



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

September 13, 2020

If WPC Disappeared, Would Anybody Miss It?

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: September 14, 2020

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Matthew 5:14-16
Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

I heard the question at a conference several years ago when our leader asked: *If the church you currently serve would cease to exist, who would miss it? Would anyone really notice, or would anyone care?*

Imagine, driving along Highway 19 and where this church stands, all you would see is one more big parking lot.

Because we haven't been able to worship in-person, many have worried that the church will disappear from the lives of so many.

It is true that worship is central to the life of the church. Our Book of Common Worship says it this way: *“Worship is the principal influence that shapes our faith and is the most visible way we express the faith. In worship, through Word and Sacrament, the church is sustained by the presence of Christ. Joined in worship to the One who is the source of its life, the church is empowered to serve God in the world.”*

For the past six months we have been singing and praying and preaching to an empty sanctuary, and it does feel good to have people in the pews again.

But let me say, it might have been an empty sanctuary, but I have never thought that I was preaching to an empty church or that Westminster Presbyterian Church was disappearing.

The way I have prayed about it is that Westminster is a multi-site congregation; wherever you are, in this sanctuary or in the sanctuary of your home, Westminster claims that place, from the North Hills to Washington County and east

and west of Highway 19 and everything in between, that we are the church!

So, no, Westminster Presbyterian Church has not disappeared, but would it really matter if this church did disappear?

Let me remind you of what we just said about worship: Yes, *“Worship is the principal influence that shapes our faith and is the most visible way we express the faith... (But this last phrase is crucial) Joined in worship to the One who is the source of its life,” the church is empowered to serve God in the world.”*

A fundamental foundation for what makes us Presbyterian is our understanding that all of life is subject to the rule of God: that God sends us out in the world to serve God’s purposes here and now.

We don’t worship for worship’s sake, rather for the sake of serving God; as John Calvin wrote: *No kind of life is more praiseworthy to God than that which is useful to...society...”*

Like my Daddy would tell me when I wanted to sleep in on Saturday mornings: *“Get up and make yourself useful as well as ornamental!”*

The founder of the Red Cross grew up in the Reformed church in Switzerland and because his parents’ lived this foundation of faith, of being useful to society, his life was dedicated to making a difference in the world. And I could go on and on about individuals...

As Presbyterians we’ve built hospitals and schools, more than any other denomination.

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We Presbyterians have emphasized that God sends us out in the world to serve God's purposes here and now: to be useful to society.

That's what the story in our reading from Luke is all about.

Jesus could have told these disciples and followers, stay here and sing "Kum Bah Yah" and keep away from life outside our little group, but he sends them out with a mission, to make the world a better place.

One thing Jesus did when he sent the seventy out was to send them out in pairs. In part, I think, he did that to remind us that we never go it alone; we're in this together, partners in faith.

Also, Jesus sent them out as lambs among wolves, and the times they haven't changed much, have they? We go out in scary times, too.

And he gave them power to heal. I think most of us are sick and tired of being sick and tired. We, too, seek changed lives: spiritually and physically, socially, emotionally, and economically.

Throughout the history of this church, this has been a church that has pointed not to itself, but to God; that is the majesty of the steeple.

And now it is yours, and I do not think for a moment that God has gathered this church in this place at this time to sit on its hands or let it disappear.

Our Scripture lessons this morning combine the spiritual and the practical, and the thread that brings them together is 'commitment.'

This church has been unfailing and unwavering in its challenge to people to make the matter of commitment to Jesus Christ a priority.

From this pulpit, the ministers have challenged you to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. The officers of this church, Youth and Children's Ministry leaders, through the ministry of music: all have set forth a faith for that daily walk into the future.

I saw a cartoon about a Pastor Nominating Committee. They said, "What we want is an energetic, innovative minister with a grand vision that will inspire us to stay just like we are!" That is not Westminster Presbyterian Church.

People are looking everywhere for help, support, and guidance for the challenges of life, and Westminster has been, is, and will be that place because we believe we need to be useful to society, especially in these days of darkness clouded by natural disasters, a global pandemic, social injustices and partisan politics.

So, what are people of good faith to do?

For starters, we should not give in to the darkness, but we should combat darkness with light.

We need to respond with love when hate raises its ugly head. We must cling to the eternal light of hope and justice that cannot be extinguished by either circumstances or individuals advocating for darkness.

Scripture uses light and darkness as a background to inspire hope over fear and evil.

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John begins his gospel with that image, *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*

Being even more specific, Jesus says it of himself, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*

We are people of the light because the light of the universe burns inside us.

Jesus says it plain, *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

So, what brings light to your life that guides you through the darkness to a destination where hope and joy reside?? What shines daily in your life that provides joy, peace, and hope to the people you meet?

People are looking everywhere to find a way through the same darkness, help for the challenges of life, and I believe they can find it with Westminster Presbyterian Church. I think of the great theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, arrested and imprisoned for his role in a failed assassination attempt on Hitler; executed just a few days before the end of the war in Europe.

He was separated from everyone, no gathering for worship, the only connection was through his letters, yet the light of his faith grew stronger in that cell and continues to shine, and the light of his good works continue to inspire.

He wrote from prison, words that ring true for today: *“The church is the church only when it exists for others...The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving...In particular, our own church will have to take the field against the vices of ‘hubris’, power-worship, envy, and humbug as the roots of all evil.”*

Just as Jesus trusted those Seventy, he trusts you today with his message of love and salvation, of freedom and justice, of grace and mercy, a life of helping and serving that changes lives and comforts those in need.

If Westminster Presbyterian Church disappeared, what would be lost would be that light that helps people find their way to decisions that are faithful and good and worthy, what would be lost are those good works that change lives for the better, for all the people whose lives are impacted by the mission and ministries of Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Frankly, I don’t know of a church that has come through so much darkness itself over the last several years with as much strength as this church.

God is blessing you because even though there have been some tough times, you have tried to be a blessing by continually turning your hearts and minds outward, reaching out to others, to be the light of the world, to let your good works shine for the glory of God.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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