

“the church”

May 2009

Hymn “The church’s one foundation”

VU 331

Scripture *It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s word is summed up in a single sentence: **love others as you love yourself.** That’s an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out – in no time at all you will be annihilating each other and where will your precious freedom be then.*

Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads, or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every aspect of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original. From Galatians 5:13-15 and 25-26 in The Message

Prayer Let us pray – Amazing God, Creator and Confronter, open our hearts to hear your voice in unexpected times and places. Appear to us in forms we cannot deny. Challenge us in ways we cannot avoid. Lead us in paths from which we cannot turn back. Discipline us, that our self-discipline may be better informed and more consistent. Test us that we may test ourselves by the model of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

Lesson We’ll begin with a story – *There once was a well-respected and loved teacher named Hufis, a Sufi sheik who could do all kinds of wonderful things. But he began to hear of another sheik, Raaleh, whom travellers from the other side of Persia said could do even more wondrous things. Troubled, he set out to find her, and they met on the shores of the Persian Gulf. As it happened, it was prayer time. So Hufis took his prayer rug and flung it out on the water. Then walking across the water, he said his prayers seated on his prayer rug, floating on the water.*

When finished, he turned to Raaleh, “Can you do that?” She took out her prayer rug and threw it into the air. Then, climbing an invisible staircase, she sat down and said her prayers, floating in the air. Upon descending, she called to Hufis: “What you and I have done today, the fishes and birds do every day. Wouldn’t it be more worthwhile if we would learn instead to treat each other as human beings?”

In the early church, believers were received into the church by adult baptism. The sacrament itself was preceded by training and teaching. The instruction in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples” includes both baptism and teaching or apprenticeship. Since baptism was a one-time act the words seem to emphasize the teaching ministry of the new church. We still train and prepare men and women in this teaching function when they become set apart as ordained or commissioned ministers.

Yet few people today consider teaching the most important function of a church. When it comes to calling a minister, most congregations say that the ability to preach good sermons is crucial. Those who value the place of music in worship feel that a fine music program is essential. Some say the most important thing about a church is the building itself, and suggest that serving the church means keeping the building in excellent condition. Of course, the Sunday School teachers would agree that teaching is primary in today's world where little Christian education is given in the home.

The church is teaching, preaching, music, and much, much more. If we take seriously the words of Jesus to "obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20) we will love our neighbour as ourselves, look after the sick, care for the thief, the leper, the prostitute, and turn the world upside down! All of these are possible only if the church is considered to be a "community" or "family" – a group of people working together, caring about one another, and caring about those in need outside of their community.

Prayer-in-action In small groups use your imaginations to create a "perfect" church. Use your own congregation as a start and decide what changes need to be made.

After you have done this, see if there is one change your group can initiate now to help to "perfect" your church.

Prayer Let us pray – Creator God, we pray for strength of spirit to be your church. Baptize us with your love that we may do your work. Guide us that we may be examples in word and in deed. Mould us into your disciples. Amen.