

FAITH

Kingdom of God, not kingdom of institution

As a multi-vocational pastor, it's been over a year since my last pastorate.

While away from the institutional affairs of the church, I have taken time to discern not only the next steps in my own ministry, but the larger issues that are at play in the greater Christian church.

In doing so, I have come to understand more about the movement that Jesus actually began, and it's not the establishment of the institutional Christian church.

In John 3:1-3, Jesus meets Nicodemus, who states, "‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’"

Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom



AUSTIN NELSON

of God without being born anew (or from above)."

This is not Jesus telling us that we need to be "born again" by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, which often means ascribing to a set of doctrines and belonging to a church.

But rather, Jesus is trying to tell us that being born anew, to see the kingdom of God, is a way of changing how we see the world around us. It's a renewed vision that we gain by following the way of Jesus.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was

already here, we just needed the eyes to see it. Those who followed Jesus and early church learned the way to open themselves up to the kingdom of God that is present on earth.

The early disciples were individuals who came together around this social and spiritual vision of Jesus.

The vision of Jesus wasn't about building institutions. It was simple: Love one another, just as we have been loved. That is how the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus. (John 13:34-35)

When Paul wrote that we are the body of Christ as the Christian community, he meant that we literally are the incarnation of Christ here on earth. We are the hands and feet of Jesus, called to go out into the world and share the good news that he brings.

It was not about Jesus establishing the church as an institution. It was about how Jesus can open people's eyes to the true kingdom of God and experience it for themselves.

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I am not trying to say that the institutional church isn't important. Communities of faith are central places for Christians to gather and share in community. There are many benefits in belonging to a church and participating in corporate worship.

But, if you look into the Book of Acts, you can see how the early church was formed by individuals coming together under this radical vision of Jesus, working to make the kingdom of God known to others.

It wasn't about establishing an institution that was a top down system of power and control, or even a system of particular ritual practices, but rather a grassroots gathering of people who believed in Jesus and the social and spiritual vision that he taught.

To be born again is to see the truth of Jesus' message and promise of hope, love and peace to those who follow him.

True Christianity is not about belonging to a particular church institution. What could be more Christian than actually following the lessons of Jesus?

The Christian faith then calls us to go out and make the kingdom of God known to the world that desperately needs it through acts of kindness and love.

That is how together as Christians we overturn the kingdoms of darkness and make the kingdom of God a reality for all.

Austin Nelson, of Minneapolis and Crosslake, is a pastor, church historian and Pequot Lakes High School graduate.

CARD GAMES

PINEANDLAKES ECHO JOURNAL
500 scores
1 p.m. Tuesdays
Pine River American Legion
Tuesday, Sept. 26
• Jack Anderson 4030, Roger Ramula 2620, Carol Furnstahl 2530, Ernie Burch 2530, Edie Watson 2500. Weiman won the door prize.

Bridge scores
1 p.m. Tuesdays
Ideal Town Hall
Tuesday, Sept. 26
Duplicate: Howell Movement

Shirley Gronholm 43.00.
1 p.m. Thursdays
Ideal Town Hall
Thursday, Sept. 28
Duplicate: Howell Movement

• Don Rasmussen and Sandy Severt 81.50, Jane Kleinsasser and Lois Steffen 80.50, Mary Leland and Marlene McArthur 79.50, Carole Johnson and Carolyn Thompson 74.50, Enga Wodziak and Joyce Roemer 70.50.

Noon Fridays
Crosslake Community Center
Party bridge
Friday, Sept. 29
• Diane Schlichting 4500, Bruce Peck 4330, Bill Herick 4260.

Call the Crosslake Community Center at 218-692-4271 to play on Fridays.

Lakes Area United Way Chili Cook-Off is Oct. 4 in Brainerd

PINEANDLAKES ECHO JOURNAL
BRAINERD — The Lakes Area United Way's annual Chili Cook-Off will run from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 4, at the Northern Pacific Center in Brainerd.
Cost is \$10 at the door for a bowl for all-you-can-taste chili, a chance to vote for your favorite "Community

Choice" chili, dessert sponsored by CTC, and a chance to learn about and support the work of the Lakes Area United Way and its partner programs.

To learn more about the

Chili Cook-Off, visit unitedwaynow.org/chili.
For more information about the Lakes Area United Way and the impact it has on the local community, visit unitedwaynow.org.

Winter clothes sought for Eagle View students

PINEANDLAKES ECHO JOURNAL
PEQUOT LAKES — Community Action of Pequot Lakes and the Pequot Lakes Community Library are collecting

winter hats, waterproof gloves, children's coats and snow pants for children until the end of October.
All donations will be delivered to Eagle View Elementary School in November: Donations

should be brought to the Pequot Lakes Community Library in new or very good condition. Any zipers must be in working order for coats and snow pants.
The library, located at

31117 Rasmussen Road (a half block north of the stop sign), is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; until 7 p.m. Thursdays; and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

Explore true crime stories.



pineandlakes.com/newsletter

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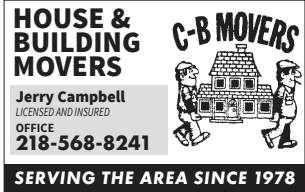
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