

**Because Jesus... We are Enough**  
Jubilee Mennonite Church  
May 21, 2017

**Purpose:** To declare God's presence and working in and through all things.

**Message:** The work of building the kingdom while tasked to us is not, ultimately, our responsibility.

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 [I will read]; Mark 4:26-34 (Please read)

**Synopsis:** It can all seem like so much. There is so much to be done, so much pain in the world, so much suffering to be addressed. As followers of Christ, it doesn't take all that long for us to unwind our laundry list of those things that we SHOULD be doing, or the ways in we ought to be about the work of the kingdom. Yet, almost everything we undertaken feels incomplete and insufficient to say the least. We can, in time, begin to think ourselves as unworthy of the work of faith, and certainly unable to meet its steep demands, let alone the dire needs of a waiting world. It is ONLY because of Jesus, and that we do what we do in the name of Jesus that we are privileged to be part of God's growing kingdom.

1 Corinthians [MESSAGE] 3: 1-4

But for right now, friends,  
I'm completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings  
with each other and with God.

You're acting like infants in relation to Christ,  
capable of nothing much more than nursing at the breast.  
Well, then, I'll nurse you since you don't seem capable of anything more.  
As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important,  
are you really much different than a babe at the breast,  
content only when everything's going your way  
? When one of you says, "I'm on Paul's side,"  
and another says, "I'm for Apollos," aren't you being totally infantile?

5-9 Who do you think Paul is, anyway?  
Or Apollos, for that matter?  
Servants, both of us—servants who waited on you  
as you gradually learned to entrust your lives  
to our mutual Master.

We each carried out our servant assignment.

I planted the seed,  
Apollos watered the plants,  
but God made you grow.

It's not the one who plants or the one who waters  
who is at the center of this process but God,  
who makes things grow.  
Planting and watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages.  
What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving.  
You happen to be God's field in which we are working.

9-15 Or, to put it another way, you are God's house.  
Using the gift God gave me as a good architect,  
I designed blueprints;  
Apollos is putting up the walls.

Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation!  
Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ.  
Take particular care in picking out your building materials.

Eventually there is going to be an inspection.  
If you use cheap or inferior materials, you'll be found out.  
The inspection will be thorough and rigorous.  
You won't get by with a thing.  
If your work passes inspection, fine;  
if it doesn't, your part of the building  
will be torn out and started over.  
But you won't be torn out; you'll survive—but just barely.

16-17 You realize, don't you,  
that you are the temple of God,  
and God himself is present in you?  
No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple,  
you can be sure of that.  
God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, are the temple.

It would seem that there is no longer any such thing as a small. You may be able to get a regular, a Medium (by which they mean the smallest size offered), or what ever system beyond comprehension that Starbucks might have come up with. But a small anything that is actually called that has gone the way of the Cassette tape—never to be seen again. After all, who would want a small anything anyhow? When there is something better out there, why would be not want to pursue that? Is that not what we all want, what we are all entitled to—the very best, the biggest, the most? Is that not what we demand of our world? Isn't that what we demand of ourselves? Small is no longer a suitable name for anything to be given to people with a reasonable level of ambition. We can have a grande, size 0, pequeno, petite, munchkin, kiddie, value size, pinch, modicum; so long as it is not small.

Its similar to how we see good at this point too. As I wrote in my blog this week, I am not sure how many times I have been asked whether I was supplied “excellent” service when being handed the latest customer satisfaction survey. I have been told; begged in so many words that this is the only acceptable response on a satisfaction survey least the employee with whom we dealt be punished for being less then stupendous. Not that this makes sense, but there it is. Good just doesn't cut it anymore as we are called again to be extraordinary in all aspects of our lives. We know that this gets us in trouble more times than not, but here we are anyway. I cannot tell you how many times I have managed to screw things up by just going for the little extra bit of perfection that would complete the project. Like a bolt that twists off when you take that extra push for tightness, it can be sickening feeling to go from good enough to too much. You really don't want to get me started on parenting blogs which are enough to convince even the most polyanna mom and dad that they are failing there kids by insufficiently stimulating them with one excellent experience after another. I have come to the point that I refuse to read the stuff. We live in a world of exclamation points (another sore point for an ex English teacher) and there is always more that we should be doing, some other element we are missing to go from good to great. After all, we are worth it, aren't we?

No I haven't simply put on my cranky pants this morning, fussing around wishing that these kids would get off my lawn, figuratively or otherwise. We have become a people of obsession with the best. As consumers, we might have the right brands, productions, or

expectations of the products we buy without which they simply will not pass muster. I take small pride in being a black coffee swilling guy, absenting myself from the routines of all the preparations of what becomes a passable cup of coffee, a ritual I watch with fascination and amusement. As people, we are driven to achieve the best or die trying, looking for the most out of ourselves, our world, our lives. We all live with the pressure of the should, the ought, and the expectation, spoken or not, and it can all get a little much at time. The problem with being an individualistic, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps society that there is degree to which that you run out of people to blame when you are dissatisfied with the world around you, so all you can do is blame yourself.

