

JFK and What Can You Do for Your Church

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It was 45 years ago this weekend that John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as President of the United States. During his inauguration speech, he spoke some of the most memorable words in American political and cultural history: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

I am borrowing those words and applying them to the local church. It seems to me the principle fits. Many people regard their church as an organization that’s supposed to “do something” for them. They become disgruntled or discouraged when some perceived need is not satisfied or when some expectation, even something quite unreasonable, is not met. These people would be happier if they regarded their church more as an organism in need of what they might provide. The best churches are those that are made up of people who understand that things are better when everyone brings something to the table. Churches are stronger when the people think more in terms of “potluck supper” than “buffet dinner.”

Here’s a biblical principle; it comes from 1 Peter 4:10 – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace...* This verse tells us that God has gifted every disciple of Jesus Christ in some particular ways. The gifts are meant to be enjoyed by the recipient and shared with others, too, in service to them. God’s design for the church is that Christians should be intentional and active in personal ministry for the good of others and for building up the church. The encouraging, and challenging, news for every Christian is that there is something for him or her to do and he or she has been gifted to get it done.

These days, many among us have become quite accustomed to getting what they want, and having it now, and expecting that it will always be there, and demanding changes when it’s not. We have cultivated a consumer mentality, an entitlement perspective, and a me-first attitude. There is no shortage of challenges for a society like that, and there are a whole lot of problems for a church with a number of people like that. The Church, taking her cues from the Lord Jesus, is called to be counter-cultural, and that means (at least in part) that we take seriously such words as we find in Romans 12: *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves...Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil...If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

We take to heart such words because, as people of The Church, we have been given the great commandment by Jesus Christ himself to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” So we look for ways to take a risk

and love our neighbors (and love our enemies, too). And we try and figure out the value of asking not “What can my church do for me?” but “What can I do for my church?” People who ask the right question will love their churches more (and be happier members, too) and see their churches accomplish some remarkable things in the name of Christ.

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Bible verses are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) and Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV).