

Why I love the Church: we value integrity

Message for Sunday, February 3, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Genesis 39:1-10

Children's Message:

Matthew 5:8, New International Version:
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Mark was very poor at spelling. On examination day he was stumped by many difficult words. His mind started thinking, "What if I just peeked over at Jane's paper; she's a good speller and always gets them right!" Mark heeded the suggestion and copied several answers.

The teacher noticed his actions and was greatly surprised, for she had always thought of him as an honest boy. When it came time to collect the completed work, she observed that Mark was having an inner struggle. After bowing his head for a moment, he suddenly tore up his paper. Although at first he had yielded to temptation, he finally decided to take a zero rather than be dishonest.

Calling the boy to her desk, the teacher said, "I was watching you, Mark, and I want you to know that I'm proud of you for what you did just now. Today you really passed a much greater examination than your spelling test!"

Message "Why I love the Church: we value integrity"

1) Integrity still has a place in our world

I did an online search for "integrity" and found this great story from 1996. The headline in the Chicago *Daily Herald* read "Fairy tale turns sour after newlyweds lose money." A newly married couple put all the money they had received at their wedding reception—\$12,000—in a black zippered pouch. They absentmindedly left it on top of their car as they drove away on their honeymoon. Of course, by the time they reached their destination it was gone. The bride said to the newspaper reporter, "I feel numb. Overwhelmed."

But two days later the newspaper shouted this headline: "Finder's keepers? Not all believe it." David Yi, an unemployed man, had found a bag with about \$12,000 in cash and cheques. With all his bills adding up, he could have used the money. Who would have known the difference? But his conscience wouldn't let him. He found the couple, and returned both their money and their hopes. David Yi hadn't even considered keeping the cash. "It doesn't matter whether it's \$50 or \$1,000 or \$1 million," he said. "It doesn't belong to you. It's just right from wrong."

Apparently there is a place in our world for people of integrity. David Yi received job offers from Motorola, Sony, and Hilton Hotels. A Hyundai car dealer who wanted to give him an office and company car. David finds it all quite perplexing. The telephone was ringing off the hook. "It's just bizarre, bizarre, bizarre," he said.¹

To someone with integrity, it *is* bizarre that this would create such a fuss. Apparently the news media and the business world witness so little integrity that they found David Yi's behaviour refreshing.

In the Church, integrity is the norm, not the exception. Or at least it should be. Do you remember back in the 90s when the news media took delight in exposing television preachers like Jimmy Swaggart who were involved in sexual immorality? The same reporters just winked at politicians who were doing the same thing. Unfair? Not at all: they were simply pointing out hypocrisy by people who claim to have a high moral standard.

When church members and leaders live by integrity, they are establishing a reputation—not just about themselves and their church, but also about Jesus Christ.

2) Integrity is consistently upright character

Integrity is more than simple honesty. In the Bible, "integrity" comes from a Hebrew word that means simple, whole, sound, pure, or complete. The opposite of integrity is dis-integrity. I just made that up; there is no such word. But there is the verb to

¹ *Daily Herald*, February 20 & 22, 1996.

describe what happens when a person abandons integrity: they *disintegrate*. They are no longer whole; they come apart.

We can say that integrity is *consistently upright character*. For instance, when you buy a new car, you expect it to have integrity. You expect all the parts to be there, in their right places, working properly. You expect the car to be free from any hidden rust or other corruption. And it should stay that way for the duration of the warranty. It should *consistently be upright in its character*.

Character grows over time. When you consistently behave a certain way over a period of time, that shows your character. A 12 year old boy may be talked into stealing a candy bar at a store, but that does not make him a thief. In fact, his conscience may bother him so much that he never steals again. But a high school boy who regularly steals candy bars has developed the character of a thief.

In the Bible, Joseph was a person of integrity. Chapter 39 of the book of Genesis shows how Joseph's values directed his behaviour with such consistency that he developed a reputation of godliness and integrity. One of the Egyptian Pharaoh's chief officers was Potiphar, who bought Joseph as a slave. Potiphar was so impressed by Joseph's life that he "put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned." [Genesis 39:4].

Potiphar was apparently a workaholic, and his wife became lonely. She saw Joseph more than she saw her husband. You can guess what happened.

Genesis 39:6-9, New International Version:
Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

Integrity says "No" to sin not just once, but it keeps on doing what is right. Joseph's character wasn't

revealed by a single *no*, but by the accumulation of *nos* to lust and betrayal, and *yeses* to chastity and loyalty.

Genesis 39:10, New International Version:
And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

Remember the story of David Yi? The media wanted to make him a hero for returning the thousands of dollars he found. But was that one deed consistent with the rest of his character? A friend remembered that David had found \$50 a year before. He sought and found the rightful owner. David said in a television interview that he would consider only job offers for which he would have qualified without his recent fame. It seemed dishonest to accept a high paying manager's job when he wasn't knowledgeable of the business. David's famous act of integrity was no fluke. It revealed his inner character.

In the same way, the deeds of individuals within a church form the reputation of the whole church. If you trust the people of the church and admire their integrity, then the church itself is known as a place of integrity. Most important of all, this brings honour to Jesus. Like in this next story...

In a certain village was a man who sold wood to his neighbours, and who always took advantage of them by cutting his logs a few inches under the required four feet. One morning in the local coffee shop, people heard gossip that the wood cutter had become a Christian. Nobody believed it, for they all declared that he was beyond hope. One man, however, slipped quietly out the door while the discussion continued. He soon came running back in excitement and shouted: "It's true! He is a Christian!" They all asked, "How do you know?" "Well, I measured the wood he cut yesterday, and it's a good four feet long!" The crowd was convinced. If Jesus can change a hard-hearted person like that into a person of integrity, then he really must be something special.

3) Integrity is rooted in faith

Integrity is rooted in faith. It must be part of our core values. It will be impossible to resist temptation unless we have a solid foundation on

which to base our actions. That solid foundation is Jesus.

Integrity isn't the kind of thing you can teach, like spelling or chemistry. Several universities which offer ethics courses have discovered the irony of students cheating on their ethics exams! As an old saying goes, "It's better caught than taught."

In other words, the best way to teach integrity is to model integrity. Lots of young people dream of the chance to be a model walking down the runway at a fashion show in Paris, or to be on the cover of a glamour magazine. As Christians, we have a far higher calling: to be models of integrity.

I've said to Junior Church teachers, it's not so much that they teach the curriculum; they *are* the curriculum. By the way they live, the children and youth learn what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ.

4) Being real in church

Idea!! Next week let's have a "Sunday Swap." Come to church wearing what you would normally wear on a typical day during the week. The point is: be real; live with integrity. You shouldn't have to be one person in church on Sunday, and a different person through the week.

In fact, how about bring with you something of what you do during a typical weekday. It would also be a great way for us to get to know each other better, by sharing what our daily lives are like. Hey, Ross (a local cattle farmer): you can wear your overalls, and bring your cattle prod. You can use me to demonstrate how effective that tool is for getting a stubborn animal to move! *wink, wink*

Hey! Why not go all out and bring with you some of the *people* that you spend time with on a typical day? I really believe that if you tell them what's happening, they will be intrigued and want to find out what on earth this church is about.

Next Sunday I'm going to wear my outfit when I go curling. I'll bring my curling broom, and I'll invite one of my curling teammates to come with me. How about you?

Next Steps:

- Pray: confess any habit which is blocking God from fullness in your life.
- Commit yourself to being a person of integrity. We need God's help for this to happen, so open yourself for the Holy Spirit to work in you.
- Remember: our motive for this is not to impress people with our character, but to demonstrate the goodness and power of God.