

THE LION

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Issue 5

Message from the Rector

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate...”

St. Luke 13:24a

Believe it or not, there are still places in the world today where the practice of Christianity is still heavily persecuted, if not outright illegal like it is in places like North Korea, because those who practice the Christian faith are seen as being either disloyal to the state or they are viewed as being in direct competition to the majority religion. Just think of many of the countries in and around the Middle East if you want an example of that. Christians in those places simply cannot openly either practice, or really even talk about, their Christian faith.

Now imagine, if you will, that being the case here in the United States. I mean, imagine that you woke up this morning to find out that Christianity has been outlawed here in the United States: you can't practice it, you can't talk about it, and you certainly can't share your faith with anyone else. And not only that, imagine that if someone turns you in for being a Christian, at your trial you aren't allowed to make any defense at all. As a matter of fact, at your trial you aren't allowed to utter even one single word. And if you are found guilty, you are immediately taken out and put to death. That is actually the way it is in some parts of the world, but imagine that scenario here.

Now let me ask you this question: With all that in mind, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you of that crime? Or, after weighing all of the evidence, would the judge instead just look at you and say, “You are as innocent as the day is long. There is simply no way that anyone could ever accuse *you* of being a Christian, regardless of what you or anyone else might claim. There is simply no evidence in your life to prove it.” Which one would it be? Innocent? Or guilty as charged?

Well, I think that that is a pretty fair question for us to ask ourselves: Is there enough evidence in our lives to convict us of the “crime” of being a Christian without us ever having to utter one single word? Guilty or innocent? Which way does it go?

Well, in Luke 13:24 that really is the question that our Lord is addressing when someone walked up to him and asked him this question: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” In other words, what Jesus does in his response is get at the root of what it means to be a Christian. And here is what I mean by that.

To our modern ears, the question that that person asked our Lord that day—you know, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”—has a very narrow ring to it, doesn't it? I mean, think about it for a minute: What is the religious mantra of most people who are living in the West today, at least most people who are living here in the United States? Isn't it that all religions are more or less equal, and that they all ultimately lead to the very same place? Isn't that what most people probably believe? I would bet that it is.

But back in Jesus's day—at least for a Jew who was living back in Jesus's day—that wasn't at all the case. As a matter of fact, as far as the Jews were concerned it was *only* the Jews who were ultimately going to be saved; because, as we read in our Old Testament lesson for today, God had made his covenant *only* with Abraham, the father of the Jews. He hadn't made it with anyone else. So as far as the Jews were concerned, it was *only* the Jews who were going to be saved.

Message from the Rector - Continued

But Jesus narrowed that field even more, didn't he? He narrowed it down to only those people who believe in and follow *him*. Don't forget what Jesus said to St Thomas in the Upper Room that night, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; *no one* comes to the Father but by me" (Jn 14:6). Jesus couldn't have made it any plainer than that: salvation comes *only* through him.

But that raises a question for us, doesn't it? And that question is this: What does it mean to believe in *and follow* Jesus? Does it mean that all we have to do is believe that Jesus really is a real historical person, and that he really is who and what he claims himself to be? Is that what it takes to be saved?

Well, that is certainly part of it, isn't it? But don't forget: St James tells us that even the demons believe all that—and tremble (cf. Js 2:19). So there must be more to it than that.

Well, then, perhaps believing in and following Jesus means that we not only have to believe that Jesus really is a real historical person, and that he truly is who and what he claims himself to be, but that we also have to trust in him alone for our salvation: meaning that in addition to all those other things, what we have to do is believe that Jesus has forgiven us our sins, and that he died for us on the cross, and that he will raise us up on the Last Day, and things like that. Maybe that is what it means to be saved.

Well, again, yes, that is a part of it too. But in spite of what has passed for "the Gospel" in some parts of the Evangelical wing of the Christian Church for a long, long time now, there is still more. And that is where the "following" part comes in; because, you see, we not only have to believe that Jesus really is a real historical person, and that he really is who and what he claims himself to be, and we really do have to trust in him alone for our salvation, but we actually have to *follow* him as well.

And that involves "doing." In other words, we not only have to believe but we have to follow him—we have to "do"—as well.

And it is that right there that gets many of us into trouble, especially those of us who are heirs of some of the thinking and theology of the Protestant Reformation; because, you see, some of us—perhaps even many of us—have confused our "doing" with "earning." And none of us can ever earn the Kingdom of God: it is a pure gift. But "earning" and "doing" really aren't the very same thing because, you see, "doing" flows from belief. And it is the combination of these two things—believing and doing—that keeps us in God's kingdom. So while Baptism gets us into God's kingdom, it is believing and doing that keeps us there.

And Jesus said as much, didn't he? I mean, when that person asked our Lord that question that day—"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"—how did our Lord answer him? "Oh, just believe in me and everything will be ok"? Or, "Just trust that I have come to forgive you of your sins and you too will be saved"? Or, "You're fundamentally a good person at heart. Don't worry about it; all good people—regardless of what they believe—go to heaven"? Did Jesus say *any* of those things?

