

The Good of All

Big Thoughts in a COVID-19 World

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I'm going to begin by saying something a little shocking, a bit controversial, something that might spark an argument or two. Ready? Christianity is about Jesus. Jesus, the Christ (nope, that's not his last name), the Messiah, the Anointed One. Now that seems really obvious, doesn't it? Not so shocking after all?

Except that we humans have done a whole lot to make Christianity out to be about so many other things. Rather than keeping Jesus at the center of our focus, the center of our desires – we turn to other things.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, Jesus helped others meet their needs. When people were hungry, he fed them, when they were sick, he made them well, when they were experiencing mental illnesses (possessed?), he made them whole.

Jesus loved the people, and while many traveled to and with him, he always met people where they were, on their terms. He lived among those others would not associate with, often eating meals with those who had been rejected. He taught by telling stories people could understand, and he boiled 613 commandments down to 2. If you've been reading this column, you know them: Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul; and love your neighbor as yourself.

In other words, stay centered. Stay centered on God, stay centered on me (Jesus), take care of others as you take care of yourself. Those sound like simple instructions – perhaps too simple. They don't hold our focus, they aren't flashy enough, they don't spark protests or movements. And so, we drag other things into the mix, something to add a little spice: doctrine, dogma, politics, culture, personal beliefs – even religious beliefs. As a result, Christianity has lost its focus, and in losing its focus it has lost its vitality as a movement.

At the same time, many of those who call themselves Christians have lost their focus and vitality. Rather than putting Jesus at the center of their lives, rather than being FOR a life in the love of Jesus, in community with one another, we have become *against* a whole slew of things.

I could name a few, but that would lead us away from the center (see how easy it is?) which is God the Son, Jesus. And while there are so many external distractions, perhaps the biggest distraction we face is ourselves.

Listen to the news and you'll hear a multitude of folks bemoaning the loss of individual rights (Why should I wear this mask? I'm not afraid of this virus!) Listen to some Christians spouting off about their own, personal salvation, like they have their own personal Jesus.

We have become so focused on ourselves that we forget that God's interest is in the common good of all. All the peoples, all the nations, all the earth – check out Psalm 96. More specifically, God's interests lie in the weak, the orphan, the lowly and the destitute (Psalm 82). It is time to stop focusing on the “me,” and return to the “we” of Our Lord.

It was that focus that sparked the early Jesus movement, that led to the formation of the Christian church. It was the exciting news that there is more to life than always grubbing for more, than bashing people over the head for not believing as we believe. Frankly, we've turned a whole lot of people off to religion and Christianity with that stuff. Rather than drawing people to a life of love with God and one another, we turn them off with infighting and vitriol. Turn your eyes back to the center.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus as the old hymn goes. Let nothing distract you. Seek good for all, sacrifice your individual wants and desires for the needs of others. Take care of each other, take care of the other. We can do better America. Stay well, think big. Amen. *Pastor Kevin may be reached at kdsamk24@hotmail.com.*