

Column

“Should God entrust a new Christian into your church’s care” is a question which has been making its rounds in Christian circles of late. The question was first posed by Christian writer Mark Eldredge and has at its source our Lord’s Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19:20. Here, Jesus not only tells his followers to go make disciples but to teach them “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded.”

Bringing the wandering ones to Jesus is the urgent task of the Church in every age. Unfortunately, this is where it often ends. The follow-up of which Jesus spoke is missing. Teaching beyond the bare basics has always been needed, but perhaps it is more crucial now than ever.

Why? Well, because we live in what has been called a post-Christian culture. Those coming into the Church today are not unlike those who joined the ranks of believers in the Corinth of Paul’s day. Moral decadence and the challenge of competing worldviews are ever present. The ‘god of this world’ remains on the job day and night.

The question behind the question I posed at the beginning is: Is a local community of believers – the ‘parish church’ – giving those who come in from all sorts of backgrounds the tools they require to meet these challenges? Or, are these fledgling believers being left vulnerable?

What about you? How grounded and prepared are you? For example, if someone at your workplace or gym asked: “Why should I pay attention to your Bible? Hasn’t it been altered over the years? What of those books about the real Jesus that were suppressed by church authorities and left out?” What could you tell such a one?

Or: “Why would I want to be a Christian? Hasn’t Christianity opposed science, sanctioned slavery, fomented wars and fostered hatred and bigotry? Again, what could you tell this person?”

One final example. What if an honest seeker said to you: “Islam, Christianity and the other great religions of the world all teach pretty much the same thing. Why should I sign-on to any of them? Why can I not choose the bits and pieces I like and just be spiritual?” What would be your response?

These and other tough questions are out there in the culture. Again, are followers of Jesus – both new and life-long – being given the tools they require to answer them?

I think most Christian leaders would agree that more needs to be done. Fulfilling the second half of our Lord's Great Commission must be a priority in our day.

What about your local church? What about mine? Is it an incubation centre fostering maturity in understanding, faith and practice, or is just a happy, hang-out place for nice people? Should God entrust anyone, let alone, a young believer into our care?

ALMIGHTY God, our Heavenly Father, who hast committed to thy Holy Church the care and nurture of thy children; Enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn; that, rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.