

This Gospel of the Kingdom Will Be Preached

I enjoy annual Conference meetings! Perhaps it's long habit from childhood, but I think it's more than that. I enjoy making connections with people I haven't seen for a while, I enjoy meeting new friends in hosting communities, I enjoy meeting newcomers to Conference. I know it isn't easy to feel a part of a new group, so I try to be one who welcomes. To be sure, I do weary of meeting after meeting, and I'll admit, a brief stroll through the Lehman complex in Kidron, Ohio was a pleasant momentary diversion!

One part of the gathering is usually my favorite—those times when we hear from mission workers around the world. It's exciting when those working in areas of the world that saw little visible fruit for years or decades now report people coming to faith and churches being established. It reminds me to keep praying for those places and

peoples that seem presently unresponsive to the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

A second encouragement for me is hearing about our conference affiliates in other places and with people having different cultural practices. Those differences remind me that we need not be overly concerned about transmitting our specific cultural practices, nor do we need to be apologetic about our culture. What joins us is some commonality in our understandings of faith and discipleship.

I continue to find deep joy in belonging to a group of people and churches who are serious about Christ's commission to be disciples and to make disciples. I find satisfaction in being part of a group that cares deeply about a respect for faithfulness to the Word of God in areas of morality that cut across political alignments. I value being part of a group that deliberately fosters relationships with "like-

minded" followers of Jesus.

Though we are a small group and may feel insignificant at times, our international affiliates, now around three times our own numbers, remind me that we aren't alone in our understandings of what it means to follow Jesus. What we believe is, and will continue to be, important to our future.

The beginnings of new communities of faith and the development of connections to other existing communities is also a helpful reminder that our primary identity in Christ is neither ethnic nor national. Rather, it is based on common understandings of the most important aspects of faith and practice. **May his kingdom come!**

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