

Authentic Followers of Christ - 8th November 2009

St George's Anglican Church

Readings: O/T: Job 42:10-11
 N/T: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11
 Gospel: Mark 14:51-52

Introduction

85% of young outsiders say that present-day Christianity is hypocritical. (a lot or some)

47% of young churchgoers agreed (a lot or some)

p 42 unChristian

What they mean by hypocrisy is that

We say one thing, but live something entirely different

Part of the answer for me is found in being

Authentic... transparent...

1. authenticity – is about being truly ourselves

What you see is what you get

2. transparency – is letting people in

letting them know what we are like on the inside as well as the out

helping them see a deep congruence

between what we're like on the outside and what we're like on the inside

let me explain what I mean

but it's going to take a sermon to do it

a story of connection

My aunt Margaret recently died

& I went to the United States to take the funeral

I talked with the family on the phone before I went

When I got there, we planned the funeral together, with her two daughters and son

It was complicated some of the family were not talking
we were able to negotiate that
not perfectly, everyone is not happy families again
but we did walk down the road together for a bit
we got a little further, not a lot but a bit
& by what I said & did
the way I listened & reflected
it became clear that many of my family respected & appreciated me, felt a deep connection
to me
sometimes in relationships we get it catastrophically right

a story of hypocrisy

But other times we get it catastrophically wrong
I was holidaying with another family member
& he was playing a video game
a violent video game, which as I remember
involved chasing enemies & shooting & killing them
& as I overlooked, he said to me,
you should get into this
it would be really helpful in your line of work
& I blew it off
I said I wasn't interested in video games
Never had been
Had only so much time in life
& would prefer to spend it in other ways...reading

later we had an argument about whether the Bible, Jesus were historical.

I got a fact wrong

& ever since then because of those two incidents I have never felt very connected to him,
whereas I did before.

I never said sorry, I was a jerk

I got that wrong

Hypocrisy revisited

What outsiders mean when they call Christians hypocrites

Is that we say one thing but do another

For example, we say that relationships are important

We say we want to connect with people

Here he was offering me friendship, connection, help

& I was blowing it off as a waste of time

now I didn't need to pretend to be into video games

but I could have asked him

what do you like about video games?

how do you think they would be helpful in my line of work?

& just give it a go

let him show me how the thing works

because only then could I really assess it

Question

What are we to do when people, friends, family, enemies lose confidence in us, Christianity, Jesus to add anything positive to their life?

A similar problem...

In 2 Corinthians Paul faced a similar problem...

A church that had lost confidence in him as their apostle...

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God (1a)

That's the reason he reminds them that it was by the will of God that he is an apostle

a reference to his commission as the apostle to the Gentiles by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus Act 9

& as Gentile Christians

he of all people is their apostle

not only because of Jesus' commission but also because he was instrumental in many of them becoming Christians

How did they lose confidence in Paul as their apostle?

1. in 1 Corinthians Paul rebukes them for their sin... one chapter after another...

chapter 1 divisions

chapter 5 tolerance of an incestual relationship in their congregation

chapter 6 lawsuits within the congregation

chapter 8 uncaring to weak Christians

chapter 11 uncaring to the poor

chapter 13 their self-focused, & unloving way they exercise their gifts

2. here in 2 Corinthians it becomes clear that Paul does not compare favorably with some teachers who arrive later on the scene...

the new comers are more eloquent

mystical

parade their supernatural abilities...

What does Paul do when the Corinthian church loses confidence in him?

To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Asia (1b)

First Paul doesn't lose confidence in them...

Even if they had lost confidence in him – he has not lost confidence in them

Paul describes them as God's holy people

God not only treats us his wayward people as holy by his grace

But he also sends his Holy Spirit to transform us into his holy people

Second Paul shares his weaknesses...

(ironically, not his strengths)

About the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia we do not want you to be uninformed. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed we felt we had received the sentence of death. (8-9)

Paul had been preaching the gospel in Ephesus

He had made it clear that there was no place for idols or idolatry with the gospel of Jesus Christ

Understandably this did not go over well with the silversmiths of Ephesus, whose livelihoods was significantly dependent on the trade of idols

A riot had follows

Paul & his friends are arrested,

The death sentence was passed

Paul expected to die.

Somehow, God had delivered them, we know not how

But through this experience Paul comes to realize that it was only a matter of time

The forces pitted against him would ultimately succeed

He realized that...

he was no longer welcome in Corinthian

his very life was endangered in Ephesus, perhaps much of the Roman world

this is Paul's perfect storm

this is when everything conspires against him

the Greek word Paul uses to describe his experience in Asia is the word for pressure (8)

its like a ship being weighed down by the ballast

being crushed

to this image Paul adds the word great (8)

that which exceeds, surpasses description, far beyond our ability to endure

literally beyond our power

it is the sort of language today we might use of clinical depression

Question

What does Paul do when the Corinthians lose confidence in him, Jesus?

