

Summer sermon series on the Third Article of the Creed – July 11, 2010 – Faith Lutheran,
Radcliff, KY

Ephesians 2:19-22; 5:25-27; John 10:16

Pastor

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“You are the Holy, Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.”

I have here a catechism from another church. It reads, “Outside the Church there is no salvation. Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, is necessary for salvation. Therefore, no one may be saved who, knowing that [this church] was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 846) Is this true? Is there no salvation for folks who are not members of this particular church? It begs the question, “What is the church?”

The past four weeks we have explored the third article of the Creed, our confession of faith. In the third article we confess, “I believe in the holy Christian Church.” What is the holy Christian Church? In his first letter to the Corinthians 1:2 the Apostle Paul addressed his readers by saying, **“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Jesseca Baker, Wilma Lee, Anna Wiley, Conny Fullen... Batson Liwonde, Igor Legvinov, Royd Mumba, Julio Corporan, Tse Tat Chiu, Mitsuo Haga. You probably didn't recognize many of those names, and most likely you will not meet them until we are all in heaven. Although these people are from the United States, Thailand, China, Africa and Russia, what they have in common? They all confess their belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Scripture tells us that everyone in the world who believes in Jesus as their Savior is the Church. God's Word is clear. He refutes the before mentioned church's claim that if you are not a member of their church you cannot be saved. All people in world who believe that Jesus lived a perfect life for them as their substitute, who believe that Jesus died to pay for all their sins and who also believe that they will go to heaven because of Christ's resurrection, these people are the Church. You are the Church.

In the creed we confess, “I believe in the *holy* Christian Church, the communion of *saints*...” First of all, why are the members of this Church called *holy*? The robe I'm wearing is fairly clean. But when I pick it up from the dry cleaners, it looks brand new, cleaned and pressed, no stains or wrinkles, no tears or loose threads. It's almost perfect in every way. The robe is a picture of every believer. Before Christ came into your life, you had a robe, but it was filthy, it smelled of the stink of sin, it was torn and tattered, and you stood before God unacceptable for entry into his kingdom.

But the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5.25-27, **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”**

At your baptism, Jesus' blood, offered on the altar of the cross, washed away every stain of your sin. No wrinkle of sin remains on your robe, no blemish, no tears or bare places, but through baptism, your robe is pure and holy; holy because Christ's holy blood, offered to wash away your sins, was poured over you.

It is very appropriate then that the members of the Church are called holy... and saints... A saint is not someone who plays professional football in New Orleans. Oftentimes when people think of a saint they might think of someone like Mother Teresa, who did many saintly works. She helped many people who were in need and demonstrated great compassion for all people. She was peace-loving and kindhearted. The problem is, for all the good she did, Mother Theresa believed that she did more good works than was necessary to gain entrance into heaven. Not only she, but many people in this world believe that lie of the devil. Jesus' good works have earned us heaven already. He was more peace-loving and kindhearted and helped the needy in a way that makes Mother Theresa look like Charles Manson. For Jesus performed his works perfectly, with complete humility and always gave his Father the glory by the works that he did. None of us could ever live a life of service like Jesus. Jesus' perfect life was given to you at your baptism. Enter again the picture of the robe... Christ's perfect life is the robe of white, draped over your shoulders at your baptism, covering over your incomplete, selfish, sinful works. And now you stand before God as his saint, holy in his sight because of Jesus.

In creed we also confess we believe in the holy *Christian* Church. Why is this Church called the *Christian* Church? This evening we will break the soil on our property to pave the way for construction on our new church building. At the beginning of August the land movers will plow the dirt, and in a month or so, the cement mixers will pour the foundation. The foundation is the most important part of this structure. It does not matter how glorious our new building is, if the foundation is not solid, it will sink, crack or crumble.

In the same way, if the foundation of our faith is built on unstable foundation we will crumble and crack and sink. If we build our faith on our feelings or emotions or what "we believe to true," but our "belief" or "opinion" has no support from Scripture, we build on sinking sand. If we build our faith on the idea that we are pretty good people, we build on sinking sand. If we build our faith on our possessions and what we're worth financially, we build on sinking sand.

One of our hymn writers wrote, "**Built on the Rock the Church shall stand even when steeples are falling.**" (CW529:1) We pray that our new building will last 100 years or more, but we know that buildings grow old and deteriorate. The Church, all believers, is built on a solid foundation so that she will never fall. In our Second Lesson this morning we heard the Apostle Paul say, Ephesians 2.19,20, "**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**" The foundation of the Church is the apostles and prophets, not the men themselves, but their message; the Word of Christ. This foundation will never crack or crumble because Christ's words are holy. His promises are certain. He never lies. He always speaks the truth. His word is power; it changes hearts and keeps the members of his Church strong in their faith. You are the Christian Church because your faith is built on Christ alone. Built on Christ you will always stand firm.

In the creed we confess, "I believe in the holy Christian Church, the *communion* of saints." Why is this Church called a *communion* of saints? In the Gospel this morning Jesus said, (John 10.16), "**I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will**

listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” Jesus paints a beautiful picture of a shepherd and his flock of sheep to illustrate our relationship to him. Jesus says there are other sheep who don't belong to his flock yet, unbelievers, but he will bring them into his flock by faith. This is the communion that we enjoy as sheep in Christ's flock. We all believe in one Savior, one faith, and we have one Shepherd who watches over us. That is the wonderful unity we have with all other believers. Christ is our Shepherd. We belong to him and we are united with one another, brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's what you are, but sadly, you do not always act that way toward each other. You look at each other with suspicion or skepticism. The way we talk to each other, it's like little children, bickering back and forth. We put each other down. We act like the opinions of others don't matter. If personalities don't match, if someone rubs you the wrong way, so what?! They are still a brother or sister in Christ, right? Christ says that we will love one another, we will bear patiently with one another. And if a brother or sister actually sins against you, does not Christ instruct you to speak to that person with love and correct them, to bring them back to repentance? Instead, we complain about them, or we let our anger or frustration simmer and stew.

Does God see a communion of saints when he sees and hears this, when he sees us offending our brothers and sisters in Christ, but in affect, we are offending our God, which would have ruined any chance of communion with your God in heaven. Thank God that he does see a communion of saints, because he sees a Shepherd who loved you enough to lay down his life for sheep who love to wander. The Good Shepherd willingly, quietly, steps in front of his sheep, and spares the sheep any punishment, any suffering in hell, any wrath from God, and by that sacrifice, he reconciled you with your God forever. That is what you are...connection with God through Christ's death, connected with each other through Christ's sacrifice.

And when we hear again and again how Christ brought us back to the Father and how he unites us with his death, then we will set aside our foolish pride. We will regard each other as brothers and sisters. We will bear patiently with each other. When a fellow sheep steps out of line, we will rebuke, correct and train with words of love and patience. Because of the great love Christ shows to us, even when we are unlovable. This is the communion we enjoy together as saints – united with each other in one baptism, one faith, and one Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. I believe that I am a member of the Church, that I am holy because of the blood of Christ. I believe that I am a saint because Christ covered me with the robe of his righteousness at my baptism. I believe that I am a Christian because my foundation is Christ and him alone. I believe that I am part of a wonderful communion with all of you and all people all over the world who confess Jesus as Savior from sin. And I believe that I will join the communion of saints in heaven one day. I pray to God that he also keep you in this belief until that time. Amen.