

Reawakening 2020 / 4: A “Christian” Church / January 26, 2020

Key Texts: Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11; Colossians 2.18; John 14.6; John 17.20-21

Key Words: Conviction, Compassion, Rick Warren, Polarization, Weird, Christian Church, New Testament Church, Restoration, Unity, Elders, Deacons, Essentials

Summary: This sermon wraps our “reawakening 2020.” We talk about what it means to be a Christian Church, especially as a “unity movement.”

This month has been about reminding us who we are, what kind of church this is. Last one. Now, I’m rarely on any of the social media, but I was curious when someone told me about a quote from Rick Warren (a great pastor) that was going viral – both positive and negative. So, I punched in the search string: Rick Warren, conviction, compassion. The first hit I got gave me his quote. Warren said, “Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone’s lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don’t have to compromise convictions to be compassionate.” I thought that was pretty good – truth, and grace. Then I glanced at the next 3 hits:

- Hit #2: “Oh Shut Up, Rick Warren. And I Mean That Compassionately”
- Hit #3: “Rick Warren’s, and American evangelicalism’s, ‘huge lie’”
- Hit #4: “Calling BS on Rick Warren’s Quote”

Wow! Sounds like he kind of poked at a hornet’s nest! In part because ... Because we’re living in a culture that is becoming more and more polarized and loving it! Wouldn’t you agree? It’s kind of like: “If you don’t think like me, you can’t sit by me.” So, out there, we exclude, and vilify, and mock, and condemn each other. And here’s the deal, in here, if the church is doing its job, the more polarized our world gets, the more weird the church will look. The worse it gets out there, the stranger it ought to look in here.

And it’s getting bad out there, isn’t it?

- Republicans versus Democrats. We are practically at war, now. It’s almost like they’d consider it evil to agree on anything. Are you following the impeachment stuff in DC?
- How about LGBTQ issues? That’s the polarization that was driving the attacks on Rick Warren. That’s one of the polarizations that has driven so much antipathy towards the church ... and in the church.
- How about all the second amendment fights out there? “The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” Well, does that include so called “assault weapons,” and high capacity magazines? Did you guys follow the second amendment rally in Richmond last week? Or have you read about the more than 100 second amendment sanctuary cities there in Virginia? Do you think all that stuff is going to heat up way more?
- Speaking of sanctuary cities, how about our polarization over “illegals.” There are cities and counties and states all over our country that simply refuse to cooperate with the feds, and the feds are threatening to cut off their funding.
- And I thought we had made progress on our historical polarization over race. But it seems like it has heated back up again. That’s awful!
- As has our polarization over a whole spate of what are framed as “women’s issues,” including abortion ... as if abortion is a “women’s issue.”
- We fight over education: public schools, charter schools, private schools, home schools ... school choice. That fight’s going on right here in Kentucky, isn’t it? Actually most of these fights touch Frankfort.
- We’re polarized over climate change, and environmental policies. Did you guys follow the fight they tried to stir between Trump and Greta Thunberg last week in Davos?

- And if those fights don't fire you up, you can always find someone to fight with about iPhones vs Androids, or PCs vs Mac, or Kentucky vs Louisville vs Duke or whoever.

The deal is: what we disagree about seems to be becoming way more important than what we agree on ... to so many. So it's: "If you don't think like me, you can't sit by me." And we exclude, and vilify, and mock, and condemn each other. But maybe Warren was right. I'm going to tweak his wording just a bit: "Our culture has accepted two huge lies. We think they are lies: The first is that if you disagree with someone, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don't have to compromise your convictions to be compassionate." Maybe it is possible for someone to pursue both truth and grace ... Jesus did!

