

“ReNew: New Creation in Christ”
Psalms 95:6-7, 2 Corinthians 5:17
October 19th, 2014
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Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

While I was preparing this Sunday service, my wife seemed to be very curious about my message. She asked me what subject I was working on. I told her that I would be talking about Christian denominations. You should have seen her face when she heard my response! Her facial expression clearly delivered her concerns to me saying, “Why honey? Does it really matter? People will not be interested in theological debate.” She seemed to worry that if you are bored, you will fall asleep during the sermon. Now I am telling you that your pastor is okay if you couldn’t help yourself falling asleep. Because good sleep is important no matter what!

This morning, I am going to explore briefly five Christian churches: Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, and Baptist Church. Our attention is not each church’s theological differences but in their spiritual passion and enthusiasm that made them committed followers of Jesus Christ. Next week, we will explore Anglican Church and our Methodist church movement. I hope that we can deepen our spirituality as we learn from their understandings of God and spiritual practices.

Every person is unique and different, and so it is with Christian churches. It is natural to be different among Christian churches, but we have one common belief and confession. We believe in one creator God, one Lord our Savior Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit. Our goal of Christian life is to become like God, being transformed and made holy as God’s new creation. That is it!

Let’s begin with the origin of Christianity. Christianity originated from Judaism and developed to be the Western Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. They were one church for almost a thousand years, but sadly in 1054 A.D. they were no longer officially one body and church. One of the major reasons was a different understanding of Trinity. The Orthodox Church believes and accepts that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Messiah and Savior, but they wouldn’t agree to the concept of Trinity, especially the origin of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church wouldn’t admit that God and the Son Jesus Christ are the exact same substance. They argue that if God and Christ Jesus are the same, then does the Holy Spirit come out of both the creator God and Jesus Christ? In other words, can a baby come out of two mothers? The key point to understand their difference is this: The Western Church highly emphasizes Jesus

Christ as our God, and the Eastern Church emphasizes the mystery of God's presence.

Last year, I visited both Catholic Church mass and Orthodox Church worship during my study leave and vacation. I was impressed by their unique worship. The Orthodox Church's worship is quite different from our worship. First of all, I had to stand almost two hours during service. The portraits of all saints around the wall and the smoke of incense filled the entire sanctuary. In their faith, **worship is a time of mystical communion with the saints and the experience of the heavenly realm.** In other words, worship is a glimpse and foretaste of heaven in our spiritual sense. This challenged me to think whether our worship helps us experience a glimpse of heaven or not.

The core of Catholic Church's mass is "Eucharist". In other words, "communion." They offer communion at every service. **The Catholic Church believes that the bread and wine during communion will be transformed into Jesus' body and blood. They are not talking about symbolism but the real presence of Christ's body in taking bread and wine.** This is their spiritual belief, attitude and commitment to Christ. In Catholic Church, the practice of the Communion is not merely a time of remembering Jesus Christ as our Savior and God, but a holy and special time of the experience of real Christ. Through participating in communion, they re-commit themselves to Christ. We don't have to agree to this Catholic understanding but their attitude challenges us to rethink our Christian faith and our commitment to Christ.

Lutheran Church follows Martin Luther's sincere and faithful heart and faith for God. Martin had a fear of God and Jesus as a rigid judge. While he was struggling to be righteous on his own, he realized that he couldn't do anything but condemned himself. He made a great confession that human beings are justified or made right with God, not by our works, but only God's work in Jesus Christ which is Grace. **The contribution of Martin Luther was the great discovery of God's Grace!**

Presbyterian Church follows a reformer, John Calvin. Calvin's motto was "only for the glory of God." He magnified and emphasized God's almighty power, reigning in all our daily living and in the universe. The theological concept of "predestination" comes out of confession that God is almighty and omnipotent. God knows and decides even our destiny before we are born. Some of you may think that this is nonsense and absurd, but Presbyterian spirit made a huge contribution to the development of capitalism because of "predestination theology". **Since we don't know about our destiny, they believe that all they can do is to persevere in our faith and work hard at all times until the Day**

of final Judgment. Christian ethics, honesty and diligence are great contributions of Presbyterian theology and spiritual practices.

Lastly, Baptist church started in England in the 1600s as a part of a radical movement. They sought to remove any Catholic or Anglican high Church things and **tried to go back to New Testament teachings like emphasis on the Bible based spiritual life. Not only do they love the Bible and Bible study, but they also live according to it and strive to follow it.** Some radical Baptists came to the United States, we call them “Puritans and Pilgrims” because of their emphasis on moral and spiritual purity. They wouldn’t admit infant baptism unlike other Christian churches like our Methodist Church because they believe that baptism is an expression of intentional choice to be a follower of Christ. One great thing about Baptist church is their great passion and enthusiasm to invite people to come to Christ! We need this Spirit in our church! I believe that our church needs a plan to make a field trip to a Baptist church and we should learn from them!

What spiritual challenge can we learn from these diverse Churches? Each church is different but the passion for Christ and the desire for new life in Christ are the essence of renewal spirit. I want to close my message sharing a couple of reflective questions for all us: Does our church offer a glimpse of heaven in our worship, do we experience the real presence of God in our communion, dare we say that we fully trust in God who saves us with His almighty and supreme power in our lives? Dare we follow Jesus Christ according to the Bible and dare we share our faith with people and invite them to Christ? Amen.

Thanks to Adam Hamilton's book "Christianity's Family Tree" for framing this sermon.