Well, actually, no he didn't. What Jesus said to the man was, "*Strive* to enter through the narrow door ... while there is still time" (Cf Lk 13:23-24). "*Strive*" Jesus said. And that "narrow door" is not only Jesus Christ himself, but it is also everything that he ever taught us to both believe *and* do.

And by the way, the Greek word that is translated "strive" there is actually the word from which we get our English word "agonize" (i.e., agonizesthe), which means to fight, to struggle, to make every effort humanly possibly in order to get whatever it is that we are after. "So *strive*," Jesus said. "*Agonize* to enter through the narrow door, and you will be saved"—not only believing the things that Jesus taught, but actually doing the things that he tells us to do as well. Strive to enter through *that* narrow door.

You know, whether we realize it or not, there are probably more "thou shalt" in the Bible than there are "thou shalt not," although unfortunately we seem to concentrate more on the latter instead of the former. But there are more "thou shalt" than there are "thou shalt not." Make every effort, Jesus says, to strive—to both believe *and do*—before it is too late.

Message from the Rector - Continued

So back to my illustration at the beginning of this article: If we were standing before the magistrates today, accused of being Christians, would there be enough evidence in our lives to convict us of that crime? Well, I hope that all of us will make every effort to answer that question for ourselves. Let us all strive to enter through the narrow door of Jesus. May we all be found “guilty” of both believing *and* doing: may we all be found guilty of truly following Jesus. And as we are, may the blessing of his peace rest in our hearts forever. †

Vestry Corner

Priscilla Reilly

In the last issue of THE LION, Father Mike sent a strong message to us from the Book of Hebrews 9:27. I hope you will re-read his letter and go to the part where he talks about memorial gifts. He directs us to page 320 of the Book of Common Prayer, at the bottom, where it says “the Minister is ordered from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are in health, to make wills arranging for the disposition of their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and charitable uses.” As Father Mike pointed out, this is to remind God’s people to remember the church in their estate plans. I am sure many members have thought about this but perhaps have not followed through on their plans or thought it might be too involved to even consider. I am here to tell you it is very easy to arrange. All it takes is a short, simple paragraph added to your will such as:

“I (name), of (city, state and zip code), give, devise and bequeath to St. Mark’s Anglican Church (written dollar amount or a percentage of the estate or description of the property) for its unrestricted use and purpose (or for the specific fund of your choosing).”

That is it! It can be modified if circumstances change and it cost nothing during your lifetime. What a wonderful way to create a legacy and preserve the joy in supporting the church you have been so comfortable with in prayer and fellowship.

Music Notes

Kathleen Knott, Music Director / Organist

This Joyful Eastertide \ #192 The 1982 Hymnal

Vs. 1 This joyful Eastertide away with sin and sorrow!

My Love, the Crucified, hath sprung to life this morrow.

Refrain: Had Christ, that once was slain, ne’er burst his three day prison,

Our faith had been in vain, but now is Christ arisen,

Arisen, arisen, arisen.

As we celebrate the liturgical season of Eastertide, the choir will sing the anthem “This Joyful Eastertide” which is based on Hymn # 192. In our Communion, Eastertide last from Easter until Ascension. The text of this wonderful hymn was written by Charles Wood and George Woodward. Wood (1866-1926) was an Irish composer and teacher. He grew up as a chorister in St. Patrick’s Cathedral (Church of Ireland) and later went on to teach at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells were his most famous students. George Woodward (1848-1934) was an Anglican priest and poet who wrote mainly

Music Notes - Continued

religious verse to fit Renaissance melodies. “This Joyful Eastertide” was first published in *Carols for Easter* (1894) which grew out of a collaboration between Wood and Woodward.

The tune **Vruechten** was originally a melody for a Dutch love song. The tune is noted for melismas and a rising sequence on the refrain. In this hymn there is a perfect marriage of text and tune. The mood of the melody reflects the joy of Eastertide.

A thank you goes out to our choir members, bell ringers, and children’s choir who work so hard throughout the year to enhance worship.

Upcoming Holy Days

April/May/June/July/August Holy Days

April 15-17 (noon) – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday in Holy Week

April 18 (6:00 p.m.) – Maundy Thursday

April 19 (noon) – Good Friday

April 22-23 (noon) – Monday, Tuesday in Easter Week

April 25 (noon) – Feast of St Mark the Evangelist

May 1 (noon) – Feast of St Phillip and St James, Apostles

May 30 (noon) – Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ

June 10-11 (noon) – Whit-Monday, Whit-Tuesday

June 19 (noon) – Feast of St Barnabas the Apostle (transferred)

June 24 (noon) – The Nativity of St John the Baptist

June 29 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of St Peter the Apostle

July 4 (10:00 a.m.) – Independence Day

July 25 (noon) – Feast of St James the Apostle

August 6 (noon) – Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord

August 24 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle

St. Mark’s Anglican Church

Rev. Canon Michael L. Ward, SSA

Rector

Rev. Randall S. Russell

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