And in light of all this ... polarization out there, if the church is doing its job, we're going to take hits. The worse it looks out there, the weirder it will look in here. We have used this descriptor before, because it fits the kind of church we want to be. Here it is: "We welcome those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, black and proud, y no habla Ingles. We welcome those who are newborns, poor as dirt, or skinny as a rail. You're welcome here if you're "just browsing," just woke up, or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope, or haven't been in church since your baby's dedication. We welcome those who could lose a few pounds (thank God), who think the earth is flat, work too hard, can't spell, or came because grandma's in town and wanted to go to church. We welcome those who could use a prayer right now, are three-times divorced, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid, or got lost in traffic and wound up here by mistake. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. If you blew all your offering money at Keeneland, you are welcome here. We welcome tourists, seekers, doubters, bleeding hearts ... and we welcome you. Welcome ... Home!"

And maybe we should add: We welcome Republicans, and Democrats, and those who despise them both. We welcome those struggling with a plethora of sexual issues. We welcome those with an arsenal in their basement, and those who think they are crazy. We welcome those who want stronger borders, and those who think "illegal" is a dirty word. We welcome Black Lives Matter shirts, and Blue Lives Matter shirts, and All Lives Matter shirts. We welcome those who are obsessed with recycling and conserving, and those who don't give a rip. ... Listen guys: They are all here, in the room, right now. You're sitting by them. You hug them, you shake their hands here. You sing with them, you share the Lord's Supper with them here. Isn't that weird? The church has always been weird like that.

And, to be honest, most people think churches just add to all this polarization. And sometimes, often times, we do. How awful is that! According to churchfinder.com, there are over 80 churches with a Frankfort address. Over 80! According to areaconnect.com, the number is closer to 90. Christian churches, Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal, Christian Missionary Alliance, Assembly of God, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, and about a gillion different kinds of Baptist churches. Sometimes working together; more often, it seems, isolated from, or undermining each other... Why so many different kinds? What are the differences between us? Shouldn't what we have in common be more important than our differences? Or do our differences cancel out what we have in common?

And then, for some reason, you try out Capital City Christian. Some of you have come here from other Christian Churches, and you're thinking: this place is kind of weird! And some of you come from one of the other kinds of churches. And for a lot of you, this place is really weird! And some of

come here from no church at all. And you're wondering, are all churches this weird? And, I suppose in their own way, most are.

But we do do some things a little differently here. We're really not trying to be "different," we're trying to be on mission. But depending on your background, some of you think we look like we're just trying to be different. I sit up here on a stool, with an iPad in front of me, in khakis and a sweater – no tie. Steve was up here in jeans. There are all these little tables around the room with crackers and juice, and every week – every week – we line up for this ... "meal." How weird is that! Even if you grew up in church, you probably didn't do it like this. We have that tub of water over there, and periodically we dunk people who want to become Jesus followers. That's odd, isn't it? And usually it's a parent, or a friend, or a neighbor doing the baptizing, instead of one of us "clergy" guys. That's a little different, isn't it? Our music is a little loud for some of you who grew up on "church music." We have all these lights, and that fog machine ... trying to immerse you in a multi-sensory worship experience. I'll bet they didn't do it like that in your grandma's church. We avoid churchy words as much as we can – that's different. We use several different Bible translations – avoiding the ones that sound all "Bible-like." We have a group of men – just men – who serve as the "elders" of this church family ... which is kind of offensive in our culture, isn't it? ... Did you know that none of this stuff – none of it – is an accident?

And when you look at this church family ... what a weird bunch! Where else would you find such an odd collection of misfits clinging to each other ... kind of like a family ... kind of like your family. But we are not ... family ... biologically. We have people in this spiritual "family" who disagree with each other on most every issue polarizing us out there – politics, gay rights, women's issues, abortion, public schools, climate change, immigration, racial issues ... It's not that these causes don't matter to us; it's that there's something that matters infinitely more! Did you know that we even have bacon haters in this church? Did you know that my wife – my wife – hates the smell of bacon cooking? And we are still married – 45 years! And all of us here are bound together by something that we think is way bigger – way bigger – than any of the issues separating people out there?!

