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Pentecost 22 – Reformation - October 29, 2023

“I Am a Christian” Part 7 – I am a Christian

Read: Romans 3: 19 - 28 and/or Memorize: Romans 3: 28 NLT

I’m going to enjoy one of my indulgences this morning. Many of you know I am a chocoholic. I love chocolate but there is one thing even better than chocolate. It’s chocolate and mint. I happened to have bought a bag of Andie’s Candies, but they’re not those little tiny things, these are really big. Who else likes the indulgence of chocolate and mint? Better put your hands up quickly, I only have one bag.

There is another type of indulgence that played an important role in the Reformation. In Roman Catholic teaching, an indulgence is the remission of a temporal punishment brought about by sin. This punishment consists of either earthly sufferings or time spent after death in purgatory.

In Roman theology it was taught that an indulgence was to devoutly make a brief prayer to God in the midst in your daily work. Or be led by the Holy Spirit to give of yourself or from your possessions for the good of others. Or voluntarily abstain from something you enjoy, perhaps Andy’s Candies.

The idea of the indulgence was to get people to do something good because they had done something bad. Notice there’s been nothing about buying an indulgence. What we’ve talked about so far did not set Luther off.

Now people, being people, corrupted the practice. Money was scarce and they were trying to build a cathedral in Vatican City. I vaguely remember it was some guy’s name with Basilica after it. Once Rome started this practice, others followed suit.

So, they began to morph the teaching about an indulgence. By the time of Luther there were actually sellers of indulgences. The one that Luther ran across was a man named John Tetzel. To Luther, this practice made it seem that people could

buy forgiveness for their sins, an abuse that deeply disturbed many Roman Catholics, Martin Luther among them.

In 1517 Tetzel gained Luther's attention using this jingle, "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." He claimed that the purchase of the indulgence could shorten one's stay in purgatory.

For those of you unfamiliar, Roman theology taught that after death, if you had committed sins since your last confession, you had to go to this intermediate place to wait for your sins to be forgiven, then you would go to heaven. Luther's concern about indulgences was it made forgiveness a commodity to be purchased rather than received as a gift of grace from God.

Luther challenged this as Biblically incorrect. For his refusal to conform to the church's teaching, he was placed under a papal ban which meant that anybody who saw him could kill him and not be guilty of murder. That was the length to which Martin would go to defend the Gospel.

Luther believed he was defending the faith. That defense is both a physical one, speaking for the beliefs we have, but also a spiritual one. Just last week we were reading in Ephesians about the spiritual beings that seek to undermine the Kingdom of God. Paul says that we're in a battle with them so we better be prepared for that battle. Psalm 141:1 reminds us of that, "Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hand for war, my fingers for battle."

For the last seven weeks we have been talking about being a Christian. Thom has taken us on a journey, asking us to look at how we live the life that Jesus has called us to. He has asked us to consider what it means to be a Christian.

Thom wrote the book from the perspective of an individual, but today we consider the corporate nature of our faith. We are believers. We believe that Jesus died and rose for us. Jesus' death and resurrection brought our redemption from the powers of sin, death and the devil by forgiving our sins.

He goes on to remind us that we are church members. Isn't it intriguing that the very first act of the disciples at Pentecost was to preach a sermon. It was quite powerful because 3,000 people got baptized that day.

Luke reminds us that it wasn't a one-day transition. They began meeting together, studying scripture, sharing communion and sharing lives. Helping each other out, making sure that the needy were provided for and that those who had would share with those who didn't. Sounds to me like what congregations do.

We moved on to finding out that we are disciples, followers of Jesus. Jesus has given each of us a commission to make other disciples. We are reminded that Jesus went around "doing good." He freed people from the bondage they were in, healed them and restored them to the wholeness that God wanted for them.

The church throughout its history has done the same thing. Sometimes, it has happened very miraculously; at other times, it's simply been that the church established institutions of health and caring to provide for those in need.

As servants, we are called to look beyond ourselves to be aware of the needs of others. In just a few weeks many of you will be baking. That's part of your servanthood because those baked goods will allow us to purchase food for fifty-five families, nearly 200 people who would have been much hungrier, but for our gift.

Just about every year, someone is astonished at how much food they receive. It reveals the generosity of the servants of God. Being a servant means we also use our time, talent and treasure to support the church and other ministries of care.

Being a servant is part of our witness. We witness by action but also by word. When we're inviting people to be disciples, at some point, we have to tell them about Jesus and His love. Jesus wants everyone to know He lived and died for them so that they don't have to die eternally.

You can think of Jesus giving us the Holy Spirit as planting a seed in us. He planned for us to grow. We grow in faith, wisdom and understanding. By our witness and service, we dispense hope to people who are frequently hope-less, while reminding ourselves that we also need to receive that same hope.

We recognize that we are prayer warriors. All that we do, all that we are needs to be wrapped in prayer. Prayer is our way to be in communication with God, so that we are aligned with Him.

Sometimes, that prayer leads us to do things we might not be inclined to do because God lays the burden on us. Sometimes, that prayer lifts up people and

encourages them in times of difficulty. As we heard just last week, prayer is one of the most powerful things we can use in the ministry we carry out.

We remember that we are Christians. Being a Christian incorporates all of those things that we've talked about over these weeks. We want to remember it is not an event, it is a lifestyle. We want our lives to reflect our faith in Jesus. It's not that we go through a list and check things off and say we're done. We are reminded that there is always someone else who needs to know about the gift that God has given us in Jesus.

Even before we were born God had prepared good works for us to do to serve other people. Then He puts them in our path just as He did last week when we talked about a preschooler who needed help and the OCC boxes that we're preparing. The generosity of the people of Good Shepherd to accomplish those two ministries is unbelievable.

But the treasure we possess is not just money, time or talent. The treasure we possess is faith in Jesus. As we hear in Matthew 6: 21 in the King James version, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." By faith, we see Jesus as our biggest treasure and keep Him in our hearts.

It is my prayer that we will follow examples like Martin Luther, and saints like Merrick Khan and Jared Reding, who come before us this weekend to proclaim their faith in Jesus, their devotion to Him and their willingness to forsake all to follow Him. I pray you will lift them up in prayer but also look at their example.

Two young people whom we have watched grow up. They have grown into a young woman and man of faith right before our eyes. They have been a great blessing to us and I know that they will be a blessing to many others throughout their lives. Their care, love, concern, joy and enthusiasm are wonderful gifts to Good Shepherd and to the church at large.

Even as we gather as a congregation, we never want to forget that we are a part of something bigger, the holy catholic Church. The Church is built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ and committed to making disciples who share in the joy of faith in Jesus.

Count me in: How will you reveal to others that you are a Christian?