

CRIBBS NOTES – September 2

It has been an incredible week of public disclosures, apologies, and heart-wrenching news from war zones. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales announced his resignation. Michael Vick, star quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons of the National Football League, apologized for criminal abuse of animals. Republican Idaho Senator Larry Craig attempted to reverse his guilty plea of lewd conduct in a men's restroom at the Minneapolis International Airport in June. It's been a painfully, difficult week.

Amid the domestic headline news, the body count continues to go up in Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, and other theaters of war. Violence and corruption sear the souls of people concerned about the human condition. What will it take to change the course of events?

The Church is expected to provide an alternative to the ever-growing conduct of misguided popular personalities. Values that set a higher standard come from traditions long held by the Church. To be clear, the Church is comprised of people, ordinary human beings, who gather as the community of believers in Jesus Christ. But more is required than merely believing. The Church as the Body of Christ is actively engaged in forging social justice and baptizing.

Unfortunately, too often, it is nearly impossible for persons outside the Church to recognize a clear and present distinction between the Church and so many other organizations.

Frankly, the conduct of too many Christians can be so terribly shameful as to present a contradictory impression of the faith. This is our dilemma today. Many of the acts of violence and declarations of war come from members of the Church. The personalities named in this article are self-identified Christians. We need not strain our memories to realize the numerous episodes in which misbehavior resulted in harm to humanity and nature; and much of it is linked to self-avowed churchgoers.

More is required beyond confessions of faith. The Church is called to be a sanctuary to shelter strangers, immigrants, and sojourners. It is a voice that proclaims God's love for every living soul. The Church offers new hope to the weary and liberation to captives. There is a qualitative clarity about the nature of the Church. Jesus Christ is its head and presents a model of being human that sets the Church apart from popular culture.

Nobody is conscripted into the Church. It is a voluntary commitment to serve God and stand as a witness to the human potential to do good works. Wherever there is a need for companionship, advocacy, or a healing touch, members of the Church are called. These days such a call is made continually.

During our Soul Food Bible Study this past Tuesday night, we explored the significance of discipleship. Although multitudes heard Jesus preach and observed his ministry of miracles, only a few of his listeners dedicated their lives to discipleship. Today, church doors are open across America and around the world. People pass through the pews and participate in worship, but they stop short of becoming disciples.

Given the dire straits in which so many lives exist, now is a critical moment in which we can assess our commitment to the Church. Jesus calls us to be disciples. Christ wants us to be the Church. We must be more than a place, a building, or an organization. As the Church, we must present a daily practice of caring for others and being the embodiment of Christ's love in the world.