And what's really strange to people who grew up in church, there are profound "theological" differences between people sitting in this room. Most of these theological debates don't mean a flip to people out there, but some churches split over this stuff! There are 6 day creationists in here, and those who think this all started with a big bang billions of years ago. There are those who hold to verbal, plenary inspiration leading to an infallible and inerrant Bible – at least for the original autographs. And there are those who don't have a clue what I just said and don't care. We have pre-millennialists, post-millennialists, a-millennialists, and pan-millennialists ... and others who are like ... "huh?!" There are Calvinists in this room who think God predetermines which of you will go to heaven and which of you will go to hell. And others in this room, like me, who find that whole idea reprehensible. We have people in this room who speak in tongues, and others who think that's just weird! There are people who insist that you're not saved till you're baptized, and others who can't figure out yet what a bath has to do with following Jesus... And we are bound together by something that we think is way bigger – way bigger – than any of these issues that split some churches?!

And all this is intentional ... it's on purpose ... it's by design. Do you know why? Not because these polarizing issues, these arguments are unimportant. Some of them are huge! But we believe there is something way, way more important. And because we think that's what our God meant for the church to be – like a really, really weird family. Because I'll bet your biological family looks a little like this one!

You see, God meant it that way from the beginning. That's what God meant for his church to look like. Let me show you two weird verses: weird in that world, and still weird in ours. The apostle Paul says, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one ... in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3.28) Those were the kinds of polarizations that caused wars back then. But not in God's church! The Message puts it like this: "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal (all of you). That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ." You see, God thinks our common allegiance to Jesus is way bigger than what separates us. In another place the apostle Paul puts it like this. He says, "In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. (That stuff mattered a lot in Paul's world! But not in the church! No, he says:) Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us." (Colossians 3.11) Now, do you buy that? Do you really? Are you willing to try to live it out? Because that's what we're about.

We call Capital City a "Christian Church" – Capital City Christian Church. Here's what that means. About 200 years ago some guys started starting some "Christian Churches" on the American frontier. They came out of all different kinds of churches: Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal. And they were kind of like, do we really have to be Methodists, or Presbyterians, or Baptists, or Episcopalians ... can we just be ... "Christian." They weren't trying to diss the other churches, they were just thinking, "Wouldn't it be enough just to be Christians? Isn't there something that unites us that is way bigger than all the squabbles that divide us? Why don't we just call ourselves "Christians," kind of like they did back in Bible times?

And we're part of that tradition, that movement. We try to be that kind of church. Here's what it means. Here's what it means to be a "Christian Church." #1: It means that we are a church "of Christ." A Christian church is a church belonging to Christ. It's his church. The Bible says, "Christ is the head of the church, which is his body." (Colossians 2.18) That means he's our boss. That means we have no authority to change his message, we have no authority to alter how he tells us to do business, we have no authority to modify the membership requirements, we have no authority to modify his mission for us. It's his church. We are not a democracy. This is not "my church" to lead where I want it to go. This is not your church, or the "elders' church" to shape by their preferences. It is a "Christian Church," a "Church of Christ"; "Christ-centered," "Christ-owned."

That means a lot. It makes a difference in how we worship: Worship is not about me, and it's not about you, it's about him. And it makes a difference in what we preach: People are going to think we're pretty narrow here at Capital City. You're going to hear us say that you can't choose your own path to God. Jesus isn't just one way to God – he is "the way, the truth, the life, and no one will go to the Father without going through him." (John 14.6) And we're going to hold that firmly, because this is his church, and that's what he said. And it makes a difference in how we choose to conduct our business. Capital City will not be ruled by its traditions. Capital City will not be ruled by the preferences of a few, or even by the preferences of the many. It's his church, his agenda, his mission, his purposes. Do you agree?

