

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
February 9, 2014
The Christian Education Mission

John 8:31

"Hold to My Teaching"

- 1. #1 Priority for Christians**
- 2. Satan Attacks in Deceiving Ways**
- 3. Jesus Corrects our Focus**
- 4. What that Means...**

Hymns: 87 – 735 – 508
– Closing 394

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Series Introduction: The directive to teach is found all over the pages of Scripture, and carrying out that decree from God is at the heart of a great percentage of what we do here at Holy Trinity, in our church and also in our school. Yet, often, I feel like we spend a good deal of our time discussing how much it costs to do this work, and not enough time talking about why we do this work. So, for these next three Sundays, we will be looking at the Christian Education Mission that Jesus has given to his people and his church, and I hope that it helps us remember why we do this work, and I hope it motivates all of us to support that work

As you look out into the world, there are any number of jobs that you could call "multi-purpose." Take a firefighter, for instance. As part of his call of duty, a firefighter might find himself as first-responder to a traffic accident; or he might be called to administer first-aid at the home of someone who called 9-1-1; or, he might find being charged with riding on the truck and waving at a local parade. Those are just some of the many duties that belong to firefighters as they perform their day-to-day duties. Yet, we wouldn't label any of those as the number one objective for a firefighter. Though there are many important duties to be performed, the number one priority, the number one duty for firefighters is...fighting fires. When push comes to shove, a firefighter's aptitude for doing his job comes down to his ability to battle a blaze. A

man might be great at parking the truck in just the right spot to block six lanes of traffic, or the best at coaxing a scared cat off of the highest limb of the tree, but if he isn't willing to gear up and fight the flames, his days as a firefighter are probably not going to last too long. Though there are many duties, there is one priority.

As you think about the Christian life, you could very well describe it as "multi-purpose." There are many, many duties/aspects/callings that come with the Christian life of discipleship. But which is the #1 priority? What would you say? What is the #1 objective that Jesus gives to you, who are his disciples? As we set out to live for Jesus in love and thanks for the forgiveness and salvation that he has won for us by living and dying as our perfect Savior, what does Jesus want us to be most focused on doing? What shows him that we are sincere in our discipleship and faithful in our following? How would you answer?

- Perhaps you'd answer with Matt. 28:19 – **"Go and make disciples..."** Believers show that they are disciples by going and spreading the Good News to as many people as possible. Certainly, that is the number one job that Jesus wants his followers to carry out. After all, it is the Great Commission, this was the final directive given before Jesus went into heaven. Yes, I get that one often.
- Or maybe you'd go to Jesus words in