

+ Matthew 10:32-42 + Who Cares? +
+ 487th Anniversary of the Presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*/Confirmation of Kayla Bidwell +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 25 June 2017 +

Put yourself in the well-worn shoes of a teacher. She devotes countless hours and energy preparing for her students. When the year starts, she spends countless hours correcting, teaching new lessons and explaining old ones, dealing with parents, and disciplining students who get out of line. Breaks are most welcome, but all along she hopes her students are learning.

As the last quarter begins, she realizes that a couple subjects didn't get as much attention as she hoped. Recalling how her class of eager minds has grown, she decides to ramp up on those subjects. With the best of intentions, she tries to play catch-up during the final weeks of the year, but there's one problem. Once the calendar flips from May to June with the weather warming up, students' minds flip from active to autopilot. Their eagerness to learn turns into eagerness to do anything else. A well-intentioned attempt at catch-up becomes a slow slog of cramming a few more facts and figures into those once eager minds. It finally comes to a head when one student asks, "Why do we have to learn this? Who cares?" A question like that can take the air out of a teacher. The student sees no point in learning what he's learning because what he's learning doesn't seem to matter.

"Who cares?" Rolls off the tongue pretty easily, doesn't it? Before this morning, how many of you knew what the *Augsburg Confession* is? Yet we're commemorating the 487th anniversary of its presentation. Did you wonder as you looked at your worship folder, "What is that and why are we celebrating its 487th anniversary? Does anyone else care about this except Pastor?"

Maybe you noticed that today is Confirmation Day. We make a big deal about the confirmation of our young people in this congregation, but as every one of our students writes down on Day 1 of every school year, "Confirmation is not graduation." It's more foundation building for a lifetime of ongoing growth in God's Word. So what's the big deal? Why does it matter? Who cares?

We might even ask ourselves that question when it comes to our lives as Christians. Being a Christian is not easy. There's a reason Jesus describes it as taking up your cross and following him. Yet when it gets particularly difficult, are you ever tempted to think, "Why does this matter? Who cares?"

Those were questions on the minds of Jesus' disciples too. As Jesus was sending his disciples out into his harvest fields, he informed them how challenging their work would be, and they were all tempted to think, "I'm going to endure what for serving Christ? Rejection? Betrayal? Opposition? Threats? All that pain and toil for what? Does my work even matter? Does anyone even care?" Such an attitude could be dangerous not only to their work, but to their souls. They needed to be warned, but they also needed to know how much Jesus cared. By doing so, Jesus answers "Who cares?" for us too.

"Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven."

Consider how many people demand your support, your allegiance. By the choices you make, the conversations you have, the people with whom you interact, and the actions you do, you express your support. You acknowledge how devoted you are to your country, your community, your school, your favorite teams, your favorite organizations, your company, your congregation, your family.

...But what about Jesus? I'm not talking about getting in people's faces, "I'm devoted to Jesus. I follow him and so should YOU!", or constantly talking about Jesus all the time. Yet if I were to ask your family or your friends or your neighbors or your co-workers or your classmates, "Is this person a Christian?", how would they respond? Does your allegiance to Jesus reflect itself in how you interact with others not just here, but when you go to work or school, when you're out in the community or at home? You might be tempted to look at your Christian faith as something you do only on Sunday mornings, but not Monday through Saturday. It's easier to be like people riding on a subway—head down, mouth shut, no eye contact. Just go to work or school, interact with the people around you, but don't reveal who you are on Sunday morning. Looking at it that way, shouldn't Jesus say to you, "I don't know you either"?

...But he doesn't. Jesus looks at you and says, "My child, remember my love. Remember how in my love for you I left my heavenly home to become like you yet without sin. I grew in my mother's womb. I was born. I grew up. I put myself in your place, because if I didn't, God would disown you forever. I took your place not only in life, but in death. I allowed my life to be taken to forgive you for those times when you've stayed silent, when you haven't

let your trust in me shine in your words and actions, when you've acted like you weren't mine. But you are my child covered in my forgiveness! Now I give you the courage, the strength to be my child not just on Sundays, but every day. When you go to work or school or out in your community, let your identity in me flow through your words and actions. Others may not care. Others may even reject you, but I won't. I care because you are my child."

