

This Is God's Church
Sermon – January 13, 2019

About three years ago, our congregation started a Renewal and Revitalization program. I planned to help the congregation in the first 16 months to focus on our faith, in order to have a better understanding about what and how we believe, and to have a clearer understanding and knowledge of who our Lord Jesus Christ is, whom we serve. We, also, have to discover how we can become much stronger in our Christian faith, knowing that we serve the Only God, who created Heaven and Earth, who revealed Himself in His only Son Jesus Christ, and who is working around and in us through His Holy Spirit. Also, our focus is on Biblical teachings to know who our God is and who we are.

In the second 16 months, which started last April and will continue to the end of this year, we are focusing on the mission required by Jesus Christ: "Make disciple of all the nations" Matthew 28:20.

In my sermons and programs, we try to find out how we can become more attractive Christians in 2019 in our society, how we can love people, and how can we connect people with the gospel of the Bible.

As you remember, we had a Sunday service in our Calvin Hall as a workshop model when around the tables we reviewed our Values, and our revised Mission and Vision Statements.

We learned that the old model for discipleship was: Believe, Belong, Serve.

The newest model emerging is in the reverse order: Serve, Belong, Believe. During this whole year in 2019, we are looking for new opportunities to be created for Calvin church members to serve new church people on community projects in Canada and outside of Canada. This is why we are planning to have a Friendship Visitation in Cuba at the end of February: to learn about our brothers and sisters in Cuba, to be empowered by their faith, and to assure them that we are here for them to help them in their needs as children of God, who are part of the same family.

Also, we will continue to learn how we, one by one and our Calvin family, should welcome new people into our church. However, in order to welcome other people into our church, we have to assess ourselves. We have to assess ourselves to know clearly who we are, what are our strengths and our weaknesses.

Facing with our strengths will make us happier, and we will feel better about ourselves, seeing how God is using us for His glory. Seeing our abilities and capabilities will make us stronger to continue what we are doing so well, and will give us the courage to do more and in a more effective way.

Furthermore, we need to assess ourselves to see our weaknesses from God's perspective. We, as human beings, like to see only our values, and most of the time we are not happy when somebody makes us face our problems. Often, we are ready to protect ourselves and to fight back with that person, explaining to them why we do or say certain things. We are ready to prove that we do not make mistakes, we are not wrong, we are PERFECT. The devil is doing a very good job to hide from us our weaknesses, and to make us stubborn not to accept criticism. Do you remember moments, when you tried to help a person with kindness, telling that you were not happy with their words, behaviours or actions? You did this calmly and lovingly in order to help them to re-think what they said or did. However, you did not get the reaction you were hoping for, but in contrary, his face became red, and he started to raise his voice, and turned against you with anger, yelling at you that **he** is right and **you** are wrong.

I am wondering why do we clean the dust and vacuum our house regularly? Why do we have to do that? Try to imagine how your house would look like if you would stop dusting and vacuuming.

Try to imagine what your heart and your mind would look like if you would not allow God to show you your mistakes anymore and you would not deal with your issues.

Why do we receive regular notifications to bring our car regularly for an oil change and regular maintenance? What would happen in our car if we would avoid oil change and we would not maintain it regularly?

Psychologist says that we all should see a counsellor once a year for at least six sessions to review our lives and our behaviours in order to maintain our private lives.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5 says "Examine yourselves."

David in Psalm 51 prays for cleansing and pardon: "... according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Psalm 51: 1-3, 10

Months ago, I started to think about our Annual Meeting which is coming up on February 24, 2019, and I was wondering how I can help our congregation to evaluate our own lives and our church ministry from God's perspective. I came across a devotional resource written by Heather Card. On *Five Smooth Stones* website, I learned that "Heather's keen desire is to call Christians around the board tables of churches and Christian ministries to integrate biblical theology and practice." She is providing Organizational Evaluation in Canadian Protestant Churches.

<https://fivesmoothstones.ca/>

Starting today and in the next nine Sundays, when I will deliver the sermons, I decided to preach about Revelation chapter 1, 2, and 3 in a series which will help us to evaluate our own private lives, our faith, our actions, and also will help us to evaluate our congregational life. My hope is

that this series will help us to follow and increase our faith and our mission here at Calvin, fulfilling our Renewal and Revitalization Program.

First, I share some basic information you have to know about the book of Revelation.

The book of Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. It is the only apocalyptic book of the Bible, and it is the most difficult book of the Bible. Some theologians say that we lost the key to enter into the mystery and messages of some chapters of the book of Revelation.

The writer is identified as John, the same person who wrote the Gospel of John, who was the closest person to Jesus. In the Gospel, John is talking about himself as the apostle who loved Jesus.

This book was written between 81-96 A.C. John was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, when he received a revelation from God. After the revelation, the Lord Jesus asked John to write down everything he heard, and he saw.

At the very beginning of chapter one, John says: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near” Rev. 1:1-2.

The further he says: “I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and Laodicea.” Rev. 1:9-11

In that time in Asia Minor there already existed Christian congregations created and established by Paul and his co-workers. Amongst those congregations, there were seven significant ones in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Revelation 2-3 contains seven letters. ***The Lord Jesus Christ addressed a separate letter to these seven congregations through John, when He said: “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches.”*** In these letters, our Lord assessed what He saw in these congregations. With that assessment, He helped them to continue what they did well and with His comments the Lord encouraged them to make changes in some special areas.

As in the following Sundays, we will examine these letters, God will help us to assess our lives, our actions, and our congregational life.

We all need to be assessed by God regularly.

God is encouraging us to assess ourselves: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2

In Lamentations 3:40 we read: “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.”

David in Psalm 119:59-60 says: “I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.”

May the Lord help us to stand in His presence with an open and humble heart in order to learn from His assessment day by day. Amen