So, #1: We are a Christian Church, a "Church of Christ." #2: We are a "New Testament Church." The New Testament is more than just an inspiring book to us. This is his house, built on the principles and guidelines of the New Testament, our covenant with God. That means we will not teach contrary to this New Testament, and we will not do church in a way that violates the principles of our covenant with God. It is the guidebook for what we preach and teach, and it is the guidebook for how we govern ourselves. If our Bylaws contradict the New Testament, we won't follow the Bylaws, we will follow the Word.

So, #1: We are a Church of Christ, a Christian Church; #2: We are a New Testament church. And, #3: Because we are a New Testament Church, we are a “Restoration Church.” Which means, as much as is possible, we try to follow the patterns of the New Testament. We don’t have a denominational headquarters, because they didn’t have denominations in the New Testament church. You were either a Christian, or you weren’t. And we like it that way. We don’t have District Superintendent, or a Regional Minister, or Bishop, or a Pope somewhere out there who tells us what to do. Because they didn’t do it that way in the New Testament. We are governed by a group of elders that you select – men who are supposed to be sensitive to his leading. Ultimately they answer to no one but God, because that’s pretty much the way they did it in the New Testament church.

We used to have guys and ladies we called “deacons,” because there were “deacons” in the New Testament church. The problem was, our deacons didn’t do deaconing the way they deaconed in the New Testament church. Deaconing isn’t about going to board meetings and voting. It’s about serving. It’s about doing ministry. In fact, that’s what “deacon” means. It means literally a “servant,” a “minister,” someone who does ministry. So we do have deacons here: Steve is our worship minister (our worship deacon), Vern is our Connections Minister (our connections deacon), James is our Growth Minister, Ben and Lisa and Jess are our Next Gen Ministers, Tater is our Communications Minister. They are deacons. Because, in New Testament times deacon just meant “minister,” people who oversaw ministries in the church. We’ve got them.

And, because we are a restoration church, we try to do the “sacraments” the way they did it in the New Testament church. That’s a churchy word, isn’t it -- sacraments? We celebrate the Lord’s Supper every worship service. A lot of churches don’t. And we’re not trying to say that they’ve got it all wrong, that their worship is unacceptable to God. But in the early church, every week the Lord’s Supper brought their focus back to first things. This is all about a God who bled for us, and died for us, and rose for us, and who tells us to feed on him. So, every week we have a very special mystical meal with our God – because that’s the way they did it back then.

And because we are a restoration church, we plunk people, we immerse people, we baptize people, who want to be Jesus followers. We don’t baptize babies, and we don’t sprinkle. Because that’s not the way they did it in the New Testament church. They baptized believers, by immersion – because They baptized them by plunging them under the water – because baptism is a cleansing of the whole person, and baptism is a burial of the whole person, and a rising to a brand new life with God. So we try to do it the way they did it.

So ... we’re Christian Church; a New Testament church; a Restoration Church, and #4: We are a church that works for Christian Unity. That’s huge to us! We want to be a weird, weird place where what binds us together is way bigger than what separates us. We hate the fact that so many churches spend more time and energy fighting each other than our real enemy. We hate the fact that so often Christians inside churches spend more time wrangling with each other than working together to do what God has called us to do. The divisiveness of the church leads to our spiritual impotence.

Did you know that Jesus prayed for our unity? Jesus said, “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony.” (John 17.20-21) That’s crazy! That means, Jesus prayed for you, and he prayed for me. This is his prayer for us. He said, “My prayer for all of them (my prayer for you guys, Jesus said) is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father” Guys, when the spats of Christians tear apart the church, someone is sinning

against God. Jesus said, "I pray that they will be one. Why? So that the world will believe you sent me." Because when we spend our energy fighting each other, our world goes to hell.

