

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2009: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 32:4

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 119:9

Law

Psalm: 119:9

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 104:1, 20

Scripture reading: John 6

Scripture text: John 6: 63

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

It has become a tendency in our churches to do everything possible to draw people into church. .

- Much attention is given to and a lot is said about matters important to man.
- For example there already are congregations who have discontinued evening services, or are planning to do so because of so-called zero interest.
- There are ministers, who during certain services, no longer deliver a sermon but enter into some type of discussion with the congregation and have them sing all kinds of alien songs in an attempt to perk up the service and so to draw people to the church.

This matter is so serious that it even influences the sacraments.

- There are churches wanting, because it is uncomfortable conducting lengthy services, the Holy Communion to be served differently.
- The minister does not like long services and the majority of the congregation also does not like it.
- This trend now is starting to change matters in our churches to what is enjoyable and acceptable.

Is this right? Let us consider the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ founded His church. What was His style? Was it important to Him to draw people and to have well attended churches? We will consider the following:

1. Pure preaching and diminishing members.

2. The Spirit and growth of faith.

3. Obedience to the Spirit.

1. Pure preaching and diminishing members.

The way in which the Lord Jesus preached drove many people away.

- He did nothing to draw people to His teachings – as is the trend today.
- By His straightforward preaching He affronted some people to the core, so that those who could not support it had to leave, as many did. .

Consider the background to the passage we read.

- The Lord multiplied five barley loaves and two fishes and therewith fed five thousand people.
- Today we would call this a sensational happening and expect that something like this would draw people again to the teachings of Jesus.

But what did Jesus do? He and His disciples went down to the lake, left by boat, leaving the multitudes behind.

- The following day the people went to search for Jesus.
- Later they found the boat used by Jesus and His disciples in leaving them and then found that Jesus was not with the disciples.
- They then went looking for Him at Capernaum.

Upon finding the Lord they were very friendly and asked: "Rabbi, when did You come here?" (v.25)

- But the same friendliness did not flow from Jesus towards them.
- He told them to their faces that they were not there because they believed in Him.
- They were there because they wanted Him to feed them again. (v.26)

The crux of this matter is Jesus telling them that they do not believe in Him.

- Straight and to their face they hear the truth.
- The Lord is not looking for people wanting to see big shows or wanting to enjoy things in church.
- He is looking for people who believe in Him and want to worship Him.
- In essence this means that most of the five thousand who were fed, left the Lord.

A very important remark in verse 59 of the passage we have read is that at this stage of the narration the Lord was inside the synagogue of Capernaum.

- The synagogues were rather smallish buildings and could not house many people.
- The logical conclusion is that at this stage only a small group of the original five thousand were left over.

After this sharp teaching in the synagogue many people turned away from the Lord – even many who, until that time, gave themselves out to be disciples. (v.66)

- They never returned to Jesus.
- This goes to show that numbers and large attendance figures are not important to the Lord.

2. The Spirit and growth of faith.

These days the church is experiencing a decline. Everybody is asking for the cause. The deputation of the Synod has even sent letters to all church councils enquiring about the diminishing of church members.

Should we gauge timespirit against the matters here mentioned in the Bible, then the cause lies within the mediocrity of the church.

- Because we do not want to hurt people we, do not take a firm standpoint about anything.
- Thereby we also drop the principles of our faith.
- We become spiritual vacillators – many of our ministers as well as elders
- Should somebody arrive with sectarian points of view, many of us lack the power of fighting this type of heresy by means of the Bible.

Hence many do not have the Spirit and are without drive, which renders them impotent and unfit to work in the Kingdom of God. .

- The reason is the heathendom, so many times facing you, clothed in the robe of Christianity.

Often it is said that Christians should rather unite against the heathen than wanting to clear up differences about faith issues.

- Should you be a true believer then you cannot pretend to be better than you really are.
 - o You cannot hide or disguise yourself and the true church of the Lord.
 - o You must stand up for what is the only honest truth. .

Of course we can only live and preach the truth if the Holy Spirit fills us. From where and how do we receive the Holy Spirit?

- In our text verse is clearly written: By teaching, the Lord Jesus grants the Spirit.
- There is a very clear link between the pure preaching of the Word of God and the granting of the Holy Spirit.

In our times there are many churches teaching that in order to come to conversion the Holy Spirit must first descend upon you.

- The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is often accompanied by all sorts of excitement and showmanship.

