

There once was a time when, if your Grandfather was a member of a particular church, that is the church that **you** would attend your whole life, and die in. And if a person resigned their membership of one denomination and became a member of another denomination, that was a really big deal (almost unheard of).

For such a thing to happen, there would have to be some kind of major spiritual awakening in a person, where their eyes were opened to some obscene theological error present in their own church, so that they would then feel compelled to move to a different one... Almost unheard of...

And of course, there's a problem with that – it was “the done thing” to remain in a church, even if biblical truth was absent and there was a false gospel being preached...

But things have changed. Today, it's almost the inverse of that. Where especially in bigger cities, but even in a little town like St George, there is a constant migration of folk from one church to the next, to the next.

We have become a generation of consumers (you see). And that's spilled over into the church.

We're looking for the weekly specials:

- *What's the weekly specials on offer at this church?*
- *What services will this church provide for me and my family that we can consume?*

And if it's a tastier product than where I am, then “Yeah, I'm shifting camp.” ... And if in a year's time, another church is offering an even tastier product, I'll shift camp again...

“But, what’s the teaching like?”

“It’s really engaging.”

“But is it true?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Does it matter? It makes me feel good....” ...

Consumerism...

And as we’ve become a generation of consumers, sadly, that has had an horrendous effect on how churches function, and on how church leaders and pastors function... “Church growth” (it seems) has become less about preaching the Gospel to unbelievers (to make new converts), and Church growth, is now predominantly through marketing, and presenting a slick image of how “our church is better than your church”, to try and draw people away from where they’re at, to add momentum to our own spot...

And the first to be drawn, are often the disaffected and the disengaged. So, rather than being the reconciling community of Christ, where brothers and sisters are bound together with the love of Jesus, and reconciled within the fellowship, they take their pain/unforgiveness/discontent, and they shift camp.

And rather than encouraging others in their ministry and rather than stepping up and beginning to serve God in areas where they see a need, some come to the conclusion that their “feeling of discontent” isn’t God calling them to service – “It must be God calling me to somewhere where I can consume what’s already provided...”

And the effect this has on Pastors/leaders in the church, is dreadful. It's something I have to fight against, all the time. The temptation (you see), is to lose the spreading Kingdom of God focus of the church.

Instead of recognising another church as being part of the same vine, the default position often becomes (until they prove otherwise), to view another church as an invasive weed, or a parasitic plant that's going to suck all of the life out of our part of the vine...

Now, of course, we pastors would never tell our congregations that... On the surface, we pastors/church leaders will say, "Oh yes, we're all part of the one church... And we're happy they're being blessed by growth..."

But in my experience, under the surface (if you can get a leader of a church to open up), you will very often discover distrust and enmity – a distrust, born from sadness over the shifting of the flock to another paddock.

And in my experience, the only ones who **don't** have that sadness, are usually the ones who have been quite successfully marketing their churches and growing at the expense of others... And in their minds, "This is all OK":

- We're growing because our church is giving people what they want (better than your church)...
- We're doing things right – you're obviously not...
- The Spirit is alive at our church – obviously not at yours...

An argument arose among the Disciples of Jesus, over which of them was the greatest... Can you believe these guys.... Jesus has just spoken about His sacrificial death for sinners, and the Disciples argue about pride of place...

Now, we obviously can't hide anything from Jesus,, – Jesus knew what they were thinking, and so He took a child, and put him by His side...

Now, what does a little child have to offer?:

- They're a nobody.
- They haven't done anything great.
- They don't have power/influence.
- They're helpless; and
- not at all notable.

And Jesus says:

"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me,

To receive, is to welcome/accept/give hospitality to.... And Jesus is saying, "If you welcome/accept/give hospitality to the most lowly/unimportant, you've done it for Jesus. And if you've welcomed Jesus, you've welcomed the Father...

But more specifically, it's about welcoming in the Name of Jesus. The relationship that we have with Christ, changes the value that we place on other people...

Oh, we're so amazed if:

- a sporting star becomes a Christian; or
- if a movie star becomes a Christian; or
- how great is it if we can get a millionaire to join our church; or

- a doctor/lawyer/CEO...

