Am I Mennonite? by Jim King

Joe and Mike had not seen each other in a few years. Years ago, they had shared a pew at the same Baptist church, until a job moved Mike away. Now, over coffee, they caught up on children, grandchildren, and health. Then Joe asked the question Mike knew was coming. "So, Mike, where are you going to church?"

Mike smiled. "I'm attending, and I'm a member of, a Mennonite church."

Joe set down his cup. "So, does that mean you've become a Mennonite?"

"Well, Joe, the answer is yes and no."

"What does that mean?"

"Yes, I'm a member of a Mennonite church. No, I haven't become Mennonite, not the way many people use the word. Around here, 'Mennonite' can mean a people: families with Swiss and German roots, familiar last names, and generations of shared history and good cooking. I wasn't born into that, and I can't join it. But 'Mennonite' also names a way of reading the Bible and following Jesus. That part I have embraced with my whole heart."

"Explain that."

"Think about yourself. You call yourself a Baptist, but that doesn't make you part of an ethnic group. It tells people what you believe about Scripture, baptism, and the church. It's the same for me. The name goes back to Menno Simons, a Dutch priest who left Rome in 1536 because he wanted to follow the Scriptures. Today most Mennonites in the world live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It's a faith, not a family tree."

"So what do you believe that I don't?"

"Less than you'd think. We share a lot, including baptism for believers who choose to follow Christ. But a few things stand out to me. First, Jesus is the center. We read the whole Bible through Him, and faith means following Him in daily life, not just believing the right things about Him. Second, the church is a community. We are responsible for one another. Third, peace. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to be reconcilers wherever we are. And fourth, service. Faith shows up in how we help the neighbor who needs it."

"That sounds like a lot to live up to."

"It would be, if I tried to do it alone. That's where something called holy listening comes in, and for me it may be the most important part of all. It starts with my own walk with God. Before I rush to speak or act, I slow down and listen: to Scripture, in prayer and in silence. James says to be 'swift to hear, slow to speak.' I'm learning that the Spirit usually speaks quietly.

"But holy listening isn't only private. We practice it together. When our church faces a decision, we don't just debate and vote. We pray, we open the Scriptures, and we listen to one another, even to the quiet voices, until we sense together where the Spirit is leading. Joe, I spent years in church meetings waiting for my turn to talk. Now I'm learning to listen for God in my brothers and sisters."

"And how is that working out for you?"

Mike was quiet for a moment. "It has changed how I live. When someone wrongs me, I ask what reconciliation looks like before I ask how to win. And on Sunday I don't feel like a spectator. I'm part of a body where my gifts are needed, and I'm free to bring my questions as well as my answers."

He finished his coffee. "That's the best way I can say it. I've found a new freedom in worship. I didn't become someone else. I found a place where following Jesus is the whole point."

Joe smiled. "Maybe I should visit sometime."

"Anytime," Mike said. "There's always room at the table."

Whatever your story, there's room at Swamp's table too.

Ministry Highlights by Pastor Tracy

These brief snippets are in the form of "Thank You's".

- To Linda Martin who took an intergenerational group of Swampers kayaking on Lake Nockamixon… THANK YOU!
- To Brent Gehman, Dana Good, and others who continue to create space for men and women to gather… THANK YOU!
- To the worship planning team who have a heart for cultivating our worship environments and experiences, and to Zack Geissinger who has been helping Pastor Nathan plan our services… THANK YOU!
- To Sara Geissinger and Chloe Hoch who are serving both our youth and young adults… THANK YOU!
- To Paul and Ruth Mindler who so faithfully create an opportunity for community through snacks and fellowship on Sunday mornings… THANK YOU!
- To those who serve on Wednesday nights with Clubs, youth, and the meal… THANK YOU!
- To the Sunday School team, teachers, and volunteers who have a heart for discipling the generations at Swamp… THANK YOU!
- To Steve and Cindy Weaver and all those who served at Ripple this fall… THANK YOU!
- To Shirley Geissinger and the Fellowship Committee for planning and serving in ways that provide opportunities for us to just enjoy being together… THANK YOU!
- To the Kingdom Partner Liaisons who are embracing their new role… THANK YOU!
- To the youth sponsors, youth, and all those who came to support the youth benefit dinner and auction where we raised about $16,000 for the youth ministry… THANK YOU!
- To Kathy and John Werner and their faithful volunteers who have such meaningful ministry to widows and widowers… THANK YOU!
- To Erin Gehman who has willingly stepped in to coordinate the nursery… THANK YOU!
- To Brandon Longacre (and those that chip in) who moves walls and sets up the fellowship hall multiple times a week… THANK YOU!

There are so many more "Thank You's" that could be given, and I encourage all of us to give those "Thank You's" on a regular basis. It goes a long way.

It's Directory Time by Pastor Tracy

It's that time of year again! Time to make sure we have your correct information for the 2027 Church Directory. But this year the process will look a little different. In an effort to adopt better organizational systems and make things a bit more efficient, we are utilizing a church management software called Planning Center. We have already been using Planning Center for several years. It is our online giving platform. Now we will be using Planning Center's other capabilities to maintain our membership database, volunteer clearances, etc. Planning Center will provide us with the information needed to create the directory.

Here is how the process will work:

- In the first week of November those of you who have an email address on file with us will receive an email that will allow you to verify or edit the information we have for you and those in your household. Please follow the instructions to verify and/or submit the information. In order to approve all household members, you'll need to sign into Planning Center. If you haven't done online giving before, you may need to set up a login for Planning Center.
- As this information is gathered from everyone, it will allow us to have an online directory available through Planning Center. It will not be public; the information will only be accessible to those who are in the directory. It will also provide us with the information needed for the printed version of the directory.
- For those of you who do not use email, you will notice the familiar binder show up on a table in the foyer so you can verify your information as you have in the past.

If you have any questions about this process, or run into difficulty working with Planning Center, please see me or Katie Gehman. Katie has been graciously volunteering to get us set up to use Planning Center in this way.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we try something new!

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