

THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE

I visited a church today—not a building but a people. It wasn't a big group and by most people's standards, this five year-old church might be considered a failure. It has not grown numerically and doesn't have many programs or very much money. They don't have their own building yet and the pastor still leads the worship, preaches, and offers communion. Indeed, half the people are drawn there from a local non-profit ministry that serves the poor and half the people would probably be considered "losers" by most observers in our culture.

But I see this small Christian community as a token of success in the kingdom of God economy. They are modeling to the rest of us something very powerful, and I suspect they don't even notice in themselves the full significance of their example. They have integrated the lost, the lonely, and the "losers" into their social lives. Through the faithfulness of each participant this small community has embodied a radical vision of downward mobility. In doing so, these Saints have embraced Jesus' call to lay down their lives, yes, even their social lives. You see, half of those who participate in this life-giving community are mentally ill, physically disabled, or developmentally challenged. But inside this small church group there is real Christian community – the authentic and sacrificial caring that Jesus calls us to. And it is also a two-way caring, not a one-sided handout. There are genuine relationships here where there exists "give and take." I watched as parishioners spotted their friends with physical disabilities as they struggled to enter the building through the 8 steps, setting aside their walkers and slowly moving along. I watched as young godly women shared responsibility for a developmentally challenged toddler, caring for this child as she wandered through the facility. I watched the healthy pray for the sick and the sick pray for the healthy. And I watched as this pastor poured out a compassion for the vulnerable and needy on this Sunday in much the same way he has done for years.

This community is small but rich. Indeed, it is rich not only in faith but also in the *experience* of the kingdom of God. In the end, when God measures and evaluates the countless congregations of our neighborhoods, I believe that what is most important in the mind of Christ is whether the "least of these" were first in our communities. And there is no doubt in my mind about this matter.

- Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth... (as it is in heaven).
- Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his...
- Unless you are born again, you can not see the kingdom of God

-- Keith Wasserman (2008)