

The Peace of Christ Be With You

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Passion Sunday, March 19, 1989. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31 :9-16; Luke 22:14-23:56.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

We've just heard the story of the suffering and death of Jesus and in a few moments we'll publicly receive new members. These men and women have heard and believe^{the} story of Jesus. In a few moments you'll hear them renounce evil and the ways of sin that separate them from the love of God.

If you aren't familiar with the questions of renunciation you might think, "My, I wonder what they've done to be renouncing evil and the ways of sin. They don't look that bad." That's what you might think if you weren't familiar with these words from the liturgy. Sometimes the repetition of our liturgy keeps us from understanding what membership in the church is all about because, you see, if we're members of the Christian church we've all made similar confessions.

Sometimes people who don't go to church think that we who do *think* we're better than those who don't go to church. Unfortunately, maybe sometimes we give that impression. But how wrong to think that way. The church of Jesus Christ is the one institution in the world that requires of all members a confession that we're sinners; and requires all of its members to renounce the ways of sin and turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as Lord and Savior.

If you're not a member of Christ's church and you were to come to the elders and say, "I'd like to join this church because I think I've lived a pretty good life, I'm not aware of any sin or evil in my life, and I'd like to be associated with people like you." The Elders would probably look somewhat perplexed and say, "Now, if you're not aware of any sin in your life you don't really need the church. And if you knew us the way God

And are you sure you want to be associated with Jesus because he was accused of misleading people, accused of advising people not to pay taxes, starting riots... knows us you probably wouldn't want to be associated with us. If you want to join you've got to understand that Jesus suffered and died for sinners. His church isn't a hotel for saints. It's a hospital for sinners. Now, you don't have to be a great sinner. Any sin will do."

Speaking personally, I'm a member of Christ's Church because I want to experience wholeness in my life and Christ has given gifts to the church that enable us to experience wholeness. I recognise brokenness in my life. Too often, like the disciples, I've childishly argued over who's the greatest. Like Peter, I've made promises to God I haven't kept. Too often I've fallen asleep when I should've been praying. Too often, like the disciples, I've attempted to force the hand of God and get what I want through violent words and actions. Too often I, like Pilate, have chosen the way of expediency rather than the way of justice. Too often, like Peter, I've followed Christ from a distance and stayed close enough to the fire to keep warm but far enough away so that no one will recognise that I'm a Christian.

I confess that. But I believe that the Risen Christ is forgiving me and making me whole. He's strengthening me. He's doing it through the church. He's doing it through your prayers. He's doing it as he speaks to me through his Word in Scripture. He's strengthening me as together we serve him in the community and world. And this Thursday I'll come to the service of Holy Communion not simply because I have to be there, but because I need the medicine of immortality to make me entirely whole. I need Jesus to feed and strengthen me with his own body and blood which alone can make me strong and completely well. I welcome our new members...

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.