

Doing Business - Have you Saved a Soul?

It's a favorite question a church consultant likes to ask when he meets with officers of a church - who want to strengthen their Church. He asks - What Business are you in - how's business? What business are you in? What business are we in?

Maybe its not fair to pose the question quite that way. Church isn't business, is it? Although these days most businesses have a mission statement - a short description of what they do. So maybe for a church our mission is our business. What business are we in?

Our mission statement seems to say that our business is caring. Caring for Christ. Caring for the Church, and for the Community. And - you know what? We do. In dollars and days of service, we care. We could do more - for sure. But we care. But - here's the rub.

We care - but to what end? What's all our caring supposed to do? Our purpose is to care. But what's the purpose of our caring? Will you please pray with me.

Lord - thank you for your Word. May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, bring your word to new life in our lives - this day - in the spirit of Christ our Lord. Amen.

What's the purpose of our caring? There really are many purposes aren't there? That some followers of Jesus Christ might have a church home. That worship of the living God might take place in this place. That children might learn the best ways to live. That the world might see a better, even the best way for people to live together in peace, harmony, joy and love.

Yes - maybe that's our purpose. To help the world see ever more clearly a better way to live. Or is it? It all sounds very good. Maybe because its partly true. It's partly true that you and I are here to help the world to be a better place to live in. It's partly true that's why we are planning to build - in order to share this good news more effectively. God loves us and we ought to love one another.

But that's just part of the story, not the heart of the story. The heart of the story, the real business of the Church, is soul business. The psalmist sang it. Jesus declared it. Paul preached it and lived it. And you and I celebrate this truth every time we gather at this table. Our business as a church - the heart and soul of our business - is soul business. Our business is to save souls... to fish for people. As un-presbyterian as that sounds... that's our business.

By the way we act as a church. By the way each one of us lives our lives, we will win some one, and more than one someone to faith. We will win people to the knowledge that they are forever children of the living God. We will save souls.

Have you saved a soul? That's our business. It's what Sunday School is about. And our worship. And our service projects and mission trips and offerings, and new buildings, and the budget every year.

It's all about souls. Its about souls saved. Its about persons who come to their senses and know - know - know mind true, and heart deep, and soul sure.... That they are loved, and forgiven their sins, and saved from death for eternal life. It is the message and meaning of this sacrament. This is my body, Jesus said, broken for you. This is my blood shed for you. As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death til he comes - You show his death and his resurrection.. and - yes - your own.

And you know this. You really do know this. You and I don't say it out loud very often. Almost never. But we know it. We believe it. We are saved souls. Though we will live. And we will die. We know we will yet live. We are soul safe.

And everything we do as a church is about trying to tell anyone and everyone we can - this truth. The good news.

The few words of the psalm of thanksgiving that Marjorie read have just been ringing in my ears this week - in everything I've done - from counseling, to visits in nursing homes and in the hospital - to Logos class with 5th. Graders. Age and stage of life. Circumstances of the moment. In sorrow and in joy. It's the soul of the matter than matters. It's faith that counts. It's trust in God that strengthens my soul. And love of God enables us to believe all things, Hope all things, Endure all things.

On the day I called, You, God, answered me. *You increased my strength of soul.* You increased my strength of soul. That's it. That's the key. *To whom shall we go – God has the words of eternal life.*

And then - the image of those first disciples - fishing - and fishing - and getting nothing. Until Jesus spoke to them and they listened. They listened - and obeyed. And then they could not lift their nets...for the fish they caught. And Jesus called them to be fishers of people - Yes - soul savers.

And Paul said, *so we proclaim, and you have come to believe.* And that's our business. Proclaiming. Soul searching. Soul saving. Have you saved a soul lately? And - the answer is yes. Yes - you have! And probably you didn't even know it.

Maybe you haven't invited anyone to Church. Or shared your faith with anyone. Something we each should do. Or shared your trust in God, your thanks for God's forgiveness of your sins. Or your comfort in hard times knowing God is a very present help in times of trouble, the One who can and will heal all your diseases.

Maybe you haven't shared your faith with anyone face to face – yet. And you need to find a way to, yes, be a fisher of people. And the good news is - in a way - right here - when you celebrate the Sacrament, you've said to your pew neighbor, Christ's body broken for you, the cup of our salvation.

But your church does say all this... does share this good news. And you help, by helping to make it possible for your church to be here... and so many other places in the world. You help your church share the good news of God's forgiving, new life giving, forever life giving love...

And every time we baptize, every time we receive new members, every time we dedicate our offerings, every time we send a mission team, or help serve the homeless, or work on Reach Out Day, or Rebuilding together..

And every time Marjorie and I send you out of this place - with the grace of Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit - we are calling you to business. As a Church..

And you are part of this business. And our business is - saving souls. Helping others - some one - know - God's soul strengthening love. And...

We practice it all here... at this table. Receiving the sign of God's grace and love.... And... Then - Sharing it. Sharing it as a sign

And - God willing - God working in you and in me - we will put it to work in the world. Showing and Sharing the love that saves your soul and mine, and every soul that trusts in God for today, and tomorrow and forever.

Come - practice now - that you may better play your part in God's plan...
And - your church's business. Amen.

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