

Sunday, June-02-13

I had an interesting experience at church today.

Ashley and I were running a little late to Sacrament meeting, which for us that means showing up 10-5 minutes EARLY vs our normal time of showing up at least 15 minutes early. On walking into the church we were greeted by many "fine" members of the Kenora Branch (many of whom were priesthood holders) all of which were chatting happily and carefree in the hallways and in the sacrament room itself. After getting past the "loiters" in the halls and making my way into the sacrament room itself I had a strong impression and desire to "find Jesus". Why you might ask? It is funny going from Branch to Branch or Ward to Ward and seeing how the members can change the atmosphere of the exact same gospel so much. You can have anything from devote members who truly seek after Christ to wards full of members who "draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me" to this branch that can only be described as "losing sight of Jesus all together". What do I mean by that? I mean a mentality that would rather support an idea of what they think the "Kenora Branch" is vs what the "Church of Jesus Christ" is. A mentality that would rather support 20, 30, or maybe even 40 years of incorrect doctrine/procedure/traditions based solely off of the fact that "that's what has always been done in Kenora" vs trying to do what Jesus wants and has asked us to do in His church. A mentality that would rather spend most of its pulpit time talking about families, money, health issues, Kenora traditions, Scouts, fish fries, etc vs spending its pulpit time focused on faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, Duty to God, etc. So I find that I spend most of my time in the Kenora Branch surrounded by "good people", people who are honest, hardworking, decent folk but who are not "Christian" let alone members of Jesus Christ's church. I feel like I am back on the streets of Philly, knocking into the doors of hardworking decent folk who would tell me "look, I am clean, I don't break the law, I don't cheat on my wife, I pay my bills, I try to be an honest and upright man, but I just can't get into Jesus- I am sorry." I suppose that since there are people who "draw near with lips but their hearts are far from Me" there would by the same right be people who "draw near to me with their hands and feet but their hearts are far from me." I suppose this is exactly what Jesus himself was talking about when he said "many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." So needless to say having the prompting to "look for Jesus" didn't really come as any surprise when entering the church, I find myself having to do so often. The pictures in this building are horrible, with more room on the walls given to billboards, chief scout awards, missionary plaques, etc than clearly is given to Jesus. There really isn't any good "Jesus Pictures" and only a couple that even have him in them at all, a problem that really needs to be addressed. So if you can't find him on the walls where do you find him? Oh that's right, the sacrament table OBVIOUSLY! So as I sit down my eyes are drawn over to the sacrament table. Empty. There is nothing on the table, no one around it, no one even attempting to set it up; as priesthood holders chat in the halls gaily. (Sacrament meeting itself is starting in less than 5 minutes.) So I stand back up and make my way over to the table, getting everything in place and setting up the sacrament. I put the cloth down, symbolizing the cloth that was laid in the tomb with Jesus when he was buried, then I took two trays, both for the

bread and placed them on the cloth, symbolizing his body that he freely gave, and then grabbed the two trays for the water, which symbolize His blood that was spilt for us and headed for the kitchen to place the plastic cups in them and fill them with water. (The purest liquid that we currently have, in the past grape juice straight from the vine was used as it was the purest substance around) When I was finished I brought the trays out and placed them beside the empty bread trays; at this point President Clark shows up and asks me "is anyone setting up the sacrament?" I reply that no one was and that I was doing so, he thanked me and sat down. I then realized that we had no bread. I looked in the kitchen and all that I could find was frozen bread. I talk to President Clark, church is now starting, who tells me that is all we have and have to make do and put it in the microwave. I then head back into the kitchen and am stopped in the hallway by a priesthood holder who has been basically watching me the whole time doing nothing to help- "hey Micah, can you get the bread for the sacrament?", "um yeah, and actually I got the whole sacrament ready, not just the bread...", "that's great..."... So I go into the kitchen and look through the bread in the freezer. Half of the bread has freezer burn on it so bad it is totally black, like burnt toast, and I am only able to find two slices that are really salvageable and microwave them and bring them out to the missionaries who were now sitting at the table ready to bless. Sacrament comes and goes and the bread itself tastes so bad I actually find it difficult to swallow. Brother Ladd on the stand takes his bread and swallows and a look comes over his face like "what did I just eat?" and he turns to President Clark and they share a few words back and forth to which Brother Ladd seems satisfied and they stop talking. Today is fast and testimony. Anyone who knows me, or really anyone in my family, knows that we really don't get up to give our testimony often, relying on the spirit to dictate when we do give a testimony if at all. (The way that it is supposed to happen) This Sunday was different. I felt impressed, strongly so, to get up and give a testimony. The words that I should speak flowed through my brain and I could see myself sharing it. How I should say it, what I should say, all was revealed in a matter of moments in perfect clarity. Here is what went through my mind:

