

Every once in a while, I like to look at old emails and/or books that include church bloopers or church signs with very creative messages. Here are a few I encountered this past week.

On an image like that of a ketchup bottle... “Catch up with Jesus... lettuce praise and relish him... cuz he loves me from my head to-ma-toes.”

Adam and Eve, the first people to not read the Apple terms and conditions

With all this rain, we need an ark. Fear not! (wait for it...) We Noah guy!

Forgive your enemies- it messes with their heads.

Forbidden fruit causes many jams!

The fact that there is a highway to hell and stairway to heaven says a lot about anticipated traffic numbers.

Be the kind of person your pet thinks you are.

Tweet others as you would like to be tweeted.

Honk if you love Jesus. Text while driving if you want to meet Him.

Alright, that is enough fun for today. We are not supposed to be laughing in church 😊 Just kidding, it is good to laugh... good to have a sense of humor.

As the body, the church- ONE HOLY CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC- we must be fed, nourished, and given new life over and over again by the Holy One who is the only one able to provide what is needed. And having been fed and given new life over and over again, we are to know that we, as the church, are transformed... and we, as the church, are moved- moved from a receiving people to an active people. As the body, with the head as the Holy One, there is a demand that we at least get up and start moving, set out on the way that leaves our sinfulness behind and moves toward his holiness. Jesus tells those he heals and forgives, “Go! And sin no more!” “Get up! Take your mat and walk.” “As you have seen this good work done in me, go now, and do likewise.”

This transformation and transition from receiving to serving is at the heart of what it means when we say the church is “apostolic.” The direct translation of “apostolic” means “in line with the apostles.” This meaning has led the church in various seasons to certain

translations. Originally, many churches interpreted “apostolic” to mean being connected by historical succession with the original apostles and therefore, to speak and act with the same authority. The Presbyterian- Reformed traditions interpreted “apostolic” to be synonymous with “biblical”- one holy catholic church that is governed by biblical authority. The books and letters of the bible are believed to be written and put together only by those who were believed to be prophets and apostles- directly empowered and inspired by God. I don’t disagree with these translations of “apostolic”, they are what they are as we might like to say. However, these translations are only half the story. You see, the New Testament Greek word for “apostle” means “one who is sent out.” As we read throughout the New Testament, Christians enter into the company of God’s people by baptism, hear the Word of God preached, receive new life and strength as they break bread together, and disciple themselves in order to be sent back into the world as servants or “ambassadors” of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). After all, the Christ who is proclaimed in word and sacrament was the original “apostle”- one sent by God into the world not to be served but to serve and give his life for many (Mark 10:45). Jesus has said, “Come unto me,” and he has also said, “Go!” “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (John 20:21)

An “apostolic” people of God, an “apostolic” church, then not only listen to sermons and receive the sacraments when they come together among themselves (like the first few translations suggest); they (we) are a people, a body, who are called out in order to be sent out, loved and saved by God in order to serve God and therefore, also the world God loves, serves, and wills to save. An “apostolic” people of God, an “apostolic” church, then not only cares for itself and tends to the spiritual needs of its own members (like the first few translations suggest); they (we) are a people, a body, a church commissioned with a mission to fulfill in and for the world.

Who then among us are apostles? Anyone have a good answer? Anyone want to volunteer? Oh, come on now! We all are. All of us. God wants us all. God picks us all and God only takes first picks in the draft. According to Exodus 19:6, all God’s people were called to be “priests” or mediators who bring God to people and people to God. Nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that only a few are called to be priests or servants of God to minister to other people. 1 Peter 2:9 declares, **“you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** Some refer to the church as Luther called it, “a priesthood of all believers.” This means that every Christian is called to be a priest to every other person. What this means for me and for you then, is the “apostolic” task is given not just to a few people with a special calling but to the whole Christian community and every one of its members. Only a few may be called to stand

behind a pulpit or baptismal font or communion table. But the task and privilege of the ministry of reconciliation, bringing God to people and people to God, is given to all.

I must confess that I wonder at times if it is this truth within the Christian faith and calling, this task, this imperative from Jesus, that can be the tipping point for some people and their conditional relationship with God. Christianity sounds amazing, with all the love and grace and forgiveness and belonging, but then it asks us to embody love, grace, forgiveness, and belonging with others. It is almost as though we mumble at times, “Yeah, it is cool that Jesus was all about that, but do I really need to be all about that too?”

What are we willing to endure with and for Christ? Do we have the heart, the courage, to relentlessly pursue the task and mission we have been sent to fulfill?

Yes, we can! We can because God lives in us and God can! Rachel Held Evans writes, “We are all commissioned. All are called. All belong to the holy order of God’s beloved. The hands (look at your hands) that pass the peace can pass a meal to the man on the street. The hands that cup together to receive Christ in the bread will extend to receive Christ in the immigrant, the refugee, the lonely, or the sick. Hands plant, and uproot, and cook, and caress. They repair, and rewire, and change diapers, and dress wounds. Hands tickle giggly children and wipe away tears. Hands sanctify all sorts of ordinary things and make them holy.” (Searching for Sunday, 98)

And just in case you might be thinking, “but I can’t do something as well as someone else,” we all need to understand that being “apostolic” isn’t about winning, it isn’t a competition- it is about serving. It is about being an asset to God and the church and not a liability. As Barbara Brown Taylor, priest and author, shares about her understanding of the role of a priest, “it is about knowing things are not as they should be and yet caring for them the way they are.” To which Held Evans comments, “Such a purpose calls us far beyond our natural postures. It means surrendering all cynicism and pride to take up the basin and towel, as Jesus did when he washed the disciples’ feet.

2 Timothy 1:1-14: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame and *rekindle* (NRSV) the gift of God, keep it ablaze (The Message), which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice or being timid, but the spirit of power, love and self-discipline. *God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible* (The Message). So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or, of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And for (of) this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed and trusted, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

Let all God's people say. **Amen.**