

To Each One of Us

Ephesians 4:7-16

Southside Church of the Nazarene

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Opening thoughts from Globe and Mail article about Canadian citizenship:

A new poll by the Dominion Institute shows that Canadians are faring dramatically worse today than they did in 1997 in a test of their knowledge of history, politics, culture and geography.

About 60 per cent would fail today a test similar to the one that immigrants take to become Canadian citizens. A decade ago, when the institute began quizzing Canadians, just 45 per cent were unable to score a passing grade by answering 12 out of 21 questions correctly.

Among the findings:

The title of the national anthem was named by 96 per cent of the respondents, but only 58 per cent could name the first two lines of O Canada. This is five percentage points worse than in 1997.

Just 16 per cent of Canadians could name the four provinces - Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia - that formed Canada in 1867. This is a decline of six points.

In 1997, 87 per cent of those surveyed correctly answered "fur" or "beaver" to the question that asked about the trade controlled by Hudson Bay Co., but in the latest quiz just 66 per cent gave the right answer.

One in three Canadians a decade ago identified the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as the part of the Constitution that protects the rights and freedoms of all Canadians. In 2007, the correct response rate had declined to 22 per cent. Six in 10 immigrants identified the Charter, however.

Just 8 per cent of Canadians identified the Queen as Canada's head of state, with half the respondents incorrectly citing the prime minister.

Mr. [Rudyard] Griffiths, the Dominion Institute's executive director, said the results indicate that "the country's common memory is dwindling and may even be

shrinking rapidly."

He believes the higher scores among immigrants result from the fact that they have had to study to pass the official citizenship exam and that they have a curiosity about their adopted country. For too many native-born Canadians, citizenship is a convenience rather than a conscious act, he added.

This indifference to civic literacy is reflected in Canada's education system, Mr. Griffiths said. Just three provinces - Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec - require a history credit for high-school graduation. He suggested that the emphasis in school curriculums on science and math indicates a bias toward turning out graduates who are attractive to employers rather than fully informed citizens.

"We are becoming a nation of civic slackers, a country of consumers who are satisfied and validated through lives that are focused increasingly around consumption as opposed to the democratic process and the responsibilities of citizenship," he said.

In thinking about that last statement, I am reminded of the famous challenge delivered by US President John F. Kennedy in his 1961 inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

What an incredible contrast between those stirring words and the sober indictment of that previous quote: "We are becoming a nation of civic slackers, a country of consumers who are satisfied and validated through lives that are focused increasingly around consumption . . ." Consumers are not interested in what they can do for their country or for the common good. They are interested in "what's good for me," and their question actually is, "What can my country do for me?" Or, "What can my employer do for me?" Or, "What can you do for me?" Or, "What's in it for me?"

Now, going a bit further, I want to consider with you how all of this applies to life together in the Church. You know, it's interesting that in 1 Peter chapter 2, the church is described as "a holy nation." So, what kind of a "nation" are we? Have we managed to escape the trap of consumerism? Are WE willing to "Ask not what our country/church can do for us, but what we can do for our country/church?" Or, could it be that we are just as captivated by that deadly consumer orientation as the society around us?

A few years ago Billy Graham was scheduled to preach at a series of evangelistic meetings at the Skydome in Toronto. Sickness prevented him from preaching. In an interview he stated that the church in Canada appeared to be held captive to a spirit of apathy. Rev. Ed Silvano has described apathy with these words: "Apathy is a mind-set impregnated with hopelessness, that causes us to accept as unchangeable that which we know is contrary to the will of God." (Quoted from Pastor Eugene Harder, newhope.bc.ca)

Of course, there **are** many things we **cannot do**. We cannot save ourselves from the guilt of sin or the wrath of God against our sin. We cannot make ourselves holy. We cannot do either of those things for anyone else, either. So it isn't like we should be saying, "Ask not what God can do for you, but what you can do for God." There are many things that only God can do for us. But on the other hand, there are many things that we CAN do for God, for the church – and we are called to do those things. We are obligated. The question which we are called to answer day after day, is, "Will we actually 'work till Jesus comes,' or will we let ourselves slide (or continue to slide) into the apathetic culture of Christian consumerism?"

There is no place for laziness and no place for a consumer mindset in this holy nation, this royal priesthood, this people belonging to God. And on this day when we think about the blessings and the responsibilities of life in this great country of Canada, God's word calls us also to consider not only the blessings of citizenship in this "holy nation" of His, but also the responsibilities of those who are subjects in His Kingdom.

