

## **“Living Your Christian Faith”**

James 2:14-17, Romans 10:13-17

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I have three questions for you this morning. I imagine that you may have different thoughts and reactions to these questions. I hope today you feel challenged or at least think about who you are as a Christian. **First, Are You A Christian?** Let's explore our Christian origins. Christ comes from the Hebrew word, “Messiah” meaning “one who is anointed”. It meant “the King” like King David in the Old Testament. The Greek term, *Christian* means Christ's followers. Central to the Christian faith is to hear and receive “good news” meaning Jesus is the son of God, the incarnation of love and everlasting eternal life. We have hope of salvation through the messages and works of Jesus. **Jesus' proclamation of God's radical love assures inclusion for everyone.** But, as we know, this love wasn't accepted by the Jewish leaders nor by the Romans. Do you think Jesus' proclamation today is well accepted? Like those early Christians who were regarded as marginalized, unlawful and dangerous people, we Christians are dangerous people because of this radical love. In earliest days, when the Roman Empire dominated Israel, Christians had to endure harsh persecution under the Roman Emperors. Early Christians hid from their persecution, but they kept their faith in Christ.



Early Christians used a secret symbol, the fish, to prevent persecution and to identify each other. The symbol of the fish comes from the Greek word (Ichthus), which was a combination of the letters of the Greek words for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." With their perception of Jesus as the big fish in the baptismal water, new Christians considered themselves the little fishes in the same water. This led to an ancient story, when a Christian met a stranger in the road, the Christian sometimes drew one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both believers knew they were in good company. The spirit of Jesus was about radical acceptance, inclusiveness, compassion for everyone. We Christians are called to practice these values in our daily lives and to our neighbors.

**Now, I move on to the second question. How Do Our Scouts Practice Their Christianity?** On our church's behalf, I appreciate our two Eagle Boy Scouts, Daniel and Woong Hui and our Boy Scouts for your great contribution to our church and children. The Boy Scouts of America started on February 8, 1910 by William Boyce and this organization has inspired many our young children and influenced them to become faithful citizens. The United Methodist Church and our Fair Oaks church are so proud to support your program. The Scout Oath reminds us of the spiritual foundation in your program in relationship with our Christian faith. It says, "On my honor I will do my best, to do my duty to God and my country and to help others at all times." The Scout law describes important values that a Scout pursues. When we compare the British based Scouting program with the Boy Scouts of America, American Scouting added the religious principle around 1911 saying, "Boy Scouts of America believes that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God". Your obligation to God is to be kind, friendly, and reverent to your friends and neighbors whoever they are with loyalty and obedience to God. We see your obligation and Christian practice in our church around us.



**Our final question is "Are We Reaching Out In Faith to Our Community?"** We know that Fair Oaks is well known for chickens. The chickens run wild all over the village. Every Thursday or Friday night, I stay up until midnight to work on my sermons. Sometimes in the middle of the night or early in the morning, roosters crow loudly. The rooster can be a great reminder of our Christian faith. Every time, I hear the rooster's crowing, it reminds me of Peter's confession at the Gospel of Mark at 14:72. It says that "Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times. And he broke down and wept." Fair Oaks seems to be a spiritual town to me. When I studied a little bit about its history, I found some interesting pieces. Our community began in 1844. In 1895, our town was well known not only for citrus farms, but also was a business town including bankers and engineers. Around 1900, Fair Oaks had been called "crown of the Sacramento valley" in the "heart of California". Our church has been an integral part of Fair Oaks history. Around 1910, a Methodist and a Presbyterian church were built and our church is one of those. The church doesn't exist without the community. Rather the church should be reaching out to and doing good works for the Fair Oaks community. Our church needs more effort to expand our mission in the community. One example of becoming more

involved in our community is to again participate in the Fair Oaks Chicken Festival. I challenge you to think more about outreach in Fair Oaks.

Today's Scripture readings emphasize that Christian faith is not about intellectual thought or belief, but it is all about integration between our faith and works. Apostle Paul reminds us saying that "faith comes from what is heard, what is heard comes from the word of Christ. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" In the other reading, Apostle James challenges us that if we say we have faith, but our faith is not completed by our works, our faith is useless. This is a central Jesus' teaching. Eugene Peterson paraphrases this saying, "God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense". You are the messengers of God' love to those who are seeking to experience God's presence, comfort, and help in their times of need. However you participate in our church, we are called to practice our Christian faith. As early Christians confessed, we are "little fishes" after the examples of Christ Jesus. Jesus fed five thousand hungry people with fish and bread. Let us love people unconditionally and fully as much as we do through our acts and services. Amen.