

The Church is the conscience of the community!

Somebody once asked, "What is worse - ignorance or indifference?"

The ironic and slightly humorous response was, "I don't know and I don't care!"

Those words really plagued me for many years and acted as a catalyst for me to act and help where I could.

It was also an uncomfortable reminder whenever I found myself sliding into a bubble of comfort and convenience.

Let me explain my introduction.

Today we have a society that is spiralling out of control at a rapid rate.

If I could just mention a few examples: violence against women and children; blatant government corruption; cold-blooded murders (hits) in our streets; a devastating pandemic; a crumbling education system, especially in the poorer areas; an alarming increase in hunger and poverty which will naturally result in a major spike in crime; and a steady increase in lawlessness and perversion.

I might have only mentioned a few but they should be enough to affect any "normal person", yet I tend to witness the opposite.

Let me provide an example. In the last two weeks, three people have been murdered in the streets in the area where I work.

I actually drove past the crime scene where the second person was killed.

I had to stop and wait for the policeman to direct me around the police cordon where the crime had happened.

While waiting, I looked at the people in the area and noticed that they seemed to be desensitised by what had just happened.

This is when I had my "lightbulb moment".

My first reaction was to blame the surrounding community for their indifference and apathy and condemn them for being so heartless.

It then dawned on me, excuse the pun, that they were in darkness and that, if as a pastor I was supposed to be the light of the world according to Matthew 5:14, then I am to be blamed for their indifferent attitude.

The church is supposed to be the conscience of the community!

The problem was that I was separating myself from them, while expecting them to have a righteous reaction. It is me who is supposed to preach, teach and exemplify righteousness, justice, truth and compassion.

It was my responsibility according to Isaiah 1:17 which says "learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Immediately I was challenged as to whether I was just going to pass and forget or actually try to do something.

I immediately mobilised the leaders and the congregation that I lead into a plan of action to address this crisis in the area.

Time and space do not allow me to share more completely on my motivation but I will try.

About ten years ago, I read Matthew 9:36: "But when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

It really had a profound impact on how I saw the community and my response to their challenges.

We Christians, I believe, should regularly do some introspection and ask ourselves if we see the multitudes who are "weary and scattered," or are we turning a blind eye to their plight?

Are we "moved with compassion" or are we passively stuck in our bubble of comfort and convenience?

Do we see the surrounding community as an unnecessary burden or as "lost sheep?"

It is in the end of this verse that the Lord Jesus gives the solution for all these challenges.

He mentions that the "weary and scattered" community is like sheep who have no shepherd!

Then it dawned on me that the solution was for the church to shepherd the community, which means leading, feeding, caring and protecting them.

Most importantly, we have the responsibility to introduce the community to the chief shepherd of our souls, the Lord Jesus!

My prayer today is that our religious, civic and community leaders will rise and take up their responsibility to shepherd our communities by leading, feeding, caring and protecting them.

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