

The Heart

What is the heart of Christianity?

Some will say that you must accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior, or you will be doomed to Hell.

That, some say, is the heart of Christianity.

And yet we know that cannot be true because Jesus says: "When I am lifted up, I'll drag **the whole world** to myself!" Jn. 12:32.

In other places we are assured that "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son into the world, ... not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." Jn. 3:16-17.

The fact is, God's determination to redeem God's creation cannot be stopped by the likes of us!

Others say that the heart of Christianity is all about following the rules and rituals of the church.

Show up on Sunday.

Participate in the sacraments.

Obey the laws.

Yet, while our sacraments and rituals and rules can be helpful guides, they are not the heart of our faith.

It's too easy to settle for blind obedience or thoughtless participation thinking that's enough to get by.

But Jesus cautions us about piety for the sake of piety.

He roundly criticizes the religious Dudley Doo-Rights of his time as being all shiny and sweet on the outside — but whose insides are like rotting corpses and moldy garbage cans.

Others will say the heart of Christianity demands that we separate ourselves from the world.

That we isolate ourselves from the broader cultures and economies and politics and therefore seek a purity that's denied to everyone else.

And yet Jesus, in the great commission, sends us out **into the world**, with the command that we make disciples of all nations. Mt 28:19.

So what is the heart of Christianity?

St John tells us in tonight's gospel lesson.

The heart of Christianity is service: particularly to the least, the lost and the left behind.

Service that grows out of a deep and abiding love for one another.

The central challenge to every Christian is to die to oneself, so that in that dying, we may live, in Christ, for one another.

The central goal of Christianity is not that I save my own okole, but that I surrender judgment and fear and resentment — and seek ways to be useful to you — and to whatever neighbor might cross my path.

I don't need to worry about my own salvation.

Christ takes care of that for me, for you, and for the whole world, on the bloody wood of the cross.

My job is to follow this strange Messiah from Galilee as he teaches us what the way of God looks like.

And lo and behold, what do we discover?

The way of God looks like humble service.

The way of God looks like ordinary bread, it tastes like ordinary wine.

The way of God is found in the daily food pantry at Wallyhouse.

It's found every Saturday morning around the hot breakfast table.

It's found when we stand up for those who cannot stand for themselves.

So in a moment, you will be invited to come up here.

You're invited to take your place in a chair, and like St Peter, to endure the embarrassment of having your feet touched and washed.

Boils, bunions, in-grown toenails and all!

Risk the embarrassment!

Risk the shyness or even that sense of shame!

Risk it, and come up!

Then, after you are washed, go, and do the same for others.

As you embrace, and find yourself embraced by, the very heart of Christianity.

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