

October 2009 A Counter-Cultural Move

I remember reading about a student who approached Will Willimon, former Dean of Duke Chapel, after hearing him preach on Sunday morning. The young man said, "I've never heard anything like that before." Willimon, in his characteristic acerbic manner responded, "Of course you haven't. You're at an elite private university in America. You've got to get up on Sunday morning and go to a church to hear something like this."

Church ought to be counter-cultural, especially when the culture is in moral, theological, and intellectual decline. More specifically the *worship* of church people ought to be counter-cultural. The corporate worship of the people of God ought to be a dramatic presentation of the *kingdom of God* in the setting of the *kingdoms of this world*. The kingdoms of this world are individualistic rather than communal. Everyone does his own thing in the kingdoms of this world. In the kingdom of God community takes precedence. We don't just do what feels right to us or what's in our personal best interest. We do what's best for the community, for the "common good" as Dr. Luke put it in his history of the early church.

We have begun to read the Psalms together, out loud as a community on Sunday morning. I don't know if you know it, but we are engaged in a radical, revolutionary activity when we do this. We are reading the Psalms as a worshipping community we are throwing stones at the devil and knocking down the walls to the kingdoms of this world. We are taking the Word of God and reading it as a family. We are affirming this is an authoritative text given to us by God. We are declaring it to the world, not just reading it silently and privately to ourselves. We are raising our voices in praise to God, lamentation to God, confession to God, thanksgiving to God, and reciting the ancient hymns of the people of God for thousands of years. This is old, good news. We're not engaged in some fad, the latest thing that sweeps the country like some ipod or beanie baby.

Another factor in our counter-cultural move on Sunday morning is the multi-generational nature of our radicalism. We live in a world that segregates the ages. Children go to this place, adults to another, and we push the seniors far away so we don't have to be reminded of the apocalypse of aging. Therefore, our churches in America tend to be places of great segregation, not only from a racial perspective, but also from an age perspective. They have sold out to the culture that idolizes youth, despises old age, and segregates itself to avoid the inevitable conflicts associated with multi-generational communities.

At Yates Baptist Church there is a radical, counter-cultural, subversive activity taking place. A little 5 year old girl is opening the same book as an 85 year old grandfather, and reading the same words aloud. A fidgeting teenager lays aside his cell phone, a college student reaches for an ancient book, an Asian immigrant opens a text foreign to her, an IT specialist touches paper and turns to Psalm 84. We are doing something probably not done anywhere else in Durham or North Carolina, or perhaps in America in our current culture. We are reading, aloud, together an ancient book in a multi-generational setting. Take that culture!