

## **Our Christian Faith** **J. Dudley Weaver, Pastor**

### TO BE A CHRISTIAN

To be a Christian is, first of all, to recognize and confess the fact that there is nothing that you can do to save yourself. Secondly, it is to give yourself over to the One who can save you. Salvation is eternal life in heaven, but it is also more, much more. Salvation is fullness of life—completion, contentment, well being—in this day and time. All human beings are born with an inner yearning for this gift. As we mature we might think of it as emptiness within waiting to be filled or a search for meaning waiting to be discovered. We try to fill this inner hunger by a variety of means. Some are healthy and helpful; others are harmful and perhaps even self-destructive. Ultimately, though, we discover that all of our answers prove inadequate. We cannot save ourselves; we cannot give ourselves that for which we most earnestly yearn. Only God can do that because ultimately our hunger is a hunger for God, for the one who made us and apart from whom our lives are less, far less, than they were created to be.

The story of the Christian Gospel is not the story of a God who remains distant and removed from us. It is not even the story of a God who calls to us from a distance beckoning us to find him or who give us a map to follow in order to find him. Rather the Gospel tells us of a God who loves us enough that he came in search of *us* and who revealed himself to us in a form that we could see and understand—in the gift of a human life, in the gift of Jesus of Nazareth. In him we see both the face of God and the face of true humanity.

In Jesus God has taken his place alongside us and has come to know our lives from the inside out—our joys and sorrows, struggles and defeats, victories and celebrations, our very being. But in Jesus God has done more than identify with us. God has acted to redeem us, to set us free from all that separates us from God our true selves, and one another. We were made to share life with God, but we have fallen from God's created intention for us. The biblical word for this human condition is sin. Sin is not so much any one thing or another as it is a state of being into which we are born and in which we live. Its power pervades every human life and the entire world. In Jesus God forgives us of our sins, frees us from the power of sin, and raises us to a new life. The Bible tells us "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). Jesus was not forced to the cross, but in obedience to his understanding of God's will gave himself to that sacrifice. There, it is said, he bore the penalty of human sin and opened the way for all human beings to new life with God and with one another. The *why* and the *how* of the cross are mysteries which reach beyond our human capacity to understand fully. What we can understand, however, is the *what* of the cross. When we place our faith (that is our belief and trust) in Jesus Christ our lives are changed, perhaps not all at once but over time as we allow God's Spirit to transform our lives more and more into the image of Christ. A profession

of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is only the first step in the Christian journey. Before us lies a lifetime of growth in faith and in love, In Jesus Christ God not only saves us *from* something but also *for* something—a new life.

If you are not a Christian and you would like to explore in more depth the meaning of Christian faith and what it can mean in your life, we invite you to explore the call of God in your life with us at First Presbyterian.

## TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

To be baptized is to be incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the Church. Presbyterians baptize both infants and adults because we understand the emphasis in this sacrament as being primarily on God and what God promises to do in and for us in Jesus Christ. Those who are baptized in infancy are invited, usually in their teen years, to consider confirming their baptismal vows or making a profession of faith. Those who were not baptized in infancy are upon profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior baptized. These are the question asked of those who present children for baptism or present themselves to be baptized upon being received into the life of the church:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

Will you be a faithful member of the church, share in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

## HOW TO JOIN FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Members are received into the membership of the church in one of several ways. If you are already an active member of another congregation, you may be received by transfer of your membership. (Not all churches will transfer membership) If you have been away from the church for some time or if you desire to mark a new beginning in your life, you may join the church by reaffirmation of your faith. And finally, if you have never made a profession of your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you may join the church by profession of your faith (and baptism, if you were not baptized in infancy).

The church provides membership preparation classes four times a year. We invite you to consider participating in one of the series of four classes, which are held on Sunday mornings following worship.

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