

Column

“The hope of the world is the local church,” announced the speaker at a recent clergy retreat. At first his words sounded rather ho-hum, but as he continued it became clear what he meant and his argument appeared cogent.

Great crusades such as those conducted by the late Dr. Billy Graham have their place and have manifestly been used of God. Without a doubt, some great Gospel work continues to be carried out via radio, television and now on the web. Even so, most of Gospel work gets done in and around little cells of believers.

These cells might be thought of as outposts and advanced signs of the Kingdom of God. Each cell serves the geographical area or parish around it, and might be thought of – shifting metaphors – as a lighthouse.

Going back to the words of our speaker, if the light of the Gospel is to go out and by it the world be saved, then it is imperative that those making up these cells be aware of their mission and be about their job. If they get distracted, if they major in minors, if they focus solely on internal matters, the work is not going to get done. The world around them will remain in darkness.

But what are some signs that a local church is functioning as it ought. Well, three things come to my mind. The first sign is that this church is functioning as a training ground. Week by week its members are being equipped with the knowledge and skills required to bear effective witness to the crucified and risen Christ.

A second sign is that its members are excited about their task. They have a clear sense they are in the service of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s religious beliefs may have fallen short of scriptural orthodoxy, yet, he was certainly right when he said:

“Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic, be enthusiastic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

The final sign that a Church is doing its part for the salvation of the world is prayer. Its members are very aware of their inability to do the work with which they are charged under their own steam. So, they stay close to God and spend time in the closet of prayer.

Perhaps you can add to my list of signs. Regardless, let us each ask ourselves: Is *my* church doing its part in bringing the world under the lordship of Christ? Which best describes my church: a lighthouse or a comfort station?

O GOD, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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