

Dear friends in Christ,

A friend shared the following note with me.

“Can I be a Christian without going to Church? Of course! Just as easily as being a student who does not go to school or a soldier who does not join the armed forces or a tuba player with a band or a citizen who does not vote or pay taxes or a ball player without a team. Yes, you can be a Christian without going to Church, but it’s kind of meaningless, isn’t it?”

Of course, we can pray and read Scripture on our own. We certainly need a regular personal devotional life of prayer and reading Scripture. Certainly, we can experience the presence of God in nature and in solitude. But there are things Christians cannot do on our own.

For one, we can’t praise God all alone. Biblically speaking, to praise God is to publicly express to the world the value of Jesus in our lives. If we never go public with our praise of Jesus or if we only go public when it is convenient for us, then, no matter what we say to God, we are publicly stating that we value other things over following Jesus.

For another thing, we can’t truly understand and apply God’s Word all alone. Certainly, we can read God’s Word alone, but without the community of the Church, we will have a very narrow understanding of God’s Word. When I prepare to preach to the Church, I am not relying on my own private interpretation. I am drawing upon the wisdom of the Church over centuries of time. I am relying on the wisdom of the consensus of the faithful, the scholarship of Luther and others, and years of Bible study conversation with fellow Christians who have challenged and enriched my understanding.

And finally, we cannot encourage our fellow Christians if we don’t engage with them. It is not easy to keep one’s faith strong in our increasingly hostile world. People all around us are struggling. And sometimes, what they need to see and hear is someone just like you showing the world what Jesus means to you. You are important to the Church.

Certainly, going to Church does not equal being a Christian. But being a Christian certainly implies being connected to the Church and acting as part of the Body of Christ.

This month our Sunday morning Adult Bible Class is beginning a study of the story of Samuel, Saul, and David in the Old Testament books of Samuel. Not only is the story a classic of ancient literature and drama, but it is filled with insight into power and pride and politics in our world today. I know we will learn things we haven’t noticed before. All are welcome to join us.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen