

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 10/22/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Years ago, when I was in college, I was confronted by members of the Campus Crusade for Christ. At the university I attended, this Christian group was very aggressive in their attempts to save people by getting them to join their group. In fact, in their minds, if you weren't part of their group, you weren't really a Christian. The day they cornered me, it was with the purpose of intimidating me to become a member of their organization.

I found myself in the middle of a circle of Campus Crusade guys. "Are you a Christian?" one of them asked.

"Yes," I answered. But since I wasn't part of their group, they had to show me the error of my ways.

"Really?" the first fellow said. "When were you saved?" He wanted to know the date of my religious conversion to Christianity, an experience all of them had had and insisted that everyone else have if they were going to be real Christians.

I replied to him, "I was saved two thousand years ago on a Friday afternoon," referring to Christ's death on the cross as the moment when I was freed from sin.

The first fellow didn't know how to argue with that, but it wasn't what they had been trained to look for in their strategy for converting others. His mouth kept moving, but now no words came out.

A second one took his place in challenging me. "No," he said. "When did you accept Jesus Christ?" again looking for the date of when I made the decision and said the "Believer's Prayer" to become a Christian. Their goal was to first show me that since I hadn't said the Prayer and followed the processes they had, I couldn't really be a Christian. Then they would get me to say the Prayer, join their group, and really find salvation.

Instead, I responded to his questions by saying, "I didn't accept Jesus. He accepted me. I had nothing to do with it."

Now there was silence from all of them. This wasn't what they were expecting, but they couldn't find a theological flaw in my comments. They finally just moved aside and let me walk on.

Lutherans, more than any other denomination, strive to keep the emphasis on what God does, and off of what we do. It is not our works, or our prayers, or our gifts, or our choices that bring us into a saving relationship with Jesus. In fact, we already have that relationship before we can do anything. Jesus' action two thousand years ago on our behalf has brought us into that relationship with God. All we can do is recognize it or reject it. There is nothing we can do to achieve it because it is already ours. All we can do is respond to what we have been given in how we choose to live. Instead of trying to earn God's love because we already have it, we are free to live in answer to that love by seeking to do the things that God wants us to do—namely by serving others with the love we ourselves have received.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey