

Sermon- Choosing Christ Over the World

Scripture: Rom 12:1-2

Sunday, February 2, 2020

In our first two sermons on the Confessions we first looked at the Mennonite church's definition of church as the visible manifestation of Christ in the world in Article 9. Then we looked at Article 10 which talked about the mission of the church. And we saw that the Mennonite vision of church is as a body that would give the world a glimpse of what life would be like under the reign of Christ. To do that we looked at the Mennonite church's distancing from state power and state actions. We also looked at three things that come together in the church's functioning mentioned in Article 10. I presented this as the three equivalences or parallels. The parallel for the Mennonite church between the ministry of salvation and the ministry of healing, secondly, the parallel between the message of the Gospel and the message of peace and finally the parallel between the work of witnessing and the work of martyrdom.

Today we are going to dwell a little deeper into what it means for individuals within the church to give the outside world a glimpse of what it is like to be under the reign of Christ. This is the focus of Article 17¹. Now article 17 states that "conformity to Christ includes non-conformity to the world". This statement implies that you cannot have dual citizenship between Christ's kingdom and the kingdom of this world which is ruled in fact by Satan. Take your pick, it is one or the other. There is no fence sitting either. So

¹ Conformity to Christ necessarily implies nonconformity to the world.³ True faith in Christ means willingness to do the will of God, rather than willful pursuit of individual happiness.⁴ True faith means seeking first the reign of God in simplicity, rather than pursuing materialism.⁵ True faith means acting in peace and justice, rather than with violence or military means.⁶ True faith means giving first loyalty to God's kingdom, rather than to any nation-state or ethnic group that claims our allegiance.⁷ True faith means honest affirmation of the truth, rather than reliance on oaths to guarantee our truth telling.⁸ True faith means chastity and loving faithfulness to marriage vows, rather than the distortion of sexual relationships, contrary to God's intention.⁹ True faith means treating our bodies as God's temples, rather than allowing addictive behaviors to take hold. True faith means performing deeds of compassion and reconciliation, in holiness of life, instead of letting sin rule over us.¹⁰ Our faithfulness to Christ is lived out in the loving life and witness of the church community, which is to be a separated people, holy to God.

what does it look like when you choose to be in Christ's kingdom? Today I will present to you three sets of choices addressed in Article 17 involved in choosing Christ over the world.

The first choice is between the pursuit of your own happiness and the pursuit of the will and glory of God. Article 17 states, *True faith in Christ means willingness to do the will of God, rather than willful pursuit of individual happiness* End quote. Conforming to the world is pursuing your own happiness. Conforming to Christ, is to pursue the will and glory of God.

In the US Declaration of Independence, there are three inalienable rights, said to be given by the Creator to all human beings and it states that the Governments job is to protect these God given rights. The three rights are, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". These rights are supposedly for all people but I want to focus today on "the right to pursue one's happiness. Who does not want to be happy? It is a universal goal. But what is happiness anyway? Happiness can be defined as that joy that comes from being surrounded by wonderful circumstances.

So the question is how do your circumstances come about? Can you control it? The world says, focus on making your circumstances everything you want it to be. Now if you look at Kobe Bryant the global superstar when it came to basket ball, he had everything to engineer the best circumstances in his life. When everyone was stuck in traffic he could afford to take a helicopter. And the helicopter he used was a one used by VIPs. It could take two pilots. It was equipped for flying under instruments instead of visual flight. The pilot also knew how to fly with instruments. And yet in California because the weather is so good helicopter companies don't bother certifying the helicopters for flying with instruments. And just then heavy fog arose and the pilot could not see ahead of him resulting in him losing control. We may do everything the world tells us to do but we still don't control the circumstances of our lives. Now I am not

implying that Kobe Bryant never sought to follow God's will. I don't know that. In fact it is likely that he did and that morning he was in catholic church asking the priest about confirmation classes for himself. So I am not saying Kobe Bryant did not have faith. All I am saying is that even a Kobe Bryant cannot control the circumstances of his or her life and so focusing your life on happiness is as futile as it is worldly.

If you were to crack open your Bible, you get a very different message about your circumstances. The very first sentence of the Bible is, "***In the begin God***". And then it goes on to describe how God created all things. The Bible also says, God also controls all things. [Isaiah 14:24](#) ESV says

The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, God plans and purposes all the circumstances of our life.

If God controls all our circumstances, then if you pursue a life that seeks the will of God no matter how hard it gets then you can never lose. Rev 4:11 says that God has created all and deserves all the glory. So we can never go wrong if we focus on bringing God glory. In John 4:23 Jesus says

But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way.

If the Father is looking for those who worship in spirit and in truth then that is what the focus of our lives should be, even if we have to set aside our desires and what we think will make us happiness.

One of the ways the Mennonites did this in the past is by dedicating themselves to one year of voluntary service after they graduated from college. When everyone else was trying to get the best paying jobs, the young Mennonites were asking, how can I use my gifts and skills to do something where I can be the salt and light in that place that cannot

reward me financially for it. Volunteer service projects have included a vast range of things from childcare to healthcare to social services to legal services. Imagine the effect on people in society who have could not afford to pay for these services and were blessed by what these people provided in the name of Jesus. Our own church looked after about 40 kids at a time who did not have homes. That is why we have so many benches lying around in our storage rooms 😊 Was God glorified in these projects? Yes!!! Did those who sacrificed personal happiness initially to do these things receive any joy in the end? Of course they did! The people who follow God's will over there's do not remain at the cross but experience the joy of the resurrection. They will have a joy that can never be taken from them. On the other hand those whose life work is to seek their own happiness above all else, end up the most miserable in the end. That is the paradox of life. Conforming to the world is to make a futile pursuit of your own happiness. Conforming to Christ the Mennonite way, is to pursue the will and glory of God even at the pain of a cross so that one day a greater joy can be yours. That is one of the Mennonites ways of choosing Christ over the world.

