

Acknowledge Christ, Worship Christ

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
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Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

1. Introduction

It is my very real privilege to preside at this Confirmation this morning.

I grew up in a 'church sending' family with God fearing parents.

I learned about Jesus because my parents sent me to Sunday school. As a 14 year old I had to attend Confirmation classes based on what is called *The Catechism* (a series of questions and answers about the essentials of the Christian faith) and then be interviewed by my Rector to determine my readiness to confirm the baptismal promises made by my godparents when I was too little to know what was happening.

I don't remember too much about the particulars of the interview except thinking our minister had a lot of books! But he must have made an impact on me because I recall going home knowing I had to be serious about this step. Kneeling beside my bed I prayed a simple prayer of commitment.

My confirmation was therefore not just a graduation from Sunday School as it was for the majority those days but a significant public declaration that I belonged to Christ and wanted to follow him all the days of my life. My own confirmation was a very significant spiritual occasion so I trust this service will be just as memorable for you.

2. Acknowledging Christ (Matthew 16:13-16)

In a few moments I will ask you to declare publicly that you turn to Christ.

In our gospel reading Jesus asked his disciples two questions.

In the first place, you will recall that he asked them what other people thought of him. There were a variety of answers which all somehow affirmed that he was a prophet. Clearly many people were impressed by Jesus and saw him doing and saying the kind of things they thought prophets would do and say.

I suspect we might get similar responses if we asked people the same question today. While few might use the term prophet apart from those from an Islamic background, many would affirm that he was a great teacher. For example, even Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India was massively inspired by the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. However he balked at going further writing on one occasion that, "I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohamed or Zoroaster." Gandhi epitomises the spirit of post modern Australia which is impressed with Jesus as one of the great religious leaders of history but is very uncomfortable with more than this.

In the second place, Jesus asked them but who do you say that I am? He sought the verdict of those who had left their homes and jobs to live with him and share his ministry. Peter, acting as spokesman, answered, " You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter was convinced that Jesus is God's long promised anointed Saviour king who would overthrow God's enemies, gather the scattered people of God and establish the perfect reign of God. But more than that he had become convinced that Jesus is also uniquely related to God. He could not have ascribed a higher place to Jesus, even if the full implications were not

known until after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, when all the disciples finally understood that Jesus was their Lord and their God.

So my friends as a Bishop in the church of God I am really asking you this second question. I am asking you to confess publicly your verdict about Jesus. Then I will ask you about your future intentions and you will effectively declare to me and this congregation that you intend to worship him with all that you have and all that you are all the days of your life.

What will this mean?

3. Worshipping Christ (Romans 12:1-2)

It is explained partly in the opening verses of the reading from Romans and this is your Confirmation text I want you always to remember — I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Sometimes we Christians have regrettably given people the wrong impression by implying that 'worship' happens only in special buildings at special times and with special ceremonies.

Now of course gathering regularly week by week to praise and adore God together is essential to represent on earth what is always happening in heaven, but 'worship' does not cease when we walk out of this church building. The Apostle Paul says that in gratitude for all the mercies of God we have received in Christ we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is the great response God desires from all of us.

Of course, when this was first written it would have been a startling instruction. In those days if you wanted a blessing from God you would go to the temple and stand at the altar watching as your animal was slain and then wholly or partially burnt.

This was the way for that generation to say thank you to God.

It seems bizarre to us because we live after the coming of Jesus, who actually offered on the cross the last blood sacrifice God ever wants to see.

So we, who now trust in the crucified Christ, no longer offer something but instead we offer ourselves entirely. We present our entire being (mind, personality, emotions, spirit) as a living sacrifice.

In a church service one Sunday, the offering plate came to a little girl at the end of a pew.

She took the plate, put it down on the floor and stood in it. When the sidesperson asked her what she was doing, she responded, "In Sunday School I learned I was supposed to give myself to God". She had got the right idea in part, but being a living sacrifice means surrendering ourselves afresh to God and his service in the week that lies ahead.

As Isaac Watts put it in his famous hymn:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all!*

Paul therefore says that our whole life is our spiritual worship.

He takes the Old Testament language of priesthood and sacrifice and applies it to our daily living for God in the community and our homes.

The truth is that God is praised as we seek to obey him in the way we do our work or studies, live in our families, relate to our neighbours and transact our business. True worship is the free surrender of ourselves as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God.

Living for the glory of God is what we were designed for. We were meant to live for Jesus and do his will. This is how we worship God every day as we commit ourselves to following Jesus.

But my friends if we are going to do this then we also need to be changed inside. This is described both negatively and positively in the text.

Negatively, we are not to be conformed to this world or as another translation puts it, don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould. We need to continue to resist any pressure to be shaped by the norms of our culture. Just because everyone does something or thinks certain things does not make them right! Regrettably we also unconsciously mimic others because we don't want to be the odd person out.

It is unnerving how easily we can adopt our society's latest values. For example the advertisers and media constantly tell us that real life is lived in the here and now, security depends on money, contentment depends on things and self help is the route to self fulfilment. Moreover in this post modern world truth and morality have become thoroughly relative as tolerance has become the supreme virtue with every opinion and lifestyle now equally valid.

But Paul says that we must constantly question the presuppositions of the world if we are to truly worship God. We need regularly to say no to the assumptions of our surrounding culture or peer group where they do not square with what God has revealed in the Bible.

Positively, we are to continue to be transformed by the renewing of your minds. While we live in an instant world and would prefer instant change, a lifelong process of change is envisaged in this text.

The word used suggests a real metamorphosis is needed, like a tadpole becoming a frog or a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. In fact it is almost a transfiguration as we are changed from one glory to another until we become like Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). This transformation occurs through the renewal of our minds by the ministry of indwelling Spirit of God, whom we received when we first put our faith in Jesus.

Remember our whole thinking has been infected by sin, but as we yield to God's Spirit and feed on his words in the Scriptures, he renews so that we can both recognise and do the will of God.

The really good news is that our daily life of obedient worship does not depend only on us. We are not left to our own devices, but instead as cooperate with God's Spirit and follow Jesus, he strengthens us to delight in God's good and acceptable and perfect will.

So my friends as we re-programme our minds with the things of God (if I can put it that way), we will be then able to offer that daily worship which pleases God as we live for Jesus.

4. Conclusion

In Confirmation you turn to Christ, the Son of the living God as your Saviour and Lord. In Confirmation you commit yourselves to a life of worship. As we pray regularly at the end of each Eucharist,

*Father, we offer ourselves to you
as a living sacrifice
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to the praise of your glory. Amen.*