

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Is It a Church or a Business?

Lesson: Luke 6:20-31

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

²⁷ “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Friends, what do you think is the difference between a church and a business? Have you ever thought about that? Then, what is the purpose of each?

What is the purpose of a business? The purpose of a business is to generate profit by providing goods or services, right? Then what about the purpose of the church? The purpose of the church is to glorify God, to make disciples of Christ, and to offer spiritual guidance.

Now let’s also compare their orientations. A business is people-centered—it is based on efficiency and rationality that can generate profit. But the church is God-centered. When the church makes decisions, it does not prioritize efficiency or rationality. Even when God’s will seems inefficient or unreasonable, if it contributes to the expansion of God’s kingdom, welcomes the marginalized, and shares God’s love, then the church willingly chooses that way.

And if we look closely, the leadership style of a business and of the church are also different. A business focuses on leadership that seeks growth and profit, while the Bible teaches leadership that serves others and values humility. You know the story of the Good Shepherd, right? When the shepherd counted his sheep and found only ninety-nine, realizing one was missing, he did not hesitate to leave the ninety-nine

and go in search of the one that was lost. And when he found it, he brought it back. That is the loving and serving leadership that the church seeks to follow.

Now that we have compared a church and a business, how do you feel? Can you see the difference a bit more clearly?

The church is not a business. And perhaps that's why the Bible often presents values that are completely different from our human way of thinking. Today's reading from Luke 6 is also one of those stories that is not easy for us to understand at first.

As Jesus looked at his disciples, one by one, he said:
 "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
 Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

It already sounds strange, doesn't it? The poor, the hungry, and those who weep—these are not usually the people we consider "blessed." Yet Jesus says that they are blessed.

Even that sounds hard to understand, but then Jesus contrasts these people with others—the rich. Jesus says,
 "Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.
 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.
 Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."

If we read this story rationally, like a businessperson who does not believe in God, it may be very difficult to understand. Because by worldly logic, the rich, the well-fed, and the joyful seem blessed—not the poor, the hungry, and the sorrowful.

But God's perspective is always different from ours. We look at appearances, but God looks at the heart. Even though someone may be poor, hungry, or weeping now, if they walk with God, they will one day enter God's kingdom, be comforted, and laugh with joy. God will make it so.

On Wednesday, we had our Charge Conference with DS Peace. During that time, the DS handed out post-it notes and asked each of you to write down what you think makes a church or congregation "healthy" and "vital." Afterward, I collected those post-its and sat down to read them one by one.

There were many faith-filled answers—such as “faith in God” or “unity in Christ.” But two words appeared most frequently. The first was “active,” and the second was “involved.”

I understand what you mean. Many of you probably feel that our congregations are aging, that there are fewer young people, that you have faithfully served in leadership for many years but are growing weary. You look around at larger churches and see vibrant women’s groups and even men’s groups, joyful music from praise bands, and it can seem like that’s why people are drawn to those churches. So I understand when people sometimes say, “Our church isn’t growing because we don’t have a men’s group,” or “because we don’t have a praise band.”

After reading your post-its, I wanted to ask:

If our members became more active, and if we started a men’s group, would that automatically make us a healthy and vital church?

Let’s imagine for a moment that fifty new, active members suddenly joined our churches. They are full of passion and eager to serve. Every meeting would last at least three hours because they have endless ideas! Sounds good so far, right? But there’s one thing—they have strong personalities. When their opinions aren’t accepted, they get frustrated, conflicts arise, and sometimes the church even splits into factions.

How do I know this? Have I seen it happen? Yes, I have—both in Southern California and in Korea.

Let me share my experience from Korea as an example. Before coming to the United States, I served for about four years as a student pastor at the first Methodist church in Seoul. That church had many staff members: a senior pastor, four associate pastors, three pastors in the ordination process, two full-time pastors not yet in the process, and around twenty student pastors like me who were studying in college while serving. Every Sunday, about 2,000 people attended worship. There were many lay leaders—many active and involved members, just as you described on your post-its.

The church was full of workers and had abundant resources, but every meeting was filled with tension. It was difficult to bring different opinions together, and even among pastors, relationships were often strained. Despite having many workers and strong finances, the church was divided into groups and factions. As a young pastor, I couldn’t understand why. And because there were so many people, many

didn't even know each other. Even after serving there for four years, I still didn't know most of the people in that church.

So yes, I understand your post-it answers, and they reflect things our churches certainly need. But I'm not sure that being "active" or "involved" alone necessarily makes a church healthy and vital.

Then what is a truly healthy and vital church?

At the beginning of today's message, I compared the church with a business. The purpose of a business is profit and the orientation of a business is human-centered. But the purpose of the church is God. Everything centers on God—on Jesus Christ.

A truly healthy and vital church is one that believes in, accepts, and follows Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is a church where every decision and direction is not guided by human reason, but by constant prayer to discern God's will, by practicing God's love, and by living out God's hope.

In verses 27 to 31, Jesus teaches us to hate sin but love our enemies, to resist injustice, and to practice love. That is the image of a healthy and vital church.

No matter how many workers or attendees a church may have—if they have not truly encountered and experienced Jesus Christ, if they have not been transformed, and if, in their lives and in their meetings, they still prioritize their own logic, thoughts, and emotions—then that church is not much different from a business.

Friends, I know you feel sad and anxious when you see your beloved church, filled with your memories and years of devotion, becoming smaller and seemingly declining. But let us lift even those feelings up to God. Let us first restore our relationship with God through prayer. And when worries about the church come back to your heart, let us remember today's passage from Luke 6.

God is the One who searches for the lost sheep. God comforts and blesses those who are poor, hungry, and weeping. Let us trust in that truth, and instead of choosing worry, let us choose love. Instead of choosing concern, let us choose hope. When we truly believe and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and follow Him in our daily lives, God will hear all our worries and anxieties and pour His hope into our church and into our lives.

I sincerely pray that we all may live that way. Amen.