So we're a unity movement, but it's not unity at any cost. Here's the fifth and last piece. We believe that "in essentials (in essentials) there must be unity, in non-essentials there must be liberty, and in all things there must be love." You see, a God-honoring unity isn't built by pretending it doesn't matter what you believe or what you do ... let's all just get along! There are some essentials we won't budge on. Real unity comes when people bend their knees together to Jesus. Real unity comes when people surrender together to Jesus. That the core, that's the non-negotiable: we surrender together to Jesus. In the non-essentials, we give each other a break. You don't have to be like me to be a Christian – thank God. You don't have to dress like me, vote like me, think like me to be a Christian. You don't have to like what I like, listen to what I listen to, do what I do to be a Christian. But in the essentials we're surrendered together, to Jesus. In the non-essentials, we're free. And in everything ... in everything ... we love, powerfully, and passionately, and unconditionally.

That's what we want to be. We want to be Christian Church, a Church of Christ. We want to be a New Testament Church, a Restoration Church. And we want to be a church in pursuit of Unity, but never at the expense of God's truth. Now ... Do you like that? Will you help us be that kind of church? He's worth it, guys!

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Closing Thoughts

So, do you remember our "why"? Here it is: Because we believe there really is a God. And we believe Jesus is the Son of God. And we believe he really is the way, the truth, and the life. So we believe you need Jesus, for now, and for forever. And your kids need Jesus, and your grandkids need Jesus, and your friends need Jesus, and our world needs Jesus ... for now, and for forever. That's our why! That was 3 weeks ago.

Two weeks ago: We are on a mission from God. And the first – and most important – part of that mission is to bring people face to face with Jesus. So we have 5 convictions. Here they are:

- #1: All people need Jesus, for now, and for forever.
- #2: God wants every person saved ... every person saved. No exceptions.
- #3: God commands us (he commands all of us) to share Jesus.
- #4: Reaching them is more important than serving you.
- #5: We will do anything short of sin to bring people to Jesus.

That was two weeks ago. Last week was about the second part of our mission from God. After bringing them face to face with Jesus, our job is to drag each other to heaven. And sometimes that's hard, because all of us – all of us – are prone to drift. But we have a strategy here at CapCity to keep you heading towards Jesus. We make Worship a part of who we are. And we Connect with a few other Jesus followers – beyond what happens here on a Sunday morning. We're stronger together than we are apart. And we keep trying to Grow in our understanding of God, and in our intimacy with God. Because you can't stand still in this thing: you're either growing, or you are drifting. And ... and we Serve. We find a way to live for someone way bigger than ourselves, someone worth dying for. And we think this isn't pick and choose. Perseverance takes all 4. And, by the way, my worshipping and connecting and growing and serving isn't just about me and God, it's a big part of how I drag my kids, and my grandkids, and my friends to heaven with me.

That was last week. And then today: what does it mean to be a Christian church? A church of Christ, a New Testament church, a restoration church, a church that tries to bring Jesus followers together so they can see Jesus in us, and a church that is weirdly committed to 100% truth, and 100% grace ... like Jesus was.

This really is a weird place, isn't it? It's crazy to think that UK and UL fans work together, side by side – because we both love Jesus way more. It's crazy to think that republicans baptize democrats here, not to change their political views, but because we know there is something way bigger – infinitely bigger. It's crazy to look around and see Hatfields and McCoys praising the same God together in this room. Different names ... but they're here!

What do you think? Is this kind of church interesting to you? Is it worth a shot? You don't have to buy it all yet, to be part of us. You are welcome to dip your toe in the water with us. You don't have to believe everything we believe, or clean up your act before you are welcome to do life with us here, to explore life with God, for God, God's way here. We are really glad you are here ... most of us anyway. God certainly is!

So, how many of you like what we're trying to do here? By the way, if you like the kind of church we're trying to be, put one of those Capital City decals on the window of your car. But here's the deal, if you put one on your car, you have to try to behave. If you don't intend to behave, go get a decal from one of the other churches in town.

How many of you want to be a part of a church like this?

How many of you want to help us build a church like this?

How many of you want to join a church like this? You don't have to "join" to engage with us. But sometimes joining is important, it's big. It's a commitment to make this your home.