

HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected

7/2/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Some years ago, as I was speaking during a church council meeting, I was interrupted by one who seemed almost angry. “Why do you keep calling yourself a Lutheran Christian? You are a Lutheran!”

I replied, “No, I am a Christian who worships within the framework of Martin Luther’s understanding of the gospel.

I continued, “I do not worship Luther. I worship Christ. But Martin Luther’s understanding of the teachings of Christ guide how I do that. Nevertheless, first and foremost, I am a follower of Jesus Christ.

That may not seem like a big distinction, but I think it is. It relates to both our identity as people of faith and to our understanding of our relationship with other Christians. Who do we worship? Who do we follow? How do we think about ourselves as believers?

I remember talking to a friend who had been part of a group that had met with other Christians in Africa. As they went around the gathering each person was to introduce her- or himself and then give a brief biographical description. My friend said that the Americans each talked about family and profession in making an introduction. But the Africans, he said, each began the same way. Each one first gave his or her name and then said, “...and I am a baptized follower of Jesus.” For those believers, their identity began with Christ Jesus, and that influenced how they lived their lives. It also reflected both faith (“I am a follower of Jesus”) and action (“I am a baptized follower”).

I am a Lutheran Christian. That means that I follow Jesus Christ above all. I am a brother to all other Christians. How I believe, the way I worship, and the things I prioritize in living my life are because of my faith in Jesus. But how I understand faith and worship and personal values are influenced by the teachings and writings of Martin Luther, most of all, about God’s unconditional love and grace for all people. Sometimes I almost want to say, “I am an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Christian,” because I know that there are other Lutherans who view things related to who can take communion (and who can’t) and who can be a leader in the church (and who can’t) differently than many of us in the ELCA.

Nevertheless, I am Christian, and how I live out my Christianity is as a Lutheran.

In Christ's Love
Pastor Jeffrey