The trouble is, we don't simply stop with our lives and the world around us. We also bring our expectation of exceptionality to our spirituality and to our church. We bring our expectations to the way church makes us feel, and our expectations of what should be happening within the church, within our spiritual lives. There is always something more that we should be doing, something that we should be doing better. We should be reading the bible more. Praying more. Being more disciplined. Spending more time visiting the sick and infirm. Solving the problems of those around us. Performing to that much higher of a standard on a Sunday morning. Giving more and more, demanding more and more until we resent giving in the first place. It is hard to measure up to what ought to be just that much better than what we feel we can muster. Sometimes the feelings of how our spiritual lives, our congregations should, and aren't, is just more that we can consider. It is hard to feel successful by the measures of excellence from the rest of our lives that we bring into the church. So what do we do with all of that?

Now there is nothing wrong with having high aspirations for who we are and what we do. We can all do with the a chessey motivational poster now and again—aim for the stars, even if you miss, you'll end up flying with the birds. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious, even in church, even in our spiritual lives. There is always a new way for us to grow, to more faithfully be who God is calling us to be. But I dare say it is not this ambition that is our particular problem, generally. Our problem is that we think that Church, that the kingdom of God is solely responsibility in the first place, and relies on this ambition, and fails solely with our

own failure. We can easily see the gapping needs to be met and feel like our individual attempts are quite inadequate, nowhere approaching “excellent” as we expect.

Our particular calling as a church is often to reach into messy situations and to offer what help we can. We do that for each other. We do that for the community that relies on us. Most of the time, answering that call pushes us into places and puts us into contact with people that we are not always quite sure what to do with. More than once in this all too short year that I have spent with you I have lamented the lack of a magic wand that makes all the messy, hard painful stuff of being church alongside the realities of life. I know that I am not alone in saying that I feel the needs around me and feel compelled to help and convicted in my inability to actually do so in seemingly effective ways. We see the deep wounds around us and we want to heal them. We see the needs and we wonder how we will ever measure up to their demands, that there is no way that there can ever be enough of us to fill these gaps. Try though we might, we know that we are not enough to supply even our own needs at times, let alone the needs of our whole congregation, our whole community.

*Tell about the week: Gretna, Community, general pain in the congregation. It is enough to make you feel quite small.*

We, like our brothers and sisters in Corinth, are far more inclined to gravitate to the program and the personalities of the church than to remember that the church and the work of the Church is not in any ultimate sense, our own. But its not. It never has been, and it never will be. God does the work. We are planters. We are waterers. God is the one who makes the growth. God is the worker of the miracles of healing, hope, and peace. We are the tools desiring to be put to good use; keeping ourselves sharp to be ready to be applied, allowing people that we are the things that we do to be used for the kingdom which is always bigger than us.

It is not our work. It is not our ability, our availability, our acumen or even our commitment to this project in the midst of all else that demands our time, talent and energy. We are enough because we are part of what God is doing. Because the kingdom is the work of the Jesus, the living God with us, and he is the foundation on which all else stands, we are invited to take a step back from the primary role that we love so much and wish desperately was ours and

to recognize that the work is God's. God is the one who is active in this Church. Jesus is the force calling us into the places of our lives and the lives of others in need of grace, hope, and promise. The Spirit is the force blowing even now awakening the deep roots of seeds planted, plants watered, and all things growing toward a full harvest. Our calling in the midst of this is not to find the ways to make all of this happen in ways that stupefy and bring all things into right relationship with God. We are called to be a good enough church, not relying on our abilities but on Christ in us to accomplish our call. We are called to be part of what God's doing in the world, not to take sole responsibility for it. We reach out in the name of Christ, congregationally and personally, and that is good. But we must remember that excellence, success, even basic effectiveness is not something that we have control over. That is God's doing. That's good; because we are not any of these things. And try as we might (and we should still try), we never will be. We never will be enough to satisfy the needs of ourselves, of our world. Yet this makes the needed room for the Love of God to seep through the cracks, providing enough we trust, even we when have run completely out.

The working of the Spirit, the working of the church is not about us. It is about God. And no matter what, in success, failure, presence, or abandonment, God's work will continue. God will give growth. God will bring about maturity, nurturing each and every one of us as we need to be. This is good. This as it should be. For there is only one cornerstone—and that is Christ. How might we be good enough—adequate enough, open enough, present enough, to allow Christ in us, and even in spite of us to provide all that we need and so much more? May it be so now and always. Amen