

October 28, 2007

Ted Turner story

Many of you have heard of American media mogul and philanthropist Ted Turner. As a businessman, he is the founder of CNN, the first 24-hour cable news channel. He founded Turner Broadcasting System and WTBS, the superstation. As a philanthropist, he is well known for his \$1 billion pledge to the United Nations.

Turner owns the Atlanta Braves Baseball team and was also in the news for his marriage to actress and political activist Jane Fonda.

Turner has had a lot of success but in an interview he tells a sad story of his youth. When he was a child his sister became very sick. Turner prayed that God would heal her. She died and Turner stopped being a Christian. This story is sad on two levels, one is it always tragic when a child dies and when a young child's sibling dies. This is also sad and tragic because he stopped being a Christian. He saw no good use for praying and believing in God if it didn't save his sister. He now claims to be an atheist. I don't believe in atheists but there you have it.

Turner's Christian education which stopped when he was very young could not handle reality that bad things can happen to good people and that even though we pray in earnest bad things can still happen.

No one can handle that reality that's why we remain with Jesus.

Jesus and the believers

In our gospel reading for today who is Jesus talking to? Jews, Jesus is talking to Jews which refers to people who reside in Jerusalem or Judea. Specifically he is talking to Jews who had believed in him. Sometime in the past they had believed in him.

Some believed in him in the past and were believing in him at that moment.

Some believed in him in the past but were not sure at that moment

And some believed in him in the past but didn't believe in him now.

We are talking about a group of people so there were probably people never believed in Jesus.

So Jesus is speaking to people who had believed in him in one way or another.

This is just like here and now.

We have some people here with a faith history and are still believers

Some have faith in their history but are not so sure now

Some have faith who are off track

And I would imagine, we have some here today who are not believers, ***but we are glad you're here.***

What is Jesus talking to these people about? Jesus is talking to them about Discipleship, what it means to be Jesus' disciple, which means Jesus' student, someone who learns from him. His is talking to them about remaining his students.

And why does he want them to remain his disciples, his students? Why does he want them to continue to learn from him? For freedom and truth.

They miss understand. The Jews misunderstand. They think they have true freedom by birth, they think that they receive freedom and truth because they are a descendant of Abraham, that it is in their DNA.

That is no more true than us believing that we have freedom and truth through those people buried in the cemetery out there. There is opportunity, there is a heritage of faith but Jesus calls us as he called those Jews to remain with him.

I can read this paper with my glasses on. But in order to read in the future I need to keep my glasses on. They have to remain on.

Jesus is encouraging them to be his students and remain his students and keep on learning because that is where freedom and truth reside, with Jesus. Remain learning and living with Jesus.

Baptism promises

We often hear among people who are not aware of the Lutheran understanding of baptism say things like:

Do they believe once baptized always baptized? It's as if they think we believe that baptism is some magical trick that forces God to do what he really doesn't want to do. That baptism is, saying the magic words, applying the magical waters. Then if you are baptized you have the magical powers to force God to do what he doesn't want to do. That God who would really rather damn us for all eternity, that God who would like to send us to where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. God would really like to zap us but because we now have the magical powers of baptism he can't hurt you.

Some people think that the Lutheran understanding is that once you are baptized you can do whatever you want, which we all assume is something terrible. We can do whatever we want and there is nothing that God can do about it because we have the magical powers of baptism.

That is not the Lutheran understanding. The Lutheran creed from the Reformation is Salvation by grace through faith. God does promise his love, forgiveness in Baptism and promises to never leave us. But for our part please turn to page 121 in the Green hymnal. When a infant is baptized the parents and sponsors promise to make sure they bring them to worship, teach them the LP, Creed, 10 comm., give them a Bible, provide for their Christian ed. And why do we do that?

Do you see where it says: "that"? right after Christian ed. It says "that" maybe it should say "so that". "that", Living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the church. Living in God's promises, living with God's people,

Now comes the real purpose: ***They may lead Godly lives until the Day of Jesus Christ. Lead godly lives.*** Isn't that what Jesus is talking about.

Going to worship, learning creed, the Lp, 10 comm, studying the bible, living with God's people, praying these are all ways, tools that assist us in remaining with Christ, being Jesus' students.

We try to get confirmation students, and adults to understand you don't graduate from confirmation. We graduate from the class but not from being a Christian. Being a Christian doesn't mean you have ticked off learning the creed, the LP, the 10 cmd.

I joke that I don't have to warm up for exercise because I learned about it in school. Being a Christian means being a disciple. Being a disciple means being a student of Jesus, one who learns from Jesus. One who continues to learn, one who remains with Jesus.

Confirmation, Baptism, coming to faith are not ends in themselves. It's not been there done that. They are but the beginning of the educational process. The beginning of the road of life in Christ.

Prayer, Baptism, Bible study, HC, 10 comm, Lp, worship, Christian community are wonderful tools that help us remain in Christ. That's what this Walk With Jesus' goal is to help us learn and remain with Christ.

Jesus wants us to remain with him because he wants us to know freedom and truth. Freedom and Truth only reside with Jesus. Stay with Jesus. Amen.