

“Is Christianity a Matter of the Head, or the Heart, or Both?”  
 Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 2019 and Confirmation Sunday  
 John 16:23-33  
 Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado  
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Is Christianity life or doctrine? Is it the content of what we believe, both in the Law and the Gospel, or is it action? Is it the passion of conviction and the zeal of faith or doctrinal and historical content? Is it about the head, i.e., knowledge, or the heart, i.e., feeling, longing, zeal, love?

Note that these questions are posed in the form of an either/or: either life or doctrine; either action or the content of what we believe; either the head or the heart; either knowledge or love. And there seems to be a debate about these questions today. And the debate suggests that we must choose between these two things, because there is no way to bring them together. And our culture may teach us that following the heart is more exciting and where good things are to be found.

But the reality is that Christianity involves both.

We find this in our Gospel reading. Jesus uses the phrase “in that day” twice. He uses the phrase “in my name” three times. He refers to the hour, the time, when such and such will happen. The phrase “in that day” refers to when things will happen, history. In this case, it refers to His resurrection. The “Name” can refer to the content of who Jesus is and what He reveals about God as Father. We could think of these things as knowledge.

Yet, He then also talks about asking the Father and receiving, in His Name, so that our joy will be full (John 16:23). Thus, He speaks about prayer. Prayer stems from trust and longing and zeal for God. It also stems from the deepest need, when knowledge is swallowed up by concern.

Jesus speaks of the world and having tribulation in it (John 16:33). Thus, He speaks about life. Life entails action. How are we going to live? What are we going to live by? What is the hope that inspires us?

He speaks about taking heart. He has overcome the world (John 16:33). Thus, He speaks about faith and courage and hope and peace in Jesus, in the midst of difficulty. He speaks about the heart.

In the same passage, Jesus speaks about both what we could call knowledge and what we could call matters of the heart. He brings the two together. He does not regard them as an either/or, but as a both/and. For it is difficult to seek and trust and rely upon God and Jesus in our deepest need if we do not know whom we are seeking; if He has not come into our time and place to tell us; to show us; to act for us in His own death and resurrection. It is difficult to know the tribulation the world brings if we do not know the truth about right and wrong, as God sees it and teaches us. On the other hand, what good has the knowledge done if it does not teach our hearts to believe, to pray, to seek God in trust; to love; to put into action through faith the right and wrong God teaches? So-called head and heart go together.

This has a lot to do with confirmation.

Certainly, confirmation involves a course of study. We study Christian doctrine from Scripture and the *Small Catechism*. We learn the content of the Christian faith, the “what” we believe. In the either/or question, we are learning knowledge about God, ourselves, our world, and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, all from the perspective of Law and Gospel.

But this knowledge without the heart does not lead anywhere. Life involves action, things

we do; things that others do to us; things that happen.

There is a lot we need to know so that our feet and hands and bodies are going in a way that is pleasing to God and good for others. There is a lot we need to know about God so that we know where to turn when the things of life happen; so we know whom to seek help from for direction in life. We need knowledge for this seeking.

But Jesus leads us not only to know but to believe; to believe that the God we are taught to know also cares about us intimately. He leads us to pray, to seek Him with all our heart, as our hearts are guided and directed by the knowledge we have been taught.

So head and heart go together. The knowledge we learn teaches our hearts to trust and guides our lives.

This is important because Jesus says that in the world we have tribulation. This is not meant to make us afraid, but wise. Not all the glitter and apparent freedom and fun the world has to offer is good. To navigate the world, we need the wisdom brought about by the knowledge our Lord teaches and to trust in Him. We need the trust inspiring truth that Jesus has overcome the world.

So confirmands, it has been a delight to work with you the last few months. My hope for you this day, and always, is that you trust what you have been taught from God's Word. It will lead you well. Come back to it again and again in life.

If you experience the world's tribulation, and as you seek your way in life as God's child, may what you have learned inspire your heart to ask the Father, to remember God's grace and love for you in Jesus; to remember Jesus's words to you today that the Father Himself loves you and hears you (John 16:27).

The purpose of the course of study you have completed is not just to give you knowledge but to lead you into faith in God your Father and to teach you wisdom. It is meant to teach your heart whom to trust, whom to fear above all, who loves you without ceasing, namely, your Father in heaven, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is intended to teach you to seek Him where He is to be found here at church in His word and Sacrament and then in life in His word and prayer. In church and life, the stuff we are taught in confirmation lives on in real life.

God's blessings to you in Jesus as you go on from this day, as life awaits you as a child of God.

Amen.