



“Blessing Others”

By: Doug Warren

What does it mean to extend the grace of Jesus to others?

Part of the difficulty with service in the church is that it is intended to run counter to any leadership we see in the world around us. The standard categories we have for “leaders” are bosses or folks in various power positions, whereas Jesus came to serve those whom he leads. He called those in leadership in his church to servant leadership, a willingness to put others before ourselves.

We recently celebrated a milestone in our church’s history. We elected and ordained our first group of officers to help lead our young and growing congregation. It was a joyous time that led naturally to some good questions. Several people have asked me, “What difference does this make?” Others asked, “What will the officers help us to do?”

Some outside Christianity have pointed out (subtly and not so subtly) that they don’t see much selflessness from the church. I want to address that in this forum where many of you who read this are not in any way associated with a church or any aspect of Christianity. What I find is that when followers of Christ talk about the grace of Jesus and extending it to others, many understandably shrug in confusion because it doesn’t match any demonstrable reality in the church.

The truth is that the church—not just our congregation, but the whole body of believers in Christ is all messed up. Not only that, but I realize that I can’t fix it. You see we have not begun our new church in Portland because we think we can fix it. We are all messed up too. Our church is a broken group of people being lead by broken people. How is that supposed to help Portland?!

One of the most thrilling, perplexing, aggravating, captivating, and breath-taking realities about Jesus is that he continually uses the weak to confound the strong. The gospel, that is, the good news of life-transformation in and through a personal relationship with Jesus, shows how a broken group of people admitting their brokenness and need for what only God can give can be instruments of radical blessing and social change.

The world on so many levels advocates change through strength. If we get a big enough corporate sponsor, develop a deep enough pool of volunteers, train enough mentors, then we can accomplish whatever noble goal we have set.

My prayer on the other hand is for God to gather disillusioned cynics, battered and abused victims, materialistic grouches, drug addicts, failed and discouraged workaholics, gossiping busy-bodies into a community of misfits. As we see our need for Christ we will more and more live out the reality of God’s plan for transformation—strength through weakness, healing through the brokenhearted. Then, when He who alone can bless Portland in ways unimaginable to us now does so, He alone will receive the glory for what He has done.

So how do we expect to extend the grace of Jesus Christ Himself to our neighbors, friends, coworkers, family, and strangers in this city? Only by receiving that grace ourselves. That only makes sense since I stand in as great a need of the grace of God as you do. By seeing our need for what we don't deserve, we are in a place of at least beginning to be used to pass it on to someone else. But even then we are only very slow and imperfect conduits for this amazing grace. We still fail in so many ways even as we acknowledge our enormous need for redemption.

You may be struggling with the failure of a Christian to live up to what they say they believe. You may be tempted to dismiss the claims of Jesus because of those who follow him. Yet it is precisely our failure that demonstrates our need for One who does not fail. Jesus did not fail when He was put to death. He had come for exactly that purpose, to pay the price of our failures.

It is not that Christians are closer to perfect than anyone else—that's pure baloney. The question is not who is closer to perfect or who's getting it right more often than not, but who has it perfectly right. There is only one person to ever walk the planet who makes a credible claim to that. His followers are all messed up, but He delights in working through broken vessels. Following Him is not hypocrisy, but the only authentic option when we face our deepest need. What's more, He not only pays for our failure, but promises to transform us. Granted this is an incredibly slow process, but one that is certain. It is not based on our success, but on His. Won't you come and follow Him too?

Doug Warren is the pastor of **Christ the Redeemer Presbyterian Church** meeting at Andover College, Sundays at 10:30 am (Sunday School for all ages at 9:30). He and his wife, Kristen, have four children and are active in serving the Portland community. If you have questions about this article, Doug would be glad to talk with you. Write Doug.Warren@MainePCA.org or call 878-1211.
