

Seven Points Of Church Life

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Date: 24 December 1985

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Amen. Amen. Please kneel.

Let us begin our intercessions with a prayer of thankfulness.

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for your loving care, which surrounds us on every side.

We thank you for setting us tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

[1 : 23] We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. We thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, for the truth of his word, for the example of his life, and above all for the giving of his life for us, in order that we, in following him, might receive your grace and the gift of eternal life.

Thank you, Lord, for your great goodness to us. Let us pause now for a moment of silence, when we can each say thank you to God for the particular way in which he has blessed us as individuals.

O Lord, in your mercy, here are our prayers.

Let us pray now for all the nations and peoples of this world. O Lord, who encompasses the whole earth with your most merciful favor, and wills that none of your children should perish.

We pray today for all who are working for peace between nations, for those who are working for purer and juster laws, remembering especially the leaders in South Africa.

[2 : 56] We pray for those who are molding public opinion in our time. And we bring to you, Lord, especially the leaders of Iran, with their call for bloodshed.

We pray that these leaders of the Muslim world would see the light of your grace and reach out in love rather than hatred, and in forgiveness rather than retaliation.

And as we think of the peoples of this world, we remember before you the homeless, the destitute, the sick, the aged, and all who have none to care for them.

Heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this for the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, who for our sake became poor.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for our city and our parish. O Lord, our Creator, by your holy prophet you taught your ancient people to seek the welfare of the cities in which they lived.

[4 : 18] We command our city of Vancouver to your care, that it might be kept free from social strife and decay. Give us strength of purpose and concern for others, that we may create here a community of justice and peace, where your will may be done.

We are thankful, O Lord, for this parish of St. John's, for our freedom to come to this place to worship, for the fellowship we experience here, for the time we had together at Parksville in learning, in worshiping, and in having fun together.

God, open our hearts to your word, and your word to our hearts, we ask in Christ's name.

I've arrived at a very important place, in my life, I expect, and that is the difficulty. It lasts Sunday that I'll be here for the next six months.

And I'm having a great deal of difficulty because I don't know how you are going to get along without me. And in reviewing the past seven years, I am grateful to say I'm even more impressed by how you have been able to get along with me.

[6 : 07] And I want to tell you that it was a peculiar set of circumstances by which we came here in the first place.

If you had really gone to the dregs and pulled somebody up out of the ditch to be the rector of the parish, that's what I felt sort of happen in lots of ways.

And it's been a wonderful place for us. And the problem of going away for six months is that there is a real sense in which if I had strength and energy, there's no place I'd rather be than here.

But maybe that'll change. But anyway, it's been a very unusual place. In the course of the past seven years, I've had a number of unusual experiences.

I never before in my life was out to go and let the house that was on the country for. I, for the only time in my life, put on even clothes and been to a debutant ball in the facility of my duty.

[7 : 22] And been on the honorary crew of a boat in the Vancouver Yacht Club sail path in the spring. Those have been great dignity and very unusual experiences.

In our first Parksville weekend, somebody whom I had known most of my Christian life, he came to be our speaker and said it was a remarkable conference because he had never been at a conference where there was an open bar from the beginning to the end.

But that wasn't in any way. And I've learned all sorts of wonderful things about church life that I never knew before since I have come here and I've undergone major illness since I've been here.

and say that there are very powerful personalities in this congregation.

One day, that man reaches again on \$60, \$50 off my pledge if he's trying to have to. With the court of sort of gentle persuasion and another occasion and if he's saying a certain hymn, somebody who draws a congregation all together.

[8 : 56] So that there's a certain amount of power politics goes on in the life of this happy congregation. And I wish I could share it all with you, but it's a bit close to the bone sometimes.

And so we will have to wait to heaven to be able to really laugh. But it's been a quite amazing kind of experience.

And I think that it's been a wonderful experience for Fran and I who have been here these seven years and God's blessing in ways that we've never anticipated and never known it before among you all.

And I think it's a very exciting place to be. We had a visiting professor here who came one day and spent a week here with us and said he thought this was the most exciting parish in the whole of Canada.

