

“God Is Not Ashamed”
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Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Luke 12:32-40

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour.

My text this morning is taken from Rudyard Kipling. “By the living God that made you, you’re a better man than I am, Gunga Din.”

For a 19th century Christian to admit a Hindu untouchable water boy was a better man, was quite notable. But even more notable is the first part, that the Christian admits that the Hindu, body and soul, was made by the living God.

We live in an age in which globalization is a catchword. It refers to the economic, political, cultural phenomena that has pulled our world together into a closer relationship. No area and no difference is safe from globalization, least of all, our religious faith.

Last weekend in Oak Creek they memorialized the horror that unfolded at the Sikh temple of Wisconsin a year ago.

The last words of one of the leaders of the temple were, “Waheguru, waheguru”, which translated means “wonderful God, wonderful God.” Now the question is, has heaven been globalized also? Is that man, whose dying words praised God, going to be with us at the throne of God? I believe so. God is not

ashamed to be called his God.

When Islamic parents pray for the life of their seriously ill child, is it the same God who hears them, who hears the prayers of Christian parents for their seriously ill child? I believe it is.

Christians have congratulated themselves with parts of the Bible that seem to reject everybody but ourselves. We even reject other Christian denominations. In 1964 we were all so happy as Protestants when Vatican II pronounced us “separated brethren.” Where before the Catholic Church had seen us as “lost.” Well, now, in this globalized 21st century atmosphere, I suggest to you that the Islamic or Jewish neighbor is a separated brother.

One calls God “Allah”, the other calls God “Elohim” or “Yahweh”, and we call God “God”. But Hebrews 11:16 says that God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city, a better country, a heavenly one.

Evangelism is very important to Islam and to Christianity. We both try to make the other think like us. But we need to listen and to share and to try to understand. We need to respect their faith. There is a young girl at Carroll who is Islamic, wears the burka every day and observes all the fasts. Other students have told me how much they respect her, especially in hot weather, going all day without a drink of water. God is not ashamed of her.

Did Jesus really claim to be starting an exclusive religion? Or is that the church in the second century when the Scriptures were being put together, struggling under great persecution. We use the Scripture against other religions, when really the heart of what we know about Jesus is that He taught love and that He said, “Everyone who searches, finds.”

In Hebrews 1:11, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” We are justified by faith, not by right doctrine, just as we are not justified by good works.

What separates the religions is doctrine and dogma and tradition. A good example is the poem by Kipling, in which this wonderful water boy could not go to heaven because he did not accept the Christian dogma, some formula like “accepting Christ as Savior.” Instead, Gunga Din is pictured, after he dies, as being down in Hades in the fire, but continuing to carry water for the British soldiers, who were also in Hades. He had the wrong doctrine. It’s pitiful that Christianity was ever so arrogant. Yet I’m sure that I preached most of my ministry Christian doctrine right along with preaching the love and grace of Jesus

Christ.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father, but by me.” And then the preacher hits the pulpit to emphasize that there is no other way.

Both Christianity and Islam customarily mix their theology with their government. Therefore, minorities are not tolerated very well. Of course, our fellow Christians have often had the wrong doctrine – witness the Thirty Years War and the Hundred Years War. These wars were in Europe after the Reformation, fought over religion. Was God ashamed?

9/11 taught us how much hatred we have between Islam and Christianity.

In the Gaza Strip, there are three churches – a Greek Orthodox, a Roman Catholic, and a Baptist. The Baptist Church used to have an attendance of 200 every Sunday, but recently one of the leaders was kidnapped, tortured, and killed by a local terrorist organization. The frightened church leaders and many members left the church and attendance dropped dramatically to 35 attendees. Now they have a new 33 year old pastor, Hannan Maher, a recent graduate of the Evangelical Theological School of Cairo, who hopes to get the 200 Arab Christians to come back to church. He is very brave.

The apostle Paul’s insight is that if one member of a community suffers, all suffer together with that member. But now the insight is, if one member of our world suffers, no matter what the religion, we all suffer together with that person.

When we toured China, we stood behind a group of Buddhist monks in their saffron robes, chanting and playing instruments. And it occurred to me that they were doing something very religious and I felt it.

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who lived in an abbey near Louisville, Kentucky, taught that he could be perfectly faithful to Christianity yet learn in depth from other religions, like Islam and Buddhism. We can’t just isolate ourselves as Christians anymore.

The central teaching in Christianity is love and compassion. The question then comes, “Whom should we love?” Just fallen Christians? Or just those of other religions who will change to our religion? No. We need to have faith in our religious tradition by respecting and loving all others. All of these are children of God.

The Christian church has dreamed up doctrines out of Scripture and missed the truth of how much

God loves all human beings. In the Luke passage read today, we see Jesus saying, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Our relationship with God is a gift, so I am safe. I am sure I am going to heaven.

It isn’t whether we should accept the beliefs of another religion, but whether we should love them and respect their culture. And for our own spiritual pilgrimage, the question is, are we able to accept the love of others and their forgiveness for how in previous centuries we have tried to globalize our faith?

The Luke passage also says that we are like men and women waiting for the master to come home, and that all we have to do is open the door when the Lord knocks. It’s very simple. And then it’s not something we do, but something the Lord does.

When He comes, Luke says, “Truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have us sit at table, and he will come and serve us.” Remember how in the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples’ feet. We are to gird ourselves and wash the feet of the whole world, regardless of their religious faith. The Lord is serving everyone, so our choice is to be on a crusade against other religions or joining the Lord in serving the other religious faiths.