

Exodus 16:1-16

John 6:24-35

Ephesians 4:1-16

“Speaking truth in love, we must  
grow up in every way.  
Grow up into Christ.” AMEN!

“There must some misunderstanding,  
there must be some kind of mistake!”

Those lyrics from Phil Collins in the song  
performed by Genesis remind me of this  
gospel lesson today.

“There must be some misunderstanding...”

We are a misunderstanding people  
especially when it comes to religion  
or things about God.

I roll my eyes when a report on the news  
brings up the name “Evangelical Christians.”

“Here we go,” I think.

The name should be a good thing.

“Evangelical” being the word to describe  
telling people of God’s forgiveness, love and  
grace for them and us, sinners  
and living out the words.

“Christians” being the name for the  
followers of Jesus to be “little Christs”  
in the world.

The words “Evangelical Christians”  
should be a good thing!

Yet, somewhere along the way  
the simple definitions I just gave you  
for each word, evangelical and Christian,

have been mashed together and twisted  
into an enigmatic fundamentalist group that  
holds political power and influence that,  
in my eyes, does nothing

to reflect an actual following of Jesus or  
of telling people of God’s unconditional love.

“There must be some misunderstanding!”

So today, let’s talk a little about  
what it means to be a Christian.

There are the words of the Creeds,  
they help, a little.

“We believe in Jesus Christ, etc...”

It is hard to call one a Christian if  
they cannot profess who Jesus is.

Some denominations want you to be able  
to say the particular time, date, and place  
where you accepted “Jesus into your heart”  
before you can be sure you’re saved.

It’s a nice testimony, I guess.

We can attest that there are a lot of words  
being spoken, proclaimed, and commanded  
in public, and private, about what it means  
to be a Christian.

It is very much like the question the crowd  
asked Jesus when they caught up with him  
again after last week’s feeding of  
the 5000 plus people.

They asked Jesus, “What must we do  
to perform the works of God?”

What must we do (or don’t do) to be Christian?

On the surface, it is a logical question. (Pause)

I’ll go out on a little limb and put the

question out there for all of you.

Think of a short answer:

What does it mean to you, to be a Christian?

(Attend a church, have faith, be baptized,  
love your neighbor as yourself, love God,  
care for the poor, have fun, grace,  
give away possessions, sacrifice...)

Good answers... I noticed no one said

“Work for the food that  
endures for eternal life.”

Those were the words Jesus gave in verse 27.

I’ll be honest, that phrase would not  
have popped into my head either. :-) (Pause)

But, this confusion about who Jesus is  
is a recurring theme in the Gospel of John.

John plays on people’s  
misunderstandings about God.

The gospel writer will point to all  
the signs that Jesus gave  
(we call them miracles) and  
communicate people’s misunderstandings

about them.

Here the people had just been  
miraculously fed by Jesus in the wilderness  
and they wanted to make him king  
to keep that feeding going

instead of seeing the miracle as a sign  
showing them who Jesus is.

In other words, John keeps communicating  
to us to “See beyond the miracle.”

How does seeing beyond the miracle  
help us to determine what it means  
to be a Christian? Hmmm

There’s a Jewish story about a man who  
was visited by the angel of death one night.

The angel told the man that in a few days  
the man would die.

The man begged the angel to  
answer one question for him.

“What will I be asked when I appear  
before the gatekeeper of heaven?”

The angel replied, “It is not for me to tell you what they will ask, but I can tell you what they will NOT ask.

They will not ask: Why were you not like everyone else?”(Pause)

There is a gospel word in that question that will not be asked.

Nowhere are we told that the importance of our life is to be like everyone else.

Yet, we plug so much value in that exact belief.

And the result is that we will misunderstand Jesus just like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the disciples and this crowd of people that followed Jesus did after he fed them with a miracle. (Pause)

In every gospel Jesus readily identified and connected with people who were authentic and open in their individuality.

Jesus could work with those who were comfortable in their own skin and, conversely, had zero patience for fakes, pretenders, and hypocrites.

What would Jesus say to the  
evangelical Christians of our nation?

I'd love to hear that conversation! :-)

Then, I am reminded it is far easier to  
point to another's sin or wrongdoing than  
to point to my own.

In what ways do I pretend?  
In what ways do you pretend? (Pause)

Paul Harvey told a story once of four young men  
who were late to class one day.

It was the day for the final exam.

And they came to the instructor with hat in hand  
and solemnly told the professor the reason  
they were late.

They'd had a flat tire on the way.

The teacher was sympathetic.

She smiled and told them that it was  
too bad they'd had this misfortune because  
they'd missed the exam.

“But, I am willing to let you make it up,” she said.

She handed each of them a piece of paper and sent them to the four corners of the room.

Once they were seated she said,

“You have my permission to make up the exam if you can answer one question:

Which tire was flat? :-)

There are many ways to pretend but  
God continually expects us to speak,  
behave and think with integrity.

“Integrity is one of those abstract qualities that we all wish to possess, but find it to be difficult to apply when it comes to [real situations in real life.]”

In an article from Brent and Kate McKay, it said,

“Integrity implies the state of being complete, undivided, intact and unbroken.”

The opposite is scattered, fragmented and incomplete.



We must not misunderstand that feeling we get  
when we say or do things that lack integrity. (Pause)

This was exactly what the Israelites were  
feeling in the wilderness of our Exodus reading.

They became divided in their worries;  
fragmented in their belief that Moses was  
*really* acting on God's behalf.

They thought, surely we are going to die out here!

When God told Moses to tell them  
manna and quail were coming, it wasn't  
because God had forgotten to feed  
the newly liberated people,

it was to remind them that God  
was still with them.

Make no mistake that this is the message  
Jesus had for the crowd in our gospel and  
it is the message for us, today, too.

God was still with them.

See beyond the miracle and  
find that God is with us.

In Jesus, the Bread gives life to the world.

“For the bread is that which comes down  
from heaven and gives life  
(not just to you or to me) but  
to the whole world.”

In that beautiful statement from Jesus in verse 33  
we find presence, more than presence,  
we find an intimate God all around. (Pause)

We are brought back to the question,  
“What does it mean to be Christian?”

Like all good sermons there are three points  
and a little poem at the end:

1. Be your authentic self.
2. Live a worthy life. Live with integrity.
3. And finally, work for the food that  
endures for eternal life.

Artist and theologian Elizabeth Gray King wrote,

“We can believe in love and care and  
kindness and humility.

But until we start living and acting as love,  
living out that care, graciously spilling over

with kindness and working with others  
in humility as compared to power,

a belief is just a belief,  
almost an object to be admired.

Believing in the resurrection is ok.

Living resurrection is quite another thing.”

AMEN!