There is another choice that we face when choosing Christ over the world. Article 17 states, True faith means acting in peace and justice, rather than with violence or military means. You see when you conform to the world, violence has an irresistible quality to it. People get a thrill out of watching conflict on TV or watching people fight in real life. When someone wrongs you, the instinct of your flesh is to hit back reflexively. Scientists tell us that when we are attacked, we are programed to either fight or flee. The world tells you, if you are being attacked, hit back even harder.

And if it is someone else's fight, we are programmed to put fuel on the fire 😊 That is what the world tells you to do.

But if you want to conform to Christ, the goal will be to deescalate conflict and pursue peace. Imagine with the power that Jesus had, what the scene would look like if when

all the Roman soldiers were around him on Mount Golgotha he called in a legion of angels and defeated the Romans and He was raised right there in triumph telling everybody, I told you I was God! 😊 Would not that make for a way more dramatic and spectacular ending? Would not the whole world hear about Jesus and follow him right there? But Jesus did not chose the quick and efficient way. You know why? Because He did not come to **overpower** evil, he came to **overcome** it. The people of the world do not get this concept. Even churches don't get this concept. Many churches want to protect themselves from gun violence by posting armed guards. This is the worldly logic of overpowering evil in action. The Mennonite way may not be efficient and it may not look effective in the short run, but the Mennonite church believes that conforming to Christ is to chose to approach even a violent situation with the message of peace and being willing to take the bullet, instead of being the first one to kill.

Jesus believed that hearing the message of forgiveness would be the best thing for the people crucifying Jesus. The Bible does not record how many people were transformed that day but you can be sure that transformation came to many of them. The Mennonite church believes that when you chose Jesus over the world, you also are choosing to respond to violence with the message of forgiveness and God's peace. You can chose to overpower evil or overcome it. You can chose the way of the world or the way of Jesus. That is a choice that all of us have to make if we want to represent Jesus.

Let me come to the third choice I want to address when it comes to conforming to the Jesus way over the way of the world. Article 17 states *True faith means chastity and loving faithfulness to marriage vows, rather than the distortion of sexual relationships, contrary to God's intention.* End quote.

Conforming to the world is to pursue the sexual desires of the moment. Conforming to Christ is to pursue either chastity for faithfulness to your spouse in line with Biblical

sexuality. This is another big area where the church in the United States is under a severe test. When an idea is fringe or rare, it is very easy to contest it or oppose it. But when an idea becomes embedded in the culture, it is literally in the air you breath. If you stand in opposition to such an idea, then you run into the danger of the air being sucked out from you. This is the challenge we face if we want to take a stance for Biblical sexuality. Let me lay out for you what the Bible believes and the Mennonite church Confession clings to. It was God's design that man not be alone. God wanted to fill man's deep loneliness with a being similar to man in stature and value, made similarly in the likeness of God, but made to be a helper to the man and complement him in every way. God made man and woman equal in value but with rich roles within a hierarchy. Today we live in a world in which people do not want to be stopped by any rules, or respect that which is sacred. Today we live in a world in which girl's just want to have fun, where boy's just will be boys and a some others just want to be a girl today and a boy tomorrow! Some people spend thousands of dollars on surgery and then decide that they want to switch back. Now let me clarify something here. I do not doubt that people who are attracted to the same sex or are confused about their own gender are actually experiencing real feelings. Unfortunately we live in a world that is really messed up. The plastics and chemicals we use on a daily basis to make life easier mimic sex hormones, especially estrogen. And that is having an effect both on both genders even in the animal world! However do we throw out the Biblical standard just because we have some confusing feelings? Not really. Just like in the area of self protection where the basic human instinct to fight back, a Christ follower is expected to suppress that instinct and respond in a Christlike, so also in the area of sexually, the expectation is that individuals who profess Christ will overcome the feelings of the moment and respond according to the Biblical standard of chastity or faithfulness to one's spouse of the opposite gender. This is an area where the church in the United States is being accused of hate crimes and discrimination. It will get more difficult in the coming days.

But Jesus never promised us that it would be an easy road. If you want to chose Jesus over the world, then the Mennonite church believes that *True faith means chastity and loving faithfulness to marriage vows, rather than the distortion of sexual relationships, contrary to God's intention*

Of course as you might see that I am not covering all these topics exhaustively. I am not even covering Article 17 or any of the Articles I am taking up exhaustively. I am only trying to highlight a few key things. If you have questions about the issues I am raising, I will be happy to talk to you about it some more.

But today, I have presented three of many choices an individual has to make when it comes to choosing the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the Lordship of the world. To be a Christ follower, the Mennonite church believes that you have to be willing to chose to follow the will and glory of God over your own happiness. You have to be able to chose the path of peace making and peaceful resistance over violence and you have to be willing to chose Biblical sexuality over the world's lustful enticements. I hope our community will be able to follow Christ and uphold the Mennonite values in these areas as we seek to share Christ with the world. Rom 12:2 warns us, ***"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect"***. Let us pray.