You know, as a church we are blessed to have several paid ministry staff – but the temptation that comes with that blessing is to leave the ministry up to them, rather than owning it ourselves. The danger is that our active ministry ability or potential as a church would actually be diminished because we are paying someone to "do the ministry"! So, really now – who does own the ministry of the church? Who actually is responsible for it? Let's turn to Ephesians, chapter 4:7, 11-16 – for some Scriptural teaching on those questions:

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our

faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Who owns the church's ministry? Who is responsible for it? There's not a whole lot of suspense, is there? The answer is there in the very first phrase: **Each one of us!**

Now, this passage is an interesting one, because depending on which translation you read from, it can seem to say different things! If you read vv. 11-12 from the KJV, it says, *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Which seems to say that the three purposes of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are, first, to perfect the saints; second, to do the work of ministry; and third, to edify the body of Christ. There seems to be an implication that these specially gifted people are the only really important ones in the church – they do all the important work, and everyone else just kind of sits around and “gets perfected” or “gets edified” by their ministry. The heavy lifting is all done by the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers!

And there is an older stream of teaching which was once very prominent in the church, and may still be quite influential, which seemed to say just that. It created a kind of division, almost a caste system of sorts, distinguishing between the “Clergy” and the “Laity.” Clergy were more important and it could only be clergy that did the really important stuff.

Then someone noticed a couple of things about verse 12: first of all, the word translated “perfecting” in the KJV did not mean what we often think of when we describe something as perfect – like it should be put up on a pedestal or inside a glass case because it's just “so perfect.” In other words, this “perfecting” of the saints wasn't for the purpose of getting them all shined up so they'd be nice to look at – rather, it had to do with getting them ready for work. The same word is

used for the action of fishermen who are mending their nets – getting those nets ready to go fish! It has to do with making someone what they ought to be, mending, outfitting, readying and preparing them for what they are designed to do or be!

And the other thing to notice in v. 12 is that it is not necessary to have a comma between the phrase, “for the equipping of the saints,” and the phrase, “for the work of ministry.” So now, most translations run those two phrases together, and the verse says that these gifted people – Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers – are there to equip the saints for the work of ministry; or to prepare God’s people for works of service, or to train Christians in skilled servant work.

This clearly means that we’re not supposed to hire someone called “Pastor” or “Teacher” and expect that they will do all the ministry themselves! The task of Pastor Tammy is NOT to “do the children’s ministry.” Pastor Trent isn’t supposed to “do the youth ministry” here. The Ministry Team is not supposed to do the ministry. Our calling is, as this passage says in *The Message*, “to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.” Our role is to help the church do its work, to help people who ask “what can I do for the church?” to figure that out and become skilled at it!

Now, even more recently, someone has noticed that this passage does not actually even mention church leadership at all. It is not talking about “church leaders;” instead, it clearly refers to “each one of us.” To “each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it” – and then, after one of Paul’s typical digressions (vv 8-10), he goes on to describe what gifts have been given “to each one of us.” Reading the passage without the digression, it’s easy to see that verse 11 follows naturally from verse 7. So “each one of us” has received the grace to fill one of these five roles: to be either an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher!

“What Paul is saying is that Jesus, by the gift of his grace, has empowered and equipped each of us for service. We have all been given different-sized portions of grace and anointing. We each receive part of the whole. Christ’s ministry fully

demonstrates all five roles of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. We as members of his body receive one of these five appointments, relying on one another for those areas we are not gifted in. . . . These five gifts of grace seem to be the elements needed for preparing people for service and building up the church” (Breen and Kallestad, *The Passionate Church*, 138).

So then, we all are ministers. We all have a crucial role to play. We all “own” the ministry of the church. We all must play our role and contribute our portion, in order for the world to see Christ. That’s the way that we grow up together and achieve what Paul goes on to call “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” None of us can think of ourselves as spectators in the work of Christ, because His work did not end when He ascended to the Father but was designed to be fulfilled by us – His Church, His Body, His Holy Nation! “He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (v 16, NLT).

My fellow Christians, here is my challenge to you today: Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church! Ask not what your pastors and ministry leaders can do for you, but how you can participate – faithfully and sacrificially – in these ministries to which God has called all of us!