

Text:

Theme: The Main Course - This We Believe...

May 22, 2016

How many of you really like your meat and potatoes? How many of you prefer soup or a salad as your main course? As we think about food, we all have our preferences, and, fortunately we're all entitled to enjoy whatever food we prefer. However, when we turn our focus to the Christian faith, personal preference falls by the wayside and the main course, the core beliefs of our faith take front and center stage. Today is known as Holy Trinity Sunday, a Sunday to focus on the Trinity. As we do so today, we focus on the main course, the core of our faith.

I. The essence of the Christian faith has been summarized in a most excellent way in the Apostles' Creed. Even so, there are many whose faith deviates from this main course. 1. For some, faith is like chicken broth. They claim to have faith, but they've watered it down so much, opened the door to so many divergent ideas that there's almost nothing left. When they open the Bible, they pick and choose what sounds good to their faith pallet. Whatever doesn't fit their liking, they toss out. By the time they're finished, their faith soup looks like weak coffee, no main course, not even a side salad. They have so little that one could easily question whether saving faith even existed.

2. For others faith is a smorgasbord. At first glance, the smorgasbord comparison sounds great. "Here is all the faith-food that's available. Enjoy all you want of whatever you want!" From a food standpoint it's a great way for everyone to have what they want. But from a faith standpoint, smorgasbord leaves our faith indulging in whatever is attractive to us. If it looks good to our faith-pallet, by all means take as much as you want. Yet, the smorgasbord approach leaves us making the choices. Faith then becomes something we earn, something we attain by our efforts. Some might think it's their choice, but by doing so, they miss the main course.

3. For still others faith is a side salad, not the meat and potatoes of life, not the central focus for the rest of life. Instead, it's an optional addition. At best, it's viewed as the magic genie that's supposed to fix everything that's broken. The side-salad faith leaves God on the fringes. Maybe He exists, but He's not an active part of day-to-day living. The basic mentality is, "I'll do it my way; I'll go my own way, and if I get in a bind, then I expect God to be there for me." For those who think God is too busy to be actively involved in their personal lives, it sounds like a good approach, but, at the end of the day, their faith-life is on the verge of starvation.

B. Having considered some of the popular approaches, where do we stand? What's the main course? 1. The main course is that we believe in a God who is triune; we believe in the Trinity. In the first book of the Bible, we find the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present although the term is never used in the Bible. All three are undeniably present before you even pass the third verse of the first chapter. Time after time, you find all three persons of the Trinity referenced together and individually. I can't explain the Trinity, nor can anyone else for that matter, yet that doesn't change the main course. We believe in the Triune God, the main course of the Christian faith.

2. The main course is that we believe that God created the world in six twenty-four hour days. We say it in our creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

maker of heaven and earth.” That’s our statement of faith. No big bang theory, no random molecules, no man evolving. God created the world out of nothing. That’s the main course. How do you create something out of nothing? I have no idea, but with God anything is possible. In six days, our main course says that God created the world. He could have done it in six seconds, but God chose to do it in six days. This we believe because God said it and that settles it.

3. The main course is that we believe Jesus is the Son of God. Listen to these words carefully, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was a god.” Do you hear anything that sounds out of place? Any red flags in your mind? “The Word was a god” with a small “g”. Is that what we believe; is that the main course? Not for a moment! That’s an inaccurate translation by a group of scholars who are also non-Christians! At the Transfiguration, God, the Father speaks and says, “This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!” Anything partly cloudy in that statement? Jesus is the Son of God. This we believe. This we profess.

4. The main course is that Jesus, the Son of God, died so that we might be forgiven. We speak the words, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Everything else in God’s Word stands or falls based on this single doctrine of forgiveness, the teaching that says clearly, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” Good works, they are a response to faith not a means of earning faith. Living a good life; doing good deeds. Those are appropriate things to do for sure, but they are always in the response category. Forgiveness - that’s the rock on which we build our faith. That’s the main course of faith regardless of what our menu for the day may be.

5. The main course is that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Those of you who are really good in math, what do you get when you add $1+1+0$ or $1+0+1$ or $0+1+1$? Do you ever arrive at three? Triune is three in one, but you can’t have three in one if there are only two! It sounds so simple, yet there are Christians, in fact, there are Lutheran churches teaching their kids in Catechism class that the Holy Spirit is an “energizing force.” Energizing force doesn’t work for me. It doesn’t work in the main course. This we believe doesn’t allow for an “energizing force.” It only allows for a person whom we know by faith to be the third person of the Trinity.

6. The main course is that the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts at Baptism. Water and words, it doesn’t appear spectacular, does it? But everything happens in that simple moment. When the child is too small to even think that they have done enough of the right things to earn faith, God steps onto the scene in the person of the Holy Spirit. As the water and those words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” are spoken, the Holy Spirit does His amazing work, a work of grace. The Holy Spirit working and maintaining that precious gift of faith - This we believe because it’s the main course of our Christian faith.

7. The next time you consider your meal preference, your mind will remember. It will recall the main course and as it does, say to yourself with heartfelt boldness, “This I believe!” Amen.