Paul opens the window of his soul

He lets the Corinthians in

he makes himself vulnerable

he shares his weaknesses, his emotional fragility

he tells them exactly what its like for him

the overwhelming feeling of destruction, he felt in Ephesus, when he was nearly executed
the hurt he feels by the rejection in Corinth

as an aside let me note two obscure verses in the Bible

one where, when Jesus is arrested a young man is also caught hold of, but escapes naked leaving his clothes in the hands of his would be captors, Mark 14: 51-52

scholars speculate why was this incident recorded and they wonder if that this might be Mark's signature, in other words the young man was the gospel writer, if so it is a very humble description, he makes himself vulnerable

the other verse comes from Job 42: 10-11, throughout Job, forty odd chapters we have endured with the Job the accusation by his friends that his plight is his own fault, he must have sinned grievously to deserve such treatment, but at the end of Job, God says no it was me, and this speaks of the humility of our God, who in Christ would go on to die naked upon a cross. Our God is a god who makes himself vulnerable

What is the answer to hypocrisy?

So what are we to do when people lose confidence in us, Jesus, Christianity to bring anything positive to their lives?

When they perceive we have said one thing and done something entirely different?

Being accused of being hypocritical is not new for us as Christians, what's new here is how we respond...

Both in the example of Paul, the writings of the New Testament and in the book unChristian The suggestion is to be authentic, transparent...

new perception

Christians are transparent about their flaws and act first, talk second.

Be Transparent – admit our flaws or failures

First, we admit our flaws, failures & we ask for forgiveness

isn't transparency part of being an authentic follower of Jesus

its not spin

because its what we truly are/believe as Christians
that a follower of Jesus says sorry/asks for forgiveness
when we wrong someone
confession of sin is authentically Christian
we don't pretend we are something we're not
we are open about our faults
& admit what the Bible says about us
that we don't always live God's way
we are open about the problems our ungodly lifestyles have created
because it grieves us deeply

the Bible says...

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3: 23

This scripture is true of us no matter how shaming our behaviour might be, no matter how little we might want to remind ourselves or others of it

We act first

Second, followers of Jesus work hard at being godly

The Bible says...

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will & to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Philippians 2: 12-13

Authentic Christianity is working hard

& failing often, yes

but working hard

Why do I say one thing and live something entirely different from time to time?

At one level it's because of my willfulness

My sinfulness

The challenge for us is to begin to ask ourselves the question

How are we going to begin to address significant moral issues in our lives?

Being authentically Christian is working hard at living a godly life, dependant upon the power of God's transforming Spirit.

(Why do I say one thing and live something entirely different from time to time?)

At another level it is because of my brokenness

Perhaps we need to seek some help

Many have found a counselor helps)

We talk second

Finally we need to talk

We need to communicate

We need to explain our faith at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way, whatever

The unconditional love we have experienced in God our heavenly Father

The love of Jesus demonstrated in the cross of Christ

The generosity of God who has given us his friendship as a gift

The gift of the Holy Spirit who pours the love of God into our hearts

We need to talk second

But we do need to talk

Because otherwise

All our unchurched friends & family will see is us trying to live a godly life and failing

And they will conclude that Christians are good people who fail

Christians are good failures

Unless we communicate

They will think Christians are good people who are not particularly good at being good
Or at least no better than they are

We need to talk second

For it is by grace you have been saved & this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2: 8-9

An authentic Christian talks second

Outsiders understand we're not good

If we don't talk they'll just think that we think we are

rather than what we truly believe as authentic followers of Jesus, that - there is no one good but God alone. Mark 10: 18

Conclusion

What's the remedy? How do we do when people lose confidence in us, Jesus, Christianity to play any positive role in their lives?

How do we respond when people perceive that we say one thing but do something entirely different?

1. We are transparent, we admit our flaws, our failures, and ask for forgiveness
2. We act first; we work hard at being godly
3. We talk second

We communicate the gospel of grace

This is not spin

This is authentic Christianity; this is who we really are

Authentic Christians confess their sins and ask for forgiveness, when they wrong others

Authentic Christians work hard at being godly.

Authentic Christians have a relationship with God that is a gift, and long for others to hear of how they might experience it too.

New

Today I have been talking about one of the positives of unChristian...

There has only been one point – let's be transparent, authentic

If you want to hear all the points... five points

Read the last chapter of unchristian, chapter 9

Respond with the right perspective

Connect with people

Be creative

Serve people

Live a lifestyle of compassion

Or come along to New

Wednesday evenings of November

7.30-9.15 pm in St Georges Church Hall

With Andrea MacDougall & me

(Last week Nov 4 - Introduction/hypocritical)

This coming week Nov 11 – Get Saved/Anti-homosexual

Nov 18 - Sheltered/Political

Nov 25 - Judgmental/from unChristian to Christian

Andrew Osborn