

**August 7, 2016 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. 12<sup>th</sup>.  
Sunday after Pentecost. Luke 12:32-40. Waking up and living in the NOW!**

**QUESTION: Today's question is an easy one; what or who is God?**

It has been my experience that most religions that I have studied and am familiar with including **Christianity** are by their very nature designed to **control** the people who ascribe to that religion. We all know there is a long list of **do's** and **don'ts**, **right** and **wrong** behaviors.

That's very sad considering that Jesus makes the poignant promise to his followers in the Gospel of John; (John 8.32)

**“and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”**

And even more troubling to me is the fact that by embracing one particular religion or philosophy you automatically set up a **“them”** and **“us”** situation. What I mean is that by declaring that I have or know the **truth** – the one and only **truth** – everyone else who believes differently is simply **wrong!**

I believe that this kind of thinking and posturing is the greatest **weakness** of Christianity, or for that matter any other religion that claims exclusive access to the truth. In our case declaring with certainty that the **“only”** way to God is through belief in **Jesus Christ**. Think about it, In the extreme it is actually a **heretical** claim really, because it not only expresses a restriction on God's ability to act **outside** of **your** stated beliefs and definitions, but even claims to **know** the very mind of God!

So how can we know anything about God at all? I believe our second lesson from **Hebrews** answers that very well. The author of Hebrews is encouraging his readers to recognize the **superiority of Jesus** as the ultimate and final revelation of God.

So the general and traditional religious response has been to **so deify** Jesus that he is made into an **object of worship** or even **idolatry** rather than someone whose teachings are to be **believed**, and not only believed but actually **lived** as he lived them.

**How can we know what to believe and who?** The answer is in the word **faith**.

And just what is **faith**? We usually understand it to be a **confession** we say:

**“I believe in God the Father Almighty...”** as in the Creed we recite every Sunday at worship. But unless your life is utterly **transformed** and you **live** that faith as seen in your **behavior** then the creed you recite is nothing more than meaningless sounds.

According to **Hebrews**, and this is why I so love this passage;

**“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”**

These words are worth thinking about for a moment. **Assurance**. Being sure of as in **“knowing”** that something is **true**. But not by mere **intellectual knowledge** or **proof** but things **hoped for**. **Hope** is only needed when you don’t know how something is going to turn out. We don’t hope for things we already know or have.

This is really important stuff. And it continues with;

**“The conviction of things not seen.”**

A **conviction** is a firmly held belief. You have not seen or experienced but you **believe** in spite of not knowing. This is truly powerful, powerful stuff. The **Hebrews** passage goes on to describe how from **Abraham** onward the people of God, because of their **faith, believed, hoped** and **survived** against all odds to become a great nation.

How does all of this work, and how can we know? The answer is we **don’t know**, that’s why we live by **faith**. Some of you may remember some time ago I had a question at the beginning of my message about knowing why bad things happen to good people and other struggles that seem to make no sense and cause many to stop believing in God.

**Janet Blank** answered the question better than I had ever heard or considered before, she simply said;

**“I am comfortable with the mystery.”**

It is a mystery, but just because we do not know a precise answer does not mean the whole life and faith enterprise is meaningless. I believe the opposite is true.

This Sunday in our Gospel lesson Jesus reminds us that becoming aware of God's presence and God's will for us is what leads to meaning and purpose in life. It is not so much about following the **right religion**, but rather awakening to the miracle and wonder of life! In that passage Jesus says; "**Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**"

Jesus does not mean that when you die you will go to heaven as is commonly thought, I believe he means that kingdom is available to you **now** when you open yourself up to it!

The key is found in his last words in that section; "**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**" You have the ability to forge your own truth and reality by either **accepting** and **living** according to the teachings of Jesus or following the current popular winds of culture most often based on acquiring ever more material **things!**

**I believe that is exactly the freedom that Jesus is talking about if you wake up the power and reality of his teachings.**

Seen in its historical context, the fact that a human being is a son of God is no new idea. The **Greeks** and **Romans** believed that certain people were especially gifted because they had divine parentage. What makes the **incarnation of God** dwelling in **Jesus** as God's own son is the powerful message that **Jesus** makes mainly that the **Holy Spirit** dwells in **all people** by virtue of **faith**.

The real issue is not the **doctrines** that we human beings from our various cultures, languages and convictions have written into laws to be obeyed, but rather the content of our character and how do we make decisions, and what our **spoken faith** looks like in **action**.

Certainly that's why the lesson from **Hebrews** foreshadows already what was later written in the **Gospel of Matthew** that I read last Sunday about the judgment of humankind. The rationale used by God was to separate those who **actually do** the will of God by living that way – and those who are merely religious and hold to creeds.

The last chapter of this marvelous **thesis on faith** in **Hebrews** begins with these words:

**“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves are being tortured. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’”**

This has absolutely nothing to do with **accepting Christ as your personal savior**, whatever that means, it has **everything** to do with how you **live your life**, what are your morals, how you make the important decisions especially the ones that will affect other people and their well-being.

Jesus even uses the analogy of slaves that have **awakened** to understand that they must be ready for the Master’s return, and when he does come home because he finds that they **are alert – he serves them!** The role is **reversed!**  
**That’s the power of faith!**

**AMEN.**