

A few weeks ago, I mentioned **Vanishing Bee Syndrome** in the sermon. Across America, honeybees are disappearing without a trace. And it's a cause for huge concern. The current speculation is that a virus may cause it, and that it might somehow interfere with the **bees'** ability to get back to the **hive**.

In the context of the church, Christians across America are vanishing too. In the April issue of *The Lutheran* magazine, you may have read that a recent major study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that Protestant Christians (that's us folks) were 2/3 of the religious population in the 1980's and only 1/2 today. 16.1% of people reported that they are unaffiliated –the largest growth.

It isn't just out there. If you take a look at our old membership roles, you'll see half of our **hive** has disappeared too.

It is always a concern when vanishing **bees** (*bee*-lievers) are not cared for. Sometimes people relocate to a new community and they don't bother connecting to a church in the new town. But many times, some event disrupts our church-attendance habit, such as a family crisis, an illness or even a disagreement with another church member, and we withdraw from church altogether. Perhaps most disturbingly, are the young people who vanish after graduating from high school. Changes in schedule, time away at college, a focus on career, but most of all an inability to care for their faith and a loss of connection to the faith of the **hive** – all these things contribute to vanishing believers.

All of these are categories of folks who stood here at the font, or were held, as water combined with the Word of God to make them a Christian. These are folks who also affirmed their faith at their confirmation, but who no longer affirm their faith because they no longer show up, here or anywhere.

So here's the point: Being a follower of Jesus is *both* a group trip *and* an individual experience.

The writer of Hebrews told the Christians of his day to not neglect to meet together, but to assemble as believers to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). And he was right. Church isn't like school where you attend for a while until you graduate. *The church has no alumni association.* We need to continue to be part of a faith **hive** for both what we receive and what we contribute. We need to take individual responsibility for the health of our faith. We do that through private activities such as prayer, Bible reading, tithing and volunteering, but we also do it *by making sure we connect regularly with a body of believers in order to worship and to continue our Christian education.*

What is more, as a part of the community, we are asked to take individual responsibility for the health of every other member's faith. Baptismal sponsors promise to do that for the newly baptized, but we all have that responsibility.

Have you missed anyone from worship lately?

Have you been present enough yourself to miss anyone else who is absent?

Have you called them?

Do they know that they are missed?

Do not wait for someone else to call them. If you miss them, the Holy Spirit is telling you to contact them. So when you see a bee in coming weeks, let it be a reminder to you to make that phone call, and to bring yourself to worship and Sunday school too.

Peace,

Pastor Chris