"...But Lord, acknowledging you to those around me doesn't make my life any easier!" That's true, and Jesus paints a starkly realistic picture. ***"Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."***

It's important to keep in mind that the peace Jesus speaks of here is not the same peace that angels sang about on Christmas or that prophets foretold when they called him ***"Prince of Peace."*** The angels and prophets sang of One who would restore peace between God and us—a peace destroyed by our first parents back in Eden. Jesus came to restore that peace for us.

Now that peace with God does impact how you treat others. Throughout Scripture, God's people rejoice because of the true peace they share as fellow believers in Christ on the basis of the pure teaching of God's Word. That same peace with God impacts how you treat everyone else around you. You see them differently—as souls for whom Christ your Savior lived and died.

...But remember that Jesus didn't come to bring peace, but a sword! You see, Jesus doesn't promise to keep the peace between us and others. Following Christ might end some of your relationships. Following Christ can even mean ***"a man's enemies will be the members of his household."***

For some, confessing Christ means being cut off from their families or even worse. For most of us, you might be odd. You might get questioned why you drive so far to go to church rather than spend Sunday as a day off. You might be pressured to follow what your family wants rather than Christ, to always give them higher priority. You might be tempted to keep your mouth shut about Christ's impact on your life when you get together with family or friends. That's tough because it comes from the people you love, but who do you love more—your parents? Kids? Family? Friends? Or do you love Jesus?

"The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses life because of me will find it." It's such a strong temptation. I dearly love my parents, my kids, my family, my friends. I don't want to lose the intimate connections I have with them, but do I love them more than my Savior? If I do, I'm not worthy of him. I deserve to be rejected, forsaken, condemned.

...But you know what? Jesus loves you more! Jesus loved and honored his earthly parents, but love and honor for his heavenly Father was more important. Jesus loved his siblings, but he wouldn't let them prevent him from carrying out his mission that time they thought he was going crazy. Thankfully, they later got it. Jesus loved his friends dearly, but accepted the suffering and death that resulted from their betrayal and abandonment. Why? Jesus cared. Jesus loved them more! Jesus loves us more! That's why Jesus cares that I love him more than these. That's why Jesus cares that I take up my cross.

I'd much rather step around that heavy cross than heave it up and follow Jesus on a path often filled with heartbreak or sorrow. Yet there beneath the cross, we see how much we need Jesus when others turn their backs on us in rejection or ridicule. There beneath the cross we see the Savior who endured hell because he cared about us more. He knew that if any of us were to be worthy in his sight, he needed to bear his cross for us first. Now loved by him, we take up our crosses and follow him not because others care so much or we're trying to impress God, but because Jesus cares about us more.

As we follow Jesus beneath the cross, we lose our old lives in him and find a new lives of service. ***"The one who welcomes you welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he's righteous will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward."***

One of the great temptations for believers of every age is the idea that as a Christian I need to strive for works that are more impressive to God and others. The daily, "ordinary" works of husbands and wives, parents and

kids, teachers and students, pastors and members, employers and employees are viewed as just “ordinary,” boring, uninspiring. We’re tempted to always reach for higher, more impressive deeds as Christians and congregations rather than find joyful satisfaction in the broad array of opportunities we have serving in our “ordinary” callings that God has given to each of us.

So what does Jesus say here? He promises blessing for the simple task of hospitality, of support, of welcoming and assisting and encouraging your fellow believers and those who serve God’s people. What’s so impressive about giving a little one a cup of cold water? Who cares? Jesus cares!

You’re not just serving that thirsty little one or that fellow believer or that public servant of the Lord. You’re serving Jesus. You’re welcoming Jesus into your home. You’re supporting and encouraging Jesus. You’re giving Jesus a cup of cold water—and Jesus even blesses you for that! He promises grace upon grace—frosting slathered on his cake of salvation. Amazing, isn’t it? Jesus typically doesn’t call us to significant, impressive works, but he cares that I care about serving others even when it seems insignificant because I’m serving him.

When it comes to following Jesus, who cares? Many around you don’t, but Jesus cares. Jesus cares about your confession, your priorities, your service. If Jesus cares, then we care too. We care that our allegiance to Jesus is clear. We care that Jesus is our highest priority even if we have to bear a cross to follow him. We care about serving others, even when what we’re doing seems ordinary and insignificant, because we’re serving Jesus. We care because Jesus cares. Praise God for his gracious and eternal care! Amen.