And I think he said that respectfully. And I, you know, I mean, people do make kind of general statements like that, but it was a great encouragement to hear that.

[10 : 07] So I feel a little bit about this sabbatical like you feel about Christmas two weeks before that it's a calm and pain to have to go through with us and then it turns out to be a delightful time after all.

And the process of extricating ourselves in the parish and getting away is very painful to me. But I hope that we will come home and rejoice in you and ready to say we're ready to get to start again.

It's a lot. I'm going to go to that. This morning I want to share with you seven points about church life and how it should go so you will understand it perfectly while I'm away.

And these seven points are derived from that passage of scripture which is which is which has been read for us as the gospel this morning and it's the end of the second chapter of Luke on page 56.

And I want you to see this as a kind of paradigm, I think, of spiritual life because it's the only glimpse we have of Christ between the time of his birth and the time of his public ministry and there's a lot to learn about what church is all about.

[11 : 39] And the first thing that it says and I make this point number one is parents. Because all of us are born into a family and we have our children baptized and the most significant religious part of our lives is our relationship to our parents and what they do for us in those first years.

And so parents' teaching becomes very important. You will be interested to know that when you bring your children to be baptized they are baptized into Jesus Christ.

but in a sense baptism is often futile because they are not then encouraged to live in relationship to Jesus Christ but have to live in relationship only to their parents and they come to think exactly like their parents do and very often that isn't especially helpful.

And so it is always the function of parents to point beyond themselves to another reality. And so the function of the parents in this story is to have taken Jesus Christ every year up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover to point to a reality beyond themselves.

I think a lot of the psychological problems of our day a lot of the despair is that people don't know any reality beyond their parents and they hate them.

[13 : 15] now I don't say that in a negative way at all even though it's a very negative statement but it seems to me that most counselors spend most of their time trying to sort people's relationship to their parents out because of the damage that was done by parents who didn't have the wit to point beyond themselves and allowed the children to grow up thinking that they were what life was all about.

And so that's the first thing that parents have that responsibility of pointing children beyond themselves. The second thing is the Passover and the Passover was for the people of God in the Old Testament really as Easter is for us in the New Testament Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

We get involved in the remembrance of something and all sorts of children have built in to their lives memories of happy Christmases so that they expect Christmases to go on being happy for the rest of their lives.

It's part of this business of pointing beyond ourselves but in our society we need those kind of points at which we celebrate.

those kinds of points around which we organize and structure our lives important occasions in the history of God dealing with us and so we preserve Christmas and Easter and Saint's Days and Pentecost and things like that to mark the sort of focus of our life to get beyond ourselves and become aware of another kind of reality and you know that over the 24 hours around Christmas here there was a thousand people attended this church sat in those few I think because not because they're devout members of the church necessarily all of them but because they recognize the need for some transcendent reality outside of themselves and though they but dimly grasp what it is I think they acknowledge the necessity of it being there and I think we have to recognize that that's part of the world in which we live so that there is this we have we have sabbaths are sort of marked like that it's a tremendous loss to a person to a family not to have a Sunday in the week

[15 : 53] I don't necessarily I think of the culture as a society we lose a lot we stop observing the Lord's day people can object to it because not everybody's Christian and so on whether they are Christians or not part of the nature of what it is to be a human being is that we need that kind of interval in our lives to stop and pay attention to the reality we just see on ourselves and that's what Jesus parents did for him in annually taking him out if you look at the text again you'll see what it says there they went up according to custom this business of custom is how we build customs or patterns into our life I have had to go to church every Sunday for the past 30 years without interruption and I know a lot of people have the wonderful luxury of lying in bed on Sunday morning and wondering whether they will or not and very often I guess they decide not to but somehow we've got to build into our lives some kind of custom some pattern of life which carries up and the loveliness

I think of prayer book worship for me is that it carries me when I can't I haven't got the heart to say dearly beloved brethren to anybody but I can pick up a book and read it and the reality of it is there the reality of the confession is there and that only is built into our lives by custom and our lives can be enormously enriched by the right kind of custom so you see Jesus had parents who directed him beyond himself they had the festival which celebrated a reality of God in history beyond the narrow little confines of history in which any one of us lives his or her life then they developed customs and this was something that they did every year the next thing that comes along is crisis and this happened to Jesus when he was 12 years old

