

October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15; Psalm 90: 12-17; Hebrews 4: 12-16; Mark 10: 17-31

Pentecost 20, b

In our gospel for today, we read about the rich man asking Jesus what must he *do* to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer to the man was that in order for him to inherit eternal life, he must follow him, and if he followed him, he obviously would have to sell all his possessions and when he did, he was to give the money to the poor. In other words, if he was going to follow Jesus all over Galilee, he could not be burdened with all that he owned.

You notice other than selling all his belongings, so he would not be burdened or distracted, there was no other requirement for him to follow Jesus. No baptism, no oath, no ritual. Following Jesus simply came from his heart. His heart, his mind, his soul reached out to Jesus and Jesus said, "Follow me".

So, that got me to thinking about the rituals our churches *now have* before we are a recognized follower of Jesus. In our Lutheran tradition, we baptize soon after birth, recognizing the coming of the Holy Spirit within the child and the child's entry into God's kingdom through its baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, of course, as Lutherans, we say, we wonder, --what happens if a

child, a person is not baptized? Are they not saved if they're not baptized? Are they not a Christian if they haven't been baptized?

Some of you, I am sure, are familiar with the Lutheran theologian, Martin Marty. His son Peter W. Marty, the editor/publisher of *The Christian Century*, has a column at the beginning of each issue. In the latest issue, Peter Marty tackled this question of what happens when someone who is not baptized *takes Holy Communion*. Should that have happened? What happens when it does? What does it mean?

Marty first tells of a member of his church, a 52-year-old man who has been faithful in attendance and in Sunday school all his life. This man found out from his mother before she died that he had never been baptized. He then was baptized, at age 52. But he and his pastor, Peter Marty, and other members of his church wondered what to do, if anything, about his almost 50 years of receiving communion without having been baptized.

These are the actual questions the congregation grappled with. Should this man and *all those who had given him communion* **repent** for having communed him as an unbaptized? Should the *entire congregation* **repent** for having let it happen?

Marty said his congregation had some wonderful insightful conversations. He said that when Holy Communion looks too

convenient, some in his congregation get *uneasy*. Letting a person commune who not only has not been properly instructed but has not been baptized struck many as *dangerous*.

However, others saw Holy Communion as receiving Jesus without having to “do” something beforehand, that, that something had already been done, --by Jesus, by His death on the cross. Jesus told the rich man simply to follow Him, --no instruction, no rules, no rituals. “Follow me”. We’re not even sure the man knew who Jesus really was, but He wanted to be with Him, regardless, and Jesus invited him to do so.

Peter Marty finishes his column with this story. He writes, “I have no idea if the 29-year-old twin brothers in my congregation, whose parents push their wheelchairs forward for communion, “believe in Jesus”. Their cerebral palsy is too severe for me to make meaning of the sounds they speak. But I place the wine-soaked bread in their mouths, nonetheless.” He goes on to write, “Maybe it’s time we start seeing the Eucharist, Holy Communion, as Christ doling out love to *all of God’s people*, everybody, whether their belief is sturdy, shaky, or completely unformed.”

So, taking that dilemma to ourselves, do we ask before Holy Communion, “Who is not welcomed” or do we ask, “Who is welcomed”?

We hear *Jesus* answering, “I did not die just for those who believe in me. I died for all. All are welcomed”.

Amen,

Pastor Scales