"I have been thinking about super heroes a lot lately. Iron Man, Superman, Hulk, Thor... These are amazing, quite frankly awesome individuals of justice and right, who battle the forces of darkness and evil in spectacular ways. I've been thinking about all the money that is spent, millions upon millions of dollars that get spent to show off these heroes, in the form of movies, posters, previews, and so on. I think about the time invested in enjoying these heroes, watching them, glorifying them, talking about them, remembering them, and I am left with one realization; that of Jesus Christ being the greatest hero of them all. Jesus, the Son of God, who lived a perfect life, who took death by its icy clutches and won. Jesus was the hero that did battle with the devil himself for our souls; who took our sins and owned them, beating Satan, death, and sin. Can you think of another hero that was purer? Who was more powerful? Who was more humble? Who bested a greater "super villain"? Neither can I. And how much money, how much time, how much remembering and love do we give Him? We can't even give Him good bread to remember Him by in His own church. A church that I know he owns, a church that He bought with His life, run by members who I know he paid for in drops of blood, with our faces engraved on the palms of his hands with our walls continually before Him. We can't even get Him decent bread. Brothers and Sisters I know that Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Prince of Peace, the greatest super hero this world, nah this universe, has ever seen. I know that this is His church, and I know that we as members of His church, bought with His blood, need to remember Him and what He

has done for us and what He continues to do for us in order to be saved. I love Him and pray that He knows how much I look up to Him and desire to become like Him.”

The words were so clear, the message was so small, the scope so small. I sat and waited for Brother Ladd to finish his opening testimony, to start testimony meeting. Brother Ladd finishes and before he can even sit down someone jumps up behind me. No big deal I think, I can always go up after. The person gets up and starts and finishes, I will summarize:

“I am having problems with my faith. Life is so hard. I don’t show up to church often or keep the commandments and my life sucks and I don’t know why.”

I think wow, I better get up- someone else jumps up.

“I am having problems with my faith too; trials suck. I don’t read my scriptures either and most likely don’t keep the commandments and life sucks- WHY?!”

I think double wow, I better get up- two people stand up.

“I just want you to know that everything you said makes perfect sense. My wife has migraines and suffers from depression, well so do I, but life gets hard, I am an X alcoholic, I suffer from mental problems- but I try to get better, amen.”

This continues for the next hour...

“So I just got to go to a graduation, how awesome was that? And my daughter in England is doing great. And we are going to have two pharmacists in the Branch, how cool is that? Amen.”

“I have Asperger and was just diagnosed with PTSD due to an incident that happened while I was working at the Hotel. They said I would never read and write and now I have a job. Amen.”

We are now literally 10 minutes past the hour and Brother Ladd has to stand up and end the meeting. I did not get to stand up. I was actually prompted, actually had the spirit tell me to get up and was not given time, and for what? People do not even wait to be prompted to give testimonies, they just “do” like it is share and tell time in primary where everyone needs to talk. Like it is an AA meeting with everyone standing, not because the spirit dictated it, but rather because everyone just needs to stand, say their name, and what addiction they are struggling with. Talk-a-mony, Story-mony, AA-a-mony, Travel-mony, Sob-a-mony, Depressed-a-mony, Confess-a-mony, and the list goes on. I was left befuddled as to why I felt so prompted to stand up and why I was not given a chance from start to finish to stand up and speak? Then the greatest realization of the whole day hit me;

“Christ isn’t given time in the world, He isn’t given time in our lives, our families, and not even in His own church. Not only that but those prompted by the Holy Spirit to stand and point people back to Him in His own church are not given time to speak. If He isn’t given time, than how in the world could I expect myself to be given time. For the first time in my life I had a real realization of just how easy apostasy is, and just how hard it must have been for the apostles of old to go out and point people back

to the very man they had just slain. People are inherently selfish, and this generation takes it to a whole new level, pushing things of God and Christ to the back burner and giving all of our time and attention to things that canker. How much do I do the very same thing? How much time do I give to Christ? If I have troubles getting moments of clarity like this with my life the way that it is, how much more difficult is it for others whose lives are completely consumed by desires of the natural man, and who openly spew those desires over Christ's very own pulpit. The wheat and the tares are fully ripened; that message was for you and for you alone my son as you are the only one who could understand it. "

Make Christ the center of your lives; not the eye of the storm.

EDIT MADE 11<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020: It should be known that from this day onward I asked the branch if I would be allowed to make homemade bread and bring it to church on Sundays for the sacrament. Up till COVID-19 we have baked bread on Saturday and brought it to church on Sunday. The branch has enjoyed the sacrament with homemade bread from scratch since.