gospel of Christ preached you will also see radical acts of love in the world. That is discipleship in balance and it is nothing new and it has been true since the very first followers of Jesus.

One of the things we will be seeking the Spirit's guidance on for 2021 is how to focus our good works - our mission opportunities as a church going forward in a world which may be different from the one we remember in 2019. Not only will we use the CAT once again but our PNC is excited about listening for God's leading in where our church should be going in both Spirit and Service, in the months to come.

It comes down to us from the very earliest Presbytery in America, in 1706 Francis McKenney came to Philadelphia and began the first Presbytery, and he came with a Bible in one pocket and seeds in the other.

McKenney saw the new settlers were not farmers, and they were hungry, so taught the new settlers how to grow food, in addition to preaching the gospel of Christ.

Spirit and Service.

Because of where my former church was in Palmetto on the west coast of Florida, I was part of the Board of Directors for just a few years of the biggest farmworker ministry in the PC(USA) the Beth El Farmworkers ministry.

We had a terrific Director, Dave Moore, and our big plan at that time was to expand into the Immokolee region near Naples, Florida to serve migrants there who were in desperate need.

The Board had elaborate plans for buying land, constructing a building, securing some funding; we had a plan for about \$400K. Then all of the sudden the land sale fell through and stopped the project in its tracks.

So the very next week, Dave just goes out and buys a motor home for about \$40K one tenth of the project cost, and just drove down from Tampa to where the need was.

Three mornings a week it started out with, coffee and tortillas, a morning worship service before the work in the fields, a place to take a break at midday, Spanish language help with any concerns or needs right at the motor home.

When Dave took a picture of that in action we were all amazed, and couldn't help but notice that the model, the manufacturer's logo of that RV was painted in large letters on the side, the word Spirit.

That is spirit and service.

That is being in balance.

That is inhaling Gods love and exhaling to a world in need.

How did Dave come up with that?

I have to believe he followed the Gospel of Propositions.

By Grace through faith for works unto life.