Assertions of this kind do not concur with the teachings of the Bible.

- In the passage we have read it is clearly stated that the Lord Jesus speaks the Word of God and that through this He distributes the Holy Spirit.
- Thus the Holy Spirit descends where the Lord Jesus is grants it and not where people so called engineer it.

The answer to the disease of the church of our times lies here.

- Through His Word the Lord equips the congregation to receive the Holy Spirit.
- Here we have it:
"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6: 63)

It is thus the Spirit who gives life to every believer – and at the same time also to every congregation – who listens to the Word.

Later Peter also confessed:

But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6: 68)

In effect the words of The Lord Jesus and Peter mean that in any situation of the faith where the Word of God does not have the first and most important word, the Spirit departs.

- Put very practically it means that because of the Holy Spirit making His departure, this search for human satisfaction and exterior show only cultivates Spiritlessness.
- The Holy Spirit only operates where the church is working purely with the Word of God.
 - o This encompasses everything: the sermon, the serving of the sacraments as well as the presentation of catechism classes.
 - o In all these matters it deals with the sum total thereof, in other words the contents and form.

Why does it work like that?

- Because in this short passage of the Bible it is put very clearly that the Lord Jesus, through the Word, gives the Holy Spirit.
- The trend sweeping the church these days entail the candle of man burning highly: they want, to their own taste, to renew, change and enjoy the church.

In the Bible we have an example of a completely different situation: John the Baptist.

- The longer Jesus taught, the more followers He obtained.
- To the disciples of John the Baptist this presented big problems – they could not stand the people reverting from John towards Jesus.

They confronted John with this problem. And what was his answer to them?

- I am not the Bridegroom. I am only a friend of the Bridegroom.
- John stated that he was only the indicator to the way and a forerunner – his candle must burn dimmer and the candle of the Lord has to be brighter.
- Just like this we all are representatives who must deeply bow to the Words of God.
- Only when we really manage this, the work of the Holy Spirit will grow in us.

In the matter of life it thus deals with the true worship.

- Physical or human-only matters do not grant life.
- Only the Spirit of God grants life.

We must never suffer from the illusion that all people attending church are worshippers of the Lord.

- Consider what happened here: From a group of five thousand people fed by the Lord, only enough to fill a synagogue remained.
- After this sermon by the Lord a large group also departed.
- Eventually only the twelve apostles remained and the Lord enquired from them if they perhaps also want to leave.
 - o Then Peter answered that because Jesus had the words of eternal life, they had nowhere to go.
- Then the Lord Jesus told them that one of them is also a devil.

Consider the gravity of the responsibility on all of us of to, in our faith and church life, remain with the absolute truth, even should it not be to the liking of most people.

- We must regard this responsibility especially against the background of the judgements delivered, by Jesus in this passage.
- Again consider the following two statements:
"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." (John 6: 64-65)
... there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe...(v. 64)
... Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father. (v. 65)

3. Obedience to the Spirit.

- There are passengers in the church.
- There are also the dissatisfied people in church.
- There are also those looking forward to exterior matters, revelling in it.

They were all deserters leaving the Lord with his twelve disciples.

The church is not a building or just a congregation. The church is all the people chosen since creation, till the last one to be born before the Lord Jesus' arrival on the clouds.

- Inside them these people all carry something very special, not found with any of those who became lost.
- These people are all, through Jesus Christ, redeemed with God and changed by His Spirit enabling them to listen to God.
- They do not just listen for the sake of listening.
 - o They totally subject themselves to the Lord and, in their lives, comply with everything He asks.
 - o They do not kiss the exterior parts of faith.

They do not intend hi-jacking worshipping services, changing it into a theatre with things happening to attract people.

- They want to make it a quiet room where people, led by the Spirit, honestly and deeply have communion with God.
- They intend it to be a deep moment of prayer. They want it to be a moment of rich communion with God.

Do you still remember what took place when the Lord appeared to Eliah?

- The Lord was not within the large exterior display of the terrible wind.
- Neither was the Lord in the frightening fire.
- The Lord was within the silence.

Where do we find our answer? In the words of Peter:

"Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
(John 6: 69)

- We must live completely by the Word of God and by the fullness of the redemption of Jesus.
- In our worshipping services and service of the sacraments we must live by the purity of the Word of God.
- Then He grants His Spirit enabling us to grow spiritually. Then we become strong enough that we can execute the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ and grow in it.
- **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."** (John 6: 63)

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 146:1, 2

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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