But the relationship we have with Christ, changes the value that we place on other people... To receive **anyone** in the Name of Jesus – and perhaps “especially” to receive the lowly in the Name of Jesus, is to **minister** in the Name of Jesus – it is the way of Jesus.

And Jesus said: **For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”**

We don't aspire to “greatness” in the way the world views “greatness”.

And did you notice how Jesus said “great” – He didn't say “**greatest**”... In the Kingdom of God, we don't compare ourselves to others. And we don't compare others to others...

On a personal level, as Disciples of Jesus, we do not compare ourselves to other Disciples of Jesus (for the better/worse). ... And nor should we do it on a church level...

he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

Jesus sees things with very different eyes to what we do. I think of the church in Laodicea, who were filled with pride. This is what they said of themselves:

Revelation 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ ... **I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,**

But Jesus said, You've got no idea: You're **wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

They marketed themselves as being “great”, but they were nothing of the kind.

he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

And “Greatness”, isn’t about being prepared to do a stint in a lowly place... *Oh please, spare us the celebrity photo-ops where a greedy rich person flies their private jet into a 3rd world country for a day, and there, they have photos taken of them handing food out to the poor....*

“Greatness”, isn’t about being prepared to do a stint in a lowly place... Greatness is about **being lowly**; and **humble**... **True** greatness, consists of lowly service... Do you know what that tells me? In the eyes of Jesus, the one who cleans up the local church toilet after there’s been an unfortunate accident, is greater than the internationally acclaimed worship leader up on the stage...

Are you with me??? **he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”**

You see, modern church marketing wants to present an image of greatness, and that image of greatness, is used to attract people... But the way of a Disciple of Jesus, is lowly, humble service...

And in the Name of Jesus, we welcome the lowly – those who have nothing to offer... There’s nothing in it for us... ...
Except for greatness in the eyes of Jesus...

Anyway, how did the Disciples respond to what Jesus said? Well, John speaks up. It's like he's looking for an exception.

Well, we saw this bloke the other day, and he was casting out demons. And he **was** doing it in Your Name, but he's not one of us – he's not one of the inner circle. And he kept doing it, and we kept on trying to stop him from doing it...

You can imagine what's going on in John's mind "Surely it's right for us to stop someone from ministering in the Name of Jesus if he's not one of us."...

⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

If I was to use the vine analogy, this man was obviously a follower of Jesus – he was part of the vine, but not the same branch as the Disciples...

You see, John was trying to contain (& restrict), what is the spreading Kingdom of God. And when we get to chapter 13, Jesus really ramps-up the teaching on the Kingdom of God and we're going to hear parables that talk about how the Kingdom of God is like:

- a tiny seed that gets planted and it grows into a spreading tree;
- a tiny bit of yeast that works its way through the whole dough...

And this is how we should view the church today. Wherever the Gospel is being preached, and wherever the Name of Jesus

is being proclaimed and worshipped, these are not our competitors – they are our brothers and sisters in Christ...

And so:

- shame on you John. Don't stop him from casting out demons in the Name of Jesus.
- Shame on pastors and leaders of the church today for when they see other fellowships as the opposition (or as a potential source of members to be attracted to our own show).
- Shame on me, for when I've held other churches with distrust and suspicion.

Jesus said: **the one who is not against you is for you.**
There's a test here, isn't there.

If any person is working **for** the Kingdom, and not **against** the ministry of other Disciples of Jesus, we're part of the one vine. This is an example of the spreading Kingdom of God... Now, of course there's limits here (and we see this exemplified, particularly in Paul's letters) – the test comes when false teachers preach a message which **is** against the Gospel of Jesus.

When we get to 11:21, we're going to hear the inverse of this:
Luke 11:23 (ESV) 23 **Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.**

Anyway, Jesus' point: the Kingdom of God / The church, is much bigger than the 12 disciples. And the Kingdom of God in this town, is much bigger than Bush Disciples...