I think it happened to me more when I was about 18 years old and I think it's something that needs to happen a crisis in our lives whereby we begin to question the values of our parents and the values of our home and the values of our culture and the values of our society there's a happy young lady that comes to this congregation with three earrings in one ear and two in the other and a funky haircut if ever I saw one and she is a very happy person who I am sure is right in the middle of this very important crisis in her life she is becoming a person on her own in what I think is and I think will prove to be a very healthy way but it's the necessity of this crisis taking place and the crisis took place when Jesus chose to stay behind when his parents went home and the description of the parents is so characteristic of all parents when they arrive at that terrible moment in their lives when they find that their children are discovering a reality to which they must inevitably take second place very hard indeed for parents to do that because of our arrogance

I think mostly it says of Joseph and Mary that they were ignorant about where he was they made false suppositions about where he might be they went looking for him in the wrong place and his behavior seriously interrupted their lives and that's what happened to parents and it needed to happen to parents as it needs to happen to all parents and parents who are so much in control that they won't let that happen to them because of the cost it is to them do terrible damage to their children they went on in their happy supposition they went on in their ignorance they went on supposing they could find him and looking in the wrong place and they allowed their life to be seriously interrupted by what Jesus did in staying behind it was his way of beginning to take hold of his own life now unfortunately and this is one of the realities of our world it's very difficult for us to take hold of our own lives we so often live them totally confined by parents and customs and that kind of expectation that is laid on us so that we try and live with it and most people have gone to church most of their lives not because they wanted to go but because they were expected to go and that they were going to please somebody else and that's a terrible reason to go to church you've got to get beyond that at a sometime in your life where you go there because you need to be there it's a terrible job having to lead the worship of a congregation a church full of people who are there for the benefit of somebody else and I must say that that's one of the dramas of each Christmas services that's been gone you can see practically the marks of the ropes on these people by which they were dragged to church and their enthusiasm for taking part in the service is somewhat diminished but at some point you have to do it for yourself and Jesus chose to do that and interrupted the pattern of his parents expectations very seriously and to their very great blessing as well as his own then they do find him and what is he doing but he's sitting among the doctors both hearing them and asking them questions

I went to Carisdale Public School to talk just before Christmas to a group of people about Christmas gifts so I started talking to them about Christmas gifts and after I had given them a wonderful explanation of what it was all about as I thought I said are there any questions and there were and they came thick and fast for the next for the rest of the time I was there for the 45 minutes I was there and what they wanted to know was why good people went to heaven and bad people went to hell and who had the right to decide which where to go one or the other this is grade six and it's Christmas for a minute but what they wanted to talk about was hell and then they wanted to find out if you went to hell could you get to heaven and if you went to heaven could you get to hell and if you went to either place was there a life beyond that to which you could ultimately go to get away from both of them and but these were very serious questions and

[23 : 48] I had to explain the lake of burning fire why could any god who was interested in Christmas gifts be involved in a lake of burning fire and why was there a revolt of the angels in heaven so that they turned against God and tried to set up another kingdom and those were really quite interesting questions and I found it very very stimulating to spend some time among these grade 6 students and the interesting thing to me was I began to wonder if one of the marks of adulthood as we put it in quotation marks as we think of it in our society is when you stop asking questions because you're smart enough to know that nobody has the answers anyway so why bother and I just hope that those kids will never stop asking those questions and I just you know

I think that in our educational system now there's a whole lot of very important questions that you're not allowed to ask simply because they come too close to what life is all about and we're not allowed to have answers to those questions in the public realm and private schools have had to move away from very often the commitment to an understanding of man and his world which they were started with but it's an embarrassment to them now and they just avoid those kinds of questions and we feed our children into that sometimes we try and create Christian schools where Christian answers will be given and I'm not sure that that's always helpful but it might be a necessary antidote to the condition of education in our society it's the necessity

