

Good enough?

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship
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Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Introduction

I think I started becoming an Anabaptist when I realized that when I had accepted “Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior,” I had accepted him as not just my savior, but my Lord.

I think I started becoming an Anabaptist when I read, after chancing to find it on the shelf of the Christian bookstore in East Lansing, William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.

I think I really started becoming an Anabaptist when our Reformed Church Sunday School read a book together by a Lutheran pastor and martyr: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*. I knew the tiniest bit of German, and I learned that the title in German was simply *Nachfolge*, or *Discipleship*, but my literal mind broke it down: “folge”: from “following;” “nach” from “after.” “To follow after,” and that the essence of the Christian life was “to follow after” Jesus.

And I remember the challenge of one sentence especially, which was translated as “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Or, as Jesus put it in our recent gospel passage: “Take up your cross, and follow me.”

We have been looking into the book of James together for the past few weeks.

James is tough on us. Has he been reading William Law and Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

He wants the rich to lower themselves. He wants everyone to feel blessed during trials. He wants us to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. He wants us to show no partiality in the church, but to care for the widows and orphans in our midst. He wants us to tame our tongues, which he practically says is impossible. He calls us to wisdom, to remove cravings from our lives, to never judge one another, to be perfectly modest about what we can accomplish, to pray when we are sick and sing when we are cheerful, to even confess our sins to one another.

No big deal.

Faith without works is dead, he says. Show me what you’ve got. Git ‘er done.

Are you being impartial enough? Are you doing enough to ensure that the left out ones are getting what they need? Are you doing it in a way that's actually helpful to them in the long run? Did you say the right things today? Did you refrain from saying the wrong things? Are you being presumptuous?

Every call of Christ, says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, leads to death. Are we dying enough to self?

ARE WE GOOD ENOUGH YET?

Last night, a good friend texted me about a problematic Christian conference: every speaker was white, and all but one was a man. What did I think?

James says, "There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?"

But, this friend asked, some of what they teach could be damaging to people. How does that fit in.

James says, "If anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

ARE WE FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN JUDGING AND NOT JUDGING?

Hear the good news, from Ephesians 2:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

Sit with this for a while.

By grace you have been saved: Paul thinks this bears repeating.

By grace you *have* been saved: there is no doubt of it. By grace *you* have been saved: it's not just for the other people, the better people or the more remorseful and repentant people but you. By grace you have *been* saved: you don't need to worry, your salvation is already accomplished. By grace you have been *saved*: it's true, it's done, it's complete.

God's love comes as a gift, unearned.

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God is a God who is rich in mercy.

God is a God who greatly loves you.

God is a God who loves you when are dead: dead wrong, on the road to death, doing deadly things.

God is a God who makes you alive.

God's love comes as a gift unearned.

God's guarantee is that God will make you into creatures able to be in the presence of the divine

God has raised us up.

God has seated us with himself.

God has promised us that that we will become participants of the divine nature. (See 2 Peter 1:4).

This is the good news: God does not love us because we are good enough, but because God chooses to love us. And God promises to make us good enough, even to participate in some sense, in the divine nature. And somehow that is true even today: we have been raised up and seated with Jesus in the heavenly places.

A woman known by everyone as a sinner interrupts a dinner with Jesus, crying so hard her tears are flowing. Perhaps in her shame, she cannot even face him. Looking down through her tears, she notices his dirty feet, bends down and washes them with her very tears, anoints them with her tears and ointment, dries them with her long hair. Her sins, which were many, were forgiven.

This is our story too.

So, if you are not feeling good enough, repentant enough: you gossip, you participate in an unjust world system which benefits you and harms others; you forget to pray; you forget to forgive; you forget to die to yourself: understand that these are temporary barriers.

So, take up your cross and follow him; yes, yes, yes. But delight in the grace of God.