

Sunday, August 11, 2019

I Corinthians 15:1-11

John 3:1-17 John 14:1-7

The Way to Eternal Life

Our fifth suggested topic for our “At Your Request” summer series, is the foundational topic of Christian faith which answers the question “What is the way to eternal Life?” In reflecting upon another key question which is in need of response is what is eternal life and why is it desirable? This everlasting, eternal life is referred to only once in the OT book of Daniel (12:2) but is frequently cited through the NT. This eternal life comprises the whole future of the ones who believe in Jesus that is the ones who are redeemed as opposed to those who do not and they are to experience eternal punishment. It is something that is desired by people because it is also the final reward and glory into which God’s children enter. The life of the faithful here on earth is connected with the eternal life, the endless life, the happy future of spending eternity with God and the saints in heaven. It is a free gift that God gives to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ. And this is foundational to our teaching for there are conditions as to how one receives eternal life- it is in Christ alone.

Our reading from John 3 tells the story of one of Nicodemus, Pharisee and leader of the Jews who went to see Jesus at night. Nicodemus knows the Jewish teachings and tells Jesus that he is teacher who has come from God. This is in contradiction to many who have claimed to be this but were not. Nicodemus’ reasoning that Jesus is from God is because he has shown many signs with God’s presence. Jesus acknowledges this and states that this is true and then he adds a hook which causes Nicodemus to question the Rabbi even more. Jesus says, “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus’ next question shows that he does not understand Jesus’ teaching of Spiritual rebirth. Jesus says, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh—like babies; but what is born of the Spirit is spirit. This then causes Nicodemus to wonder and ask what this really means. Jesus tells him that we are Spirit filled because of God’s gift of life. Yet we must choose the path of our lives. Jesus then asks Nicodemus about learning about earthly and heavenly things. No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven; the Son of Man- himself. And it is then he gives an important image of healing, wholeness and faith. When Moses and the people of Israel were on their desert journey and had sinned against God. God responded to their sins by putting venomous and deadly snakes. According to Numbers 21:7-9, “the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD to take the snakes away from us.” So Moses interceded for the people because

the LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and mount it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live." So Moses made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. If anyone who was bitten looked at the bronze serpent, he would recover.

Jesus tells Nicodemus this because he himself would be lifted up on a cross to die for the sake of others. Through his death, others may receive eternal life. Nicodemus was not clear about this and so Jesus speaks. John 3:16 is a key verse of our Christian faith. "For God so loved the world (substitute your name) that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

As people who live in a multi-faith, multi-cultural city we know that in order to answer the question of the way to eternal life, we need to remember a few things about who we are. Various religions or faith groups claim that there are many paths to God, to know God or live the way He taught. But do they teach life everlasting in the presence of God's heaven? There are different groups of people who live godly lives- loving others, reaching out to help and yet as Christians we profess our faith in Jesus Christ. Our doctrinal beliefs as the UCC state: "We believe in and confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, who, being the Eternal Son of God, for us men and for our salvation became truly man, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, yet without sin. Unto us He has revealed the Father, by His word and Spirit, making known the perfect will of God. For our redemption, He fulfilled all righteousness, offered Himself a perfect sacrifice on the Cross, satisfied Divine justice, and made propitiation for the sins of the whole world. He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He ever intercedes for us. In the hearts of believers He abides forever as the indwelling Christ; above us and over us all He rules; wherefore, unto Him we render love, obedience, and adoration as our Prophet, Priest, and King."

Jesus made propitiation—a great church word- also known as expiation or atonement. This is the act Jesus completed by dying on the cross to save us from our sins, to redeem us. Jesus the Son of God, died in order that we God's children by faith might receive the gift of eternal life. By his death, Jesus appeased the need for sacrifice for sin. He took it upon himself- so that we do not die. This is important for us as creatures of the Earth, because we know that when death occurs there is the separation of the spirit within us and our bodies. By dying and rising to new life, we are offered that gift to live with God in heaven forever so that we know where we are going after our bodies die. We will be in God's presence.

When we hear these words we are reminded of our statements of faith including the Apostles creed and A New Creed. Yet what we need to realize is that we are Christians- followers of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God the Promised One. And it is through Him that we receive the gift of eternal life. No one can give you this other than Jesus. And it is by the amazing gift of God's grace that you will receive eternal life if you have faith and believe.

To receive God's grace and to know that you will have life eternal you must believe in two things 1) Jesus died so that God may forgive you all your sins and 2) Jesus rose from death so that you have can receive eternal life. And in order to receive the gift of eternal life, you must 1) confess your sins (repent) to Jesus and say you are sorry for the wrong doings sins/ bad actions in your life and 2) believe and give thanks to Jesus for this gift.

We often think that if I do more, give more, share more, we can earn eternal life. But none of this enables you to receive eternal life. What the church does however, is help you to build your relationship with God once you say you belong and are changed by God's Spirit. And building your relationship with God enables your earthly life to be filled with hope, peace, joy and love—all the gifts that come to us in Jesus Christ.

We read in Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." People from any and every religion can be saved through Christ. The first followers were Jewish. There are Christian believers today from all religious backgrounds. But faith requires a personal response. God forces no one. We have the option of rejecting Christ and choosing a path of our own. We might like the idea that everyone will receive the gift of eternal life. Such a hope is attractive but ignores the awesome responsibility of people making the decision to accept Jesus as the way to eternal life. And this is what our job our purpose as a church is—to invite people in to hear the good news of eternal life made possible in Jesus Christ our Risen Saviour.

But who are the eternally lost if only Jesus can provide forgiveness and a restored relationship with God? We need to be very careful with this sensitive and profound question. Our answer should not dilute the gospel, but nor should we make claims beyond our limited understanding. Because this is part of the answer- we our limited in our understanding of who God's grace is offered and who receives it. And in turn how each person lives out their faith and builds on the relationship with God. Again we must be conscious of the knowledge that we are Christians and what distinguishes us from our faith groups—is God's grace freely offered and received through the confession of sins. And if we confess our sins we

are assured of God's forgiveness not only as a church family praying together (which we did earlier,) but as individuals who seek Christ's love.

The way to eternal life is by believing in Christ's death and resurrection; confessing your sins and believing and thanking Jesus for giving you this gift. How do we accept Jesus? By praying as individuals and offering to God our hearts and our lives. Let us pray offering to God our lives. Or let us renewing our belief and hope that we are living as Christ taught, that we have received the gift of eternal life and we know to whom we belong.

Dear God, I know, I'm a sinner and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Saviour and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Praise be to God. We have shared in the way of Christ; the way that we will experience eternal life together. Thanks be to God