

# Commentary: Show me the sermon

August 30, 2017

"I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day."

It's the opening line from a poem I've used from time to time. Now is a good time to use it.

The moral outrage from Christians on both ends of the theological spectrum and in between made me think of that line. Pastors are speaking up with loud voices condemning racism and division.

And yet the greatest divisions I see are in their own churches. It's hard to listen to their words when most congregations in America remain segregated and separated by race. The voices of prominent pastors are drowned out by inaction when it comes to their own churches.

Martin Luther King Jr. had it right when he said that 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.

Excuses are many but feeble. Homogeneous churches based on race are nothing more than a form of ecclesiastical apartheid.

Standing next to a person of a different color protesting Nazis or swapping pulpits once a year with a pastor of a different color isn't multicultural.

The church I attend is unique, I admit. But it's also possible. The Crossing Baptist Church in Mesquite, Texas, is comprised equally of one-third black (African and African-American), one-third brown (Latinos from all over), and white (I'm from Missouri originally).

So it's hard to listen to the words of pastors from non-diverse

congregations celebrate diversity. And I'm not just speaking to white pastors and churches.

We've learned a few lessons about multiculturalism at The Crossing:

1. Be who you are. We don't force it or try to be people we're not. Instead, we love who each person is as God created him or her. We don't see our church as a political or social statement. We're just followers of Jesus who have that as our most important unifier.
2. Incorporate, don't separate. We've learned to include the best of each person and culture. A person's color or background are not even noticed. When we elected a pastor search team last year, it was a wide-open vote of the church. The seven-member team was two Latinos, two African/African-American and three Anglos. Incorporation also includes your worship style.
3. I suspect the main reason churches are monolithic is a refusal to change, especially their worship style, a major definer of modern churches. Are white churches willing to give up their organ for drums? Are African-American churches willing to incorporate elements of traditionally white or Latino worship?
4. Be missional. Growing into a multicultural congregation was a natural result of the mission and ministry emphases at The Crossing. Ministries like English as a Second Language, U.S. citizenship classes and mission trips to Spanish-speaking South Texas all created a welcoming environment for everyone. We've also discovered that many of those ESL students prefer attending our English language services so they can learn quicker.
5. It's hard not to notice the variety in our church. We recognize that and we celebrate the fact that we are diverse and multicultural. Celebrating our diversity has helped us embrace it and work to keep it. It's embedded in our DNA.

One of the hardest things about attending a multicultural church is

attending other churches. It's striking to walk into a church sanctuary and see a sea of faces all the same color. It's odd - we don't notice our variety now as much as we notice the lack of it in other places.

In a climate of destroying statues, the greatest monument to Jesus is for churches and pastors to intentionally integrate their congregations - every Sunday. Not just once a year.

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