



CHRIST CENTERED

Rev. Mark A. Medina
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Whenever a person unites with a Presbyterian congregation, they are asked three questions which go right to the heart of what one professes. I will be asking the question of you at the end of the sermon for you to reaffirm your faith in Christ Jesus.

Today we will nominate and elect individuals to serve as Ruling Elders and Deacons. These future church officers as well as others before them have ordination questions to answer. The vows are very specific to servant leaders. Of the 9 vows, there are 2 which ask the most vital question to the servant leader's heart.

Each of these questions speak to a person's faith and commitment to Christ. Here too I will ask all those who have been previously ordained as a Ruling Elder, Deacon or Teaching Elder to reaffirm your vows.

Well, Rev. Medina, you are going to ask what we believe. So what do you believe? My answer is that I believe Jesus Christ is my personal Lord and Savior. I seek to follow him and try to be a likeness of him in the world. I pursue a ministry that honors my call to what he teaches me and has given to me through grace.

So we ask ourselves, where is Jesus in my life and am I Christ-like in all my relationships through word and action? Today, we continue the sermon series on the beliefs of those in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We lift up what it means to look to Christ as the center of our life and faith as we serve him in a world of challenge and hatred.

The following saying comes from the *Minds Christianity Today* ministry. **"A Christian is: a mind through which Christ thinks, a heart through which Christ loves, a voice through which Christ speaks, and a hand through which Christ helps."** [Mind Christianity Today]

Friends, it is essential that we profess Christ in our lives everyday. If we say the words of scripture that testifies to the gift of Christ then we live to be Christ-like in our relations with others that we know and with those who are strangers. God offers you and me salvation and grace through Christ His Son. Thus we truly understand what it means in the Gospel of John. We hear these words during Advent as we prepare for the coming of the Christ child. Yet they ring true in the genuine Christian today.

Just like John the Baptist, we **"bear witness about the light...⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹⁴ And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** The word became flesh in Emmanuel, God with us - Christ Jesus

John also emphasizes the ones who truly believe in him are his people. **¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of**

man, but of God. This belief in Christ is more than just words in our lives. These words are to become a living part of our life today and in how we treat other people.

If we say we have Christ in our lives then we ought to be able to truly live what we profess. The Augustinian monk Thomas à Kempis wrote in his book *The Imitation of Christ* these words: **“Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.”**

Let me share with you about an older couple, Doris and Claire, in a congregation where I was the installed pastor. Shortly after I arrived at the church, Doris came to visit me with her thoughts on where the church needed to go into the future. She was telling me that I needed to do this and that so the church would be okay especially if I followed her directions. I thanked her for her thoughts and ideas as she parted for a doctor’s appointment.

Later a couple of the members of the search committee shared with me that Doris and Claire had been going through some rough times as their health was changing and their influence in the church was waning. They were strong in their faith and seemed to seek a Christ-like life. I kept those thoughts filed away in my mind as I worked with this family.

Over the next several weeks, I was hearing rumblings about how Doris was going around to other members speaking badly about me. A special friend of Doris and Claire’s was very concerned about how she was sowing seeds of discontent through critical comments, by seeking others to join her crusade and to place roadblocks in the ministry I was trying to accomplish.

The negativity and acrimony was flowing through the church with Doris right in the middle of it all. Others were coming to me with the same agenda items as she. This conflict and bitterness had to stop because it was causing others to not attend worship or fellowship events. So I asked one of Doris’ friends, who was also a Ruling Elder on Session, to go with me to meet Doris and Claire in their home to resolve this bitterness and dissension that was infecting the church and our relationship.

The meeting was set for their home a few days away. As the day approached, I was thinking all kinds of things and what to say to them as they hurt me as well as damaging my relationships with others. I could have really laid into them for such behavior. But it was then that I remembered the little stone I carried around with me in my pocket.

So I reached in and rubbed the stone while I remembered the words of Jesus, **“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** (John 8:7b) This stone has been with me over the past 30 yrs of ministry. This is my reminder of what Jesus said. The words of the Savior saved me from doing something rash and hurtful even though I had been deeply hurt. My approach to Doris changed as I prayed and thought more about what Christ would have me do in this situation. What would you do?

After an hour of working through all her anger and concerns as well as my issues with her, we came to a place of peace and hope for our relationship. Claire said he had no real issues with me but wanted to support Doris. But you know, I had a deep sense that not all was out of her. So I asked her, “Doris, thank you for this time of coming to a better understanding of our relationship. However, I have a feeling, a sneaking feeling that you have one or two more things to say that haven’t been said. What is at the core of the issues for us to work on?”

Doris then started to cry and said, “I am sorry for all the trouble I caused you and the church. My faith has been in tatters for some time and my heart has been convicting me to be at peace with you, Rev. Medina. Christ has not been at the center of my life and evil infected my life and how I viewed you as my pastor. I am sorry.”

I said to her, “Doris, I am sorry too. Our relationship was broken but is now being restored. Is there anything else that is at the core of the discontent?” She slowly said through her tears, “I guess through it all, I just wondered if you would be here for Claire and me as we struggle with ongoing health concerns.” That was the basis for all the issues. She wanted to know if I was going to be there for them. She went on, “You see, Claire’s doctor tells him that the cancer is back and there is nothing more they can do. So we are getting our affairs in order.”

“Doris, I will be here for you two as you go through this time of transition and adjustment. I believe that Christ is here now and is the witness to our relationship with him and with one another. My commitment is to be with you now and in the future as you go through the difficult days ahead.”

We all were crying and hugging each other as we closed with prayer for Christ to always be with us during this times and the times ahead. And to be Christ-like in what we do and what we say. The room was filled with peace, love and hope. Praise be that Christ was among us then and is among us today. For Christ is alive in each one of us.

My dear brothers and sisters, the word made flesh in Christ is among us now and for ever. He will always be there for us when we remember him. We place our full attention on him and we look at him. There so much in this world that’s trying to distract us and trying to get us to hurt other people. With Christ in our sights and in our minds, we have a way of getting through it all knowing that Christ is with us. May we each keep our eyes on Christ and live with loving hearts.

Now to you, members and guest, please respond to these questions.

1. Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? **I do.**
2. Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

3. Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love? **I will, with God’s help.**

And to you Ruling Elders, Deacons and Teaching Elders/Pastors, please respond to these questions.

1. Do you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ your savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? **I do.**
2. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world? **I will.**

I close with a prayer that Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus. Let us pray.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Scriptural Support:

Ephesians 3:14–21

A Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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John 1:1-18

The Word Became Flesh

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.