

The world has lost interest in many interesting things...

According to a recent Pew Foundation survey, people today have lost interest in Religion, but claim Spirituality is the most important aspect of their life! What can this mean? Have people lost interest in Jesus or in the “shenanigans” of Christianity, which often bears no resemblance to Christ’s example?

Jesus did not come to cajole or manipulate people. He did not come to debate or lead by forceful personality. He never tried to gather a crowd (although crowds gathered whenever Jesus taught, healed or spoke). And Jesus never tried to build an organization. He never marketed himself or developed His “brand”. Instead, He exemplified this quality that we all need – Gentleness.

The writer of Hebrews paints a beautiful portrait of a spiritual leader. When describing how the Priest functions, the writer says, "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness." Hebrews 5:2 (NIV)

One of the most underrated and underestimated qualities of a spiritual leader is the quality of gentleness.

There is an obscure passage in the gospel of Matthew that shines the spotlight on the quality of gentleness in the life of Jesus. "He will not fight or shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. Finally he will cause justice to be victorious." Matthew 12:19-20 (NIV)

These words can be traced back to the book Isaiah, but they speak volumes about the ministry of Jesus. They don’t address the “what” of his ministry, but they do speak of the “how.”

Rather, Isaiah portrays a gentle, compassionate, tender-toward-people Messiah. In ancient times reeds were sometimes used to make a musical instrument. But when the reed became soft or cracked, it became worthless and was tossed aside. And when a lamp burned all the way down to the wick, it would smolder and not produce any light and like a cracked reed, it was thrown in the garbage.

Like a cracked reed or a smoldering wick, broken people are often cast aside. Thank God that Jesus doesn’t love us or value us based on our usefulness or potential. Of all the possible descriptions Isaiah could have used to portray the style of Jesus’ ministry, I am intrigued that he singled out the qualities of humility and gentleness. Another appropriate translation for gentleness could be graciousness. I believe this is one of the most endearing qualities a leader can possess. A healthy leader is gracious.

We love to quote Philippians 4 where Paul tells us to...

- rejoice in the Lord always
- don’t be anxious about anything
- present your requests to God
- think on that which is noble and true

Tucked right in the middle of that passage is a verse that doesn’t get the same airtime: Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Philippians 4:5 (NIV)

In my own life I have observed that when I’m emotionally empty and spiritually unhealthy, I am not gentle. I am irritable, impatient, harsh, and biting. It should be true that the longer we know and serve Jesus, we grow in graciousness, not grumpiness. The longer we know Jesus, the more kind and gracious and gentle we should become.

A question for us to ask is, “Do those who know me best respect me most?” I’m not talking about respect for you as a visionary or an organizational leader. Do those who have a front-row seat to your life see a person who is personal, tender, gracious, and gentle?

The world has lost interest with "The Most Interesting Man in the World." After nine years of dispensing wisdom on life and listening to interesting facts about his life, Dos Equis is retiring the bearded bandit who was a cultural phenomenon. We followed him as he jaunted around the world and hung on every word as he casually dispensed advice sitting in a booth.

The Most Interesting Man in the World tripled Dos Equis' business. But what made this man such a cultural phenomenon? I would submit that his quiet confidence and spirited outlook on life drew others to what he was selling. In an age in which we skip commercials to get back to the good part, he caused us to watch his commercials because they were the good part.

Interesting things never demand attention—they captivate it. They don't force you to look; you are compelled to stare. All because there is something more than meets the eye.

We live and move in a culture in which the way of Jesus is increasingly seen as dangerous, not interesting. Some want to force us to believe a certain way. Others are taking steps to limit the ways we can work out the faith with fear and trembling. This resistance is new, but it is not unique.

Throughout the biblical narrative, God uses interesting individuals for the glory of his name and the spreading of his kingdom.

Moses lived a spirited life to such an extent that he lived until the moment he died (Deuteronomy 34:7). Before Tim McGraw told us to live like we were dying, Moses died living and in turn thousands followed. His patience was only exceeded by his faithfulness (Hebrews 11:29). And his determination led thousands to a better place than they were.

Joshua's quiet confidence came from following after a giant in Moses, knowing that the God of Moses was with him and called him (Joshua 1:5). He could be strong and courageous because he was walking with the One who had the ability to make the sun stand still (Joshua 10:13).

The mission is not to look like the culture, but to look like Christ while we live and move in the culture (1 John 2:6). Our goal is less about trying to “win”, and more about being faithful (Hebrews 11:6). Faithfulness does not seek to be counter-cultural, it strives to be loving (1 Corinthians 13:1). This at times can be counter-cultural, but a desire to love always looks for the best in people and strives to redeem the worst. We are known by our love, not our stands on issues. (John 13:35).

We should want to be interesting in the world, so that others may take note that we have been with the One who is worthy of all our interest and praise (Acts 4:13).

Put this on your radar this month.

- When someone brings a problem, don't be defensive
- Listen better
- Be present in a conversation instead of being pre-occupied
- Ask someone about their family
- Allow compassion to interrupt your schedule
- Pray with someone who is hurting

Some interesting things happening in the life of Rome First –

- Confirmation Sunday is Sunday April 10, – you will want to be present as we confirm 13 young people into the Christian Community at Rome First!
- The Sermon Series for April is “A Table for Two or More” – We will overhear the table talk between Christ and his Disciples and hear how we are invited to join the discussion and invite others to the table as well!
- The Vision Pathway Team made their report to the One Board in March and at the next meeting of the One Board, Love God, Love People and Serve the World teams will present some interesting choices for consideration as we continue on our Faith Journey with God!

Hope to see you in a very interesting place to worship, learn and grow in our faith – Rome First. I pray you will share with your friends the interesting opportunities for spiritual growth that are available to all through the ministries of Rome First.

Shalom,
Robert ><>