In the history of the church, there have been times when (for instance) the church of Rome would say, “If you’re not part of us, you’re not part of the church.” And they’re not the only ones. *When we first started BD, prior to that, we used to use the Anglican Church in Dirranbandi (UC), but as soon as we started BD, the Bishop sent word, “We don’t recognise you as a church – you can’t use our building any more...”*

If someone is working for the **Kingdom**, and not **against** the ministry of other Disciples of Jesus, we’re part of the same vine.

So, what does a Kingdom-focused church look like? It’s not about:

- having slick marketing, because in Christ, the lowly are great.
- “church growth”, because we’re told that in end times, people will flock to false teaching; and
- bleeding other fellowships to increase our own... Jesus said **the one who is not against you is for you.**

A Kingdom-focused church:

- sees themselves as the lowly (for we are); and
- we welcome the lowly;

- serves the Lord, humbly; and
- isn’t pretentious or “full of themselves”;

- is a place where the glorious Gospel has not been changed; and
- we welcome the lowly in the Name of Jesus.

Now, at this point, it seemed a good place to finish, but I realised, we need to go just a little bit further, and we're just going to touch on what we're going to cover (more) next week:

In the next scene, the time is coming for Jesus to be crucified. He sets His face to head toward Jerusalem. Now obviously, Jesus had a whole bunch of people following Him, and so, if they needed accommodation in a village overnight, it was good to ring ahead let them know to expect a crowd. And so He sent messengers ahead of him.

Anyway, they were going to be passing through Samaritan territory. Now, the Samaritans hated the Jews and the Jews hated the Samaritans – they had a history. The Samaritans started out as some of the tribes of Israel, and they inter-married with other races (which they were told **not** to do), and the reason they were told not to do it, is because God knew what would happen if they did – they'd take on the idolatrous worship of the gods of those other nations. And that's what they did...

Anyway, the Jews and the Samaritans had a long-running dispute over the proper place for the worship of God. God chose Jerusalem (Jewish territory), but the Samaritans set up an alternative in Samaria...

And we can see that reflected in the animosity here. It was because Jesus was going to Jerusalem that they didn't welcome Him into their town...

Enter James and John.

It's no wonder Jesus gave these two brothers the nickname, "The sons of thunder." because when they heard about this, they were very sure of the power of God – they had faith: "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

NOOOOO!!!!

Jesus rebuked them. I'd love to know what He said...

Keep in mind: Jesus has just said, **the one who is not against you is for you.**

Well, these ones definitely are against us, and they're against You, Jesus.... Surely it's time for the judgment of God....

No. If you're looking for judgment, then you still don't understand the Kingdom of God. There **will come** a time for judgment, but not yet. And the Disciples of Jesus, don't pronounce judgment... The Lord will be our Judge (when He comes in His glory).

As we minister in the Name of Jesus, never lose sight of the fact that we are the lowly. As the lowly, in Christ, we are great. And in the Name of Christ, we will be rejected (as Jesus was rejected). And in the lowliness of rejection, we are great.

Slick church marketing wants to achieve greatness in the eyes of the world and avoid the rejection. But the trouble is, Christ and His Gospel, is **offensive** to the world. The world generally hates the message of Jesus (repentance for the forgiveness of sins). And so, worldly greatness is never our aim. Faithfulness to Jesus is what we are called to.

And as we humbly walk in our Lord, we will be rejected (just as He was rejected). That doesn't mean we retaliate. That doesn't mean we tweak our image to reflect worldly greatness. We move on, proclaiming the Kingdom of God wherever we go.

he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
We know we are nobodies.
There is nothing marvellous about us;
nothing great.

And so Lord,
we repent of pride;
and in humility,
we bow before You,
and proclaim You as Lord.

And in You, there is greatness.

It's all about You.

Lord, may Your Name be proclaimed.
And may we be a welcoming people,
welcoming those who are the least;
(for that is what we are)

- the least perfect;
- the least famous;
- the least of achievers;
- the least of the haves vs the have-nots...

And Lord we pray, for the building of Your Kingdom,
which is far greater than our own little patch.

Help us to encourage those who are for You and for
Your Gospel;
and to guard against those who would corrupt your
Gospel.

And always entrusting judgment to You.

To God be the Glory, forever.
Amen.