

Month #15

Here's an interesting statistic about life in a fast-growing, fast-paced area of the nation: Of the thousands of people who move into such areas, only ten percent of them end up finding a church home. That's why in many communities across North America, 50-60 percent of the adults are unchurched.

A recent Gallop poll suggests that as many as 95% of people in America believe in God. However, many people stop going to church simply because the language they hear there about God neither matches the reality of their lives nor feeds the hunger of their hearts.

In a sermon one Sunday, Rev. Glenn Wilkerson, a pastor from Texas, describes one of the reasons why:

I think there are a lot of believers who are sitting at home today because earlier in their lives, they got burned by "worm theology." The more they went to church, the worse they felt about themselves. It's changed over the years. Most preachers today who preach a fear-based gospel are a lot slicker than the hell-fire and damnation types I heard when I was a kid. I've heard some on television recently who are really good; they can even turn the fear factor around whereby you actually feel pretty good about yourself because, as a member of that church, you're saved — but everybody else is going to hell; so there's still an underlying reliance upon the factor of fear.

Sad to say, Pastor Wilkerson is right. There are many people who are no longer involved in the life and ministry of a local church because they got burned along the way. At the same time, there are some people who are involved in a host of activities in a church like ours who are doing what they do because they fear what God might do to them if they cease their involvement. In the final analysis, they are motivated to do what they do out of fear.

May I suggest an alternative? Rather than being motivated by fear, why not be motivated by the love of Christ? Second Corinthians 5:14 puts it this way: "For Christ's love compels us." Instead of being motivated by fear, we are to be motivated by Christ's love for us. We do what we do (which we usually call "good works") not because we have to or because we are afraid not to. We do what we do out of a sense of gratitude for the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Wilkerson summed it up this way:

It's the difference of doing good works out of a sense of joy or out of a sense of fear. You choose.

In other words, when it comes to serving the Lord here at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, we have a three-fold choice. First, we can do nothing by way of Christian service or service for Christ. Second, we can do some good works for Christ out of fear of God's wrath, judgment and displeasure. Or third, through our involvement in this ministry, we can respond to God's love and grace out of a sense of joy and heartfelt gratitude.

It all comes down to this: It's a matter of choice. I don't know about you, but to paraphrase Joshua of old, "As for me and my house, we will serve out of love."