

Date: December 7, 2025 (Advent 2)

1. Texts: Isaiah 11:1-10; Ps. 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12.
2. Subject: the faith.
3. Topic: faith lived, acted upon and proclaimed.
4. Aim: challenge, guide.
5. Proposition: "It is never enough to claim a Christian heritage. Genuine faith must be seen and heard."

NO CLAIM–PROCLAIM

It sounds odd, but many people have actually been inoculated against the Christian faith. Many potential believers say, "Oh, yeah, I'm Christian. My grandmother used to attend this church." Others say, "Oh, yeah, I was baptized but I only go at Christmas when my mother goes." Such historical connections to the Church shields them from the expectations of genuine Christian faith. They claim to be Christian but without any genuine connection to Jesus. They see no need for anything more because they have an historical relationship to the Church. If the Christian faith were a virus, they will have been vaccinated.

Of course, an empty claim to the Church is not the same as a living and transforming relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. No one can just *claim* the faith—they have to live it, act upon it and proclaim it.

So, genuine Christian faith is a relationship with God the Creator who revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth and who released the Holy Spirit amongst the faithful.

That relationship is mutual: God is in relationship with us, and we are in relationship with him. He talks, we listen. We talk, he listens.

That relationship is characterized by love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender to the will of God. So, mindful of the mutuality of faith, God loves and trust us. He sacrifices himself for us. And he actually gives us freewill, so he surrenders himself to our control—just as Jesus did on the cross.

In turn, we love God and trust him to be God for us. We sacrifice our plans, hopes and fears as we surrender to his will for us.

Ultimately, God lives for us, and we live for God. God acted on our behalf, and we do the same for him. God proclaims his love for us, and we proclaim our love for him to others.

Claiming to be Christian is not enough. We must proclaim the faith in our lives, our lifestyles, our actions and conversations. Christians do not claim to be so—they prove who and what they are through their lives, actions and proclamation.

The Bible outlines how we are to do this. The Bible lays out the principles and guidelines for living the life of Christ in our circumstances. We have to work out what that means in 2025, but the principles and guidelines are there.

The principles do not start out with being a “good person”. Just as it is not enough to claim to be a Christian, it is not enough to be kind, generous and supportive to those you love. Being nice is not the same as being a Christian.

Jesus once said,

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹

Jesus loved the disciples and sacrificed his life for them. This is the quality of love we are to show to others. We sacrifice our lives for the sake of others.

So, we make sacrifices on behalf of the immigrant, refugee and exile. We make sacrifices for the houseless, the addicted and the abused.

By such means we demonstrate and prove our love for God and for others. We can also find the means to demonstrate our trust in God and in others.

To trust God is to act as if he is God, active in you and working through you. We behave as if God is faithful and true to his word. We do this, even if

¹ John 15:12-14.

there are doubts and fears. We believe in God and so we behave as if God were genuine and real.

To trust others is only a little more complicated.

People say that you have to earn trust, as if you started out at zero trust points and had to do things to earn someone else's trust. That's not really the most helpful image.

Rather, we start out at, say, 100 trust points. As we prove ourselves trustworthy, we add to our account. As we prove ourselves untrustworthy, trust points are deducted. So, your clergyperson starts out at 100 when she first arrives. Every brilliant sermon or effective pastoral care episode adds points. Every harsh criticism deducts points.

And every individual critic keeps tabs on your trust account. It's complicated, true, but that's the way trust works. Trust is not earned, but it can be eroded.

As far as the Christian is concerned, being trustworthy is a necessary part of our proclamation of the faith. God trusts us. We trust God. Therefore, we prove ourselves trustworthy to others and connect that with our faith. It is part of who we are as disciples. We reflect the nature of God in our actions and words.

That's the outline of faithful Christian living in the Bible. God loves and trusts us. He sacrificed himself for us and even surrendered himself to our freewill. In turn, we love God and trust him to be God for us. We sacrifice our plans and lives for his as we surrender to him. We proclaim this relationship of faith in our lives, lifestyles, actions and words. That's what a Christian does. That's who a Christian is.

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian actually is one. Jesus once said, You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree

cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.²

It is through our lives, lifestyles, actions and words that people will know our faith and the quality of our discipleship. It is through the lives, lifestyles, actions and words of others that we will know their faith and the quality of their discipleship.

May each of us experience the grace and courage to prove ourselves disciples of Jesus.

AMEN.

² Matthew 7:16-20.