

What If St. Martin's Disappeared?

Periodically, the National Geographic channel runs a special, "World Without Humans", about what would happen to our cities, in fact, the entire planet if people suddenly disappeared forever. The scientific data presented indicated that the world would be none the worse if humans disappeared; in fact, the world and wildlife would benefit without us.

What would change in the West County community if St. Martin's Church suddenly no longer existed? Instead of the impact on the environment with our disappearance, what would be the impact on the Christian movement if St. Martin's Church suddenly disappeared? Would there be a void if we were no longer around? Would people eventually say, "Remember that church on Clayton Road?" What was its name? Or would they say, "Without St. Martin's Episcopal Church the Christian movement has certainly been hampered – what wonderful examples of discipleship and Christ-like love those people were."

What do you think would happen if this church suddenly disappeared? I do believe that God does not need St. Martin's Episcopal Church for God's plan of salvation to unfold, just as God does not need any particular local church. In a way, that's a relief – we are not totally responsible for God's work. On the other hand, we are responsible for part of it. God could have affected the continued salvation of humankind in all sorts of ways; however, he chose a specific method and that way involves you and me. You see, after his Resurrection, Jesus told his disciples to go out and teach all people what he, Jesus, had taught them and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You and I are the spiritual descendants of those first disciples. We have inherited their gifts and the same Holy Spirit that was given them; and we have been told countless times through the Scriptures and through the teaching tradition of the Church that we are to do what those first disciples did.

How are we doing in that area? Are we fulfilling what was commanded us by Christ or are we waiting for someone else to do it? I don't think Jesus said, "Well, if you get a bit uncomfortable or tired or nervous or if it interferes with your plans, that's okay – I'll get someone else to do it for you." No, he didn't say that at all, in fact, he said quite the opposite. "Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"¹ That's a harsh statement and not a popular one. What Jesus is saying using Semitic hyperbole is that you and I are to do the work of disciples. We should not expect thanks for doing this work, but rather, be thankful that we are privileged to do the work of Christ. He also said, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master."² Do we want to be like Christ? Then we must follow in his footsteps.

Salvation is freely given, but when we accept the gift of salvation and become a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, our responsibility to self and others takes on a new dimension. We live in the grace of salvation but are expected to share that grace with others. We all have a job to do and each and every one of us is expected to do his or her job.

What is the job of the members of the Church? For that answer let's look at what the Book of Common Prayer states.

Q. *What is the mission of the Church?*

A. *The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.*

Q. *How does the Church pursue its mission?*

A. *The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.*

Q. *Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?*

A. *The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.* ³

Have you noticed that the work of the Church is carried out through all its members? It is not just some, but rather, all who are expected to do this work. Actually, the work of the Church is no more than the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant. It is in the doing of this work that you and I are given the opportunity to make Christ known to the world. We do not have to stand on street corners to proclaim the word, but rather, we proclaim the word by how we live, treat other people, and share with others. Don't be afraid to tell someone you are a Christian. Do not be worried about how to answer a question. All you have to say is that you are a person of faith and this is how you have experienced the saving grace of God in your life. Don't be afraid to volunteer in outreach work and when you do so, tell people where you are from. Most of all share the love of Christ.

How you and I do this job makes all the difference about how St. Martin's Church impacts the community of West County and surrounding area. How you and I – not some else, but how you and I do this job of making Christ known is what we will be judged on. Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes it all possible; because without the Spirit guiding us and filling us with courage, we would not be able to do the work of disciples. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. ⁴

Father Al Jewson

1. Luke 17:7-10

2. Matthew 10:24-25