

Parable of the Church that Died

"The Christian church is the one institution in the world that exists for the benefit of non-members." William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury

Research is telling us that church attendance in Nova Scotia is at an all-time low. There are even reports of churches and other faith communities closing their doors. Perhaps this parable will give us some insight into why this is happening.

Once there was a neighbour who owned a beautiful home and a cottage at the lake. Two cars and a shiny boat filled his garage. His family was healthy. His custom – when he was in town, when the fish were not biting, when he was not on the beach or at the lake, when he had no guests, and when there was nothing else to do – was to go to church.

When he went, he dwelt on the church's faults and failures – the youth attendance was low, the choir scanty, the offerings poor, the preacher discouraged. "They ought to do better," he said, "what do they think religion is all about anyway?"

The years flew by and according to the way of the world, this man's children grew up. They did not go to church. The reason, their father said, was that the people at the church had not kindled his children's interest in religion.

The man's health failed. One day he noticed that those people from the church no longer came by. He was in the hospital and they did not visit him. And lo, he was very angry. He demanded, "Where is the church?" Then he was informed how that church went out of business several years ago! "Oh, he cried, I want my church to be there for our family weddings, funerals, baptisms and other special occasions. They should never have let it die!"

Christian churches and other faith communities are receiving a lot of bad press these days. And, sad to say, some of it is deserved. Our greatest problem is caused by the fact that we have departed from the life and teaching of our Founder. When rightly understood, people do not reject the pure teachings of the gospel of Christ, but rather its perversions and distortions.

But, in spite of its flawed human side, it must also be said that the church has brought more blessings to the world than any other organization. For example, churches are often among the first responders to victims of natural disasters. Try to imagine the result if all churches were abolished from the earth. What an enormous gap there would be – a gap which no other institution, whether educational, social or political could possibly fill.

I want to aspire to the desire of Henry Porter, *“Long ago I decided that I wanted to invest my life, my time, talent and treasure in something that will stand long after I am gone. And the only place to which I am sure, is the church.”*