I think of asking those questions that belongs to us and that we must involve ourselves in and the whole function of trying to get people into Bible studies into prayer and discussion groups with one another is to create a situation in which you are given permission to ask questions the impact of our mission in November was that suddenly people found at least for a few days a context in which they could ask questions questions that linger in the back of our minds and sometimes weigh heavily on our hearts because we don't understand heaven we don't understand hell we don't understand God and we don't understand who we are there's no place where we can ask the questions questions and nobody makes themselves responsible to answering those questions well Jesus did and I think that it's very important that the church should be a place where you can ask all the questions you want to ask and demand significant and meaningful answers the next point in this sort of thing we have the parents influence the influence of custom the influence of festivals we have the crisis which takes place as you have to go and find your own answers to questions you have to go and do that and break away from the expectations and dependency of your parents upon you and you upon them and then comes that lovely line in the story when Jesus turns to his parents and says should I not be above my father's business and that's such a terribly that really is the fundamental statement about your life and about mine and that is that you and I must come to the place where we know the father and we go about his business for us at the heart of the confession of faith is the recognition of God as our father

God who as father assumes responsibility for us and God is our father to whom we give our obedience and our love and our faith faith and we live in obedience to the father and that's that's that is what the freedom is I'm sure is the freedom to be obedient and to know our heavenly father father and to live in that in that obedience when Paul is describing what the impact of faith has on the person who puts their faith and trust in Jesus Christ is that they say Abba father I am I discover that I am living in a world which was created by my heavenly father I am living in a world which is sustained by my heavenly father

I am living a life which will only find meaning in relationship to my heavenly father I am fulfilling by my life a purpose which I can only know by the guidance and direction of my heavenly father that's why it says wish ye not that I be about my father's business will we give one another permission to be obedient to the father whom we have come to know through Jesus Christ then the story ends with a little lesson that we all like where it says of Jesus he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them while God is our heavenly father the need of submission to the home and family to which we belong is part of our responsibility to that heavenly father but it's not a submission that's imposed upon us it's got to be a submission which is chosen by us it's the submission a wife makes to her husband and a husband makes to his wife and children make to their parents and slaves make to their masters and workers make to their bosses it's the thing that we do in obedience to the father this pattern of submission in relationship to one another out of reverence for Christ that's what we're to do that's how we are to live our life in voluntary submission to one another out of reverence for Jesus

[31 : 07] Christ and the seventh thing and I hope that you can review all seven of them quickly in your mind when I'm finished the seventh thing is the line that the story ends with which says and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man just like a tree never stopped growing so you and I are never meant to stop growing I honestly believe when I got married that I then had finished growing that life was really just going on from there terrible shock to find that most of my growing hadn't even begun at that state and in emotional terms and in my moral stature and in my relationships to people and in my relationship to God there's a tremendous amount of growth demanded of me and the whole of my life is a very short time for the kind of growth that I think is needed in our lives and how much time we waste by thinking that somehow we've arrived somehow it's just a matter of piling it all up and enjoying it it is not that at all it's a matter of growing in wisdom in stature and in favor with God and man and that continues through the whole of your earthly life and what a blessing it is when

God comes along and clobbers you that you start growing again and God must do that because we are such self satisfied creatures well those are the things that I want to leave you with the awareness that God has this pattern for our lives and it has to do with the family from which we come the family to which we belong the festivals we observe the customs we develop the crises that are precipitated in our lives so your willingness to ask questions profound questions a Bible study I would suggest for you take a highlighter pen and a Bible that you're not afraid to mark up and you should all have one and go through the epistles of the Romans and highlight every question mark in that epistle then you will find it enriching to go further and write all those questions out and then you will find it helpful to try and answer all those questions and then will the epistles of the

Romans ever make sense to you when you go back to read it because of the profundity of the questions that are asked you will see that your study schedule for the rest of your life is laid out for you in that so those are the things that I want to make you aware of and those are the things that I hope will sustain and strengthen you in your spiritual lives and the things that I want to re-examine in my life period that lies ahead for me amen to the top in and Thank you.