

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JANUARY 12, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“The Work of Christmas Has Begun!”

Based on Acts 10:34-43

*When the song of the
angels is stilled
When the star in the
sky is gone
When the kings and the
shepherds have found their
way home
The work of
Christmas is begun!*
~Kelly Joe Phelps

Fast forward thirty some years, and the Apostle Peter was discovering that the work of the *Christian Church* had just begun. Bethlehem was a distant memory. Christ had become a child, and then, a man. He had been baptized by John the Baptist, and those present had seen the light from heaven land upon His shoulders and bless Him.

- Ministry had followed.
- Death had followed that.
- A return to life and to His Father's side had followed that.

Now the work of the Christian Church was set to begin.

Peter found himself at a crossroads. He, and others, had continued to minister after Jesus' work had come to an end. But Peter kept things

rather safe: sticking fairly close to home, spending time with believers and supporters of the cause. It was busy enough work. Many who had come to listen to Jesus were rather skittish about public displays of support for the Jesus Movement after the crucifixion. The apostles themselves, were cautious, not anxious for a repeat of the events of Calvary.

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~ACTS 10:42

But Peter needed more bodies. If the teachings of Jesus were ever going to be

seen as more than a flash-in-the-pan, hillbilly movement from the backwoods of Galilee, then Peter needed more bodies in the pews. At the same time, up the shores of the Mediterranean, Paul was going great guns preaching the Good News in all sorts of towns the apostles were too shy to tackle. But Paul, whose experience was much more worldly than Peter's, insisted that Christ's message had not just been for the Jewish people, but for all the people of the world. To quote a now somewhat politically incorrect Sunday School Song:

*Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red, brown, yellow,
black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children
Of the world*

~Clare Wolston

What Peter might have lacked in 'worldly vision', he had mountains of in 'history and legacy of the faith,' which Paul lacked. Truth was, they needed each other. Paul had bodies for the pews. Peter had the deep foundations of religious tradition: the spiritual bedrock of Christ's teachings. Both had passion

for the Saviour and a belief that His stories were worth teaching, again and again, to the point that they would take a life of their own, and sustain themselves for every generation: in homes around the dinner table, in buildings with songs and prayers, in the streets and marketplaces, as new people and new places were discovered.

While I don't think that Peter and Paul ever became best friends, I think they recognized that they were both headed in the same direction, with similar passion, and a common vision for the Christian faith that was both practical and spiritual. Peter began:

"I now realize, how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." (v34-35)

They may not have completely understood each other's position, or even necessarily agreed entirely, at first, but they both trusted implicitly, that God was at work, creating and moulding something life changing for the world. And they were a part of it. The work of the Christian faith had begun. Peter said,

"He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." (v42)

It was head work.
It was heart work.
It was busy hands and never still feet kind of work.
But it was work with a plan, a purpose, and a vision.

We've put away the Christmas decorations.

The New Year has been rung in with streamers and champagne.

The work of our resolutions has begun.

As it has with the church.

The annual meeting will not arrive for another month or so, but the work has already begun.

- Do we have a plan?
- A purpose?
- A vision?
- Do we know where we are going and do we know why?

How many churches will close their doors this year because they recognized too late, that there were too few bodies in the pews and not enough money to cover the expense of things? Rich in spirit, but poor in cash and people power.

How many churches will close their doors this year because they are perceived to be only a shadow of what they claim to be, their attitude lackluster, turning away new faces, instead of inviting them in? Rich in assets, but poor in spirit.

Like Peter and Paul, we need each other.

- We need to be practical.
- We need to be spiritual.
- We need a plan, and a purpose.
- We need to know where we are going, and why we are trying so hard to get there.
- We need to trust that God is busy here.
- Because He is.

"And now it is time to get to work," Peter said, "because..."

"You know the message God sent to the people..." (v36)

"We are witnesses of everything he did..." (v39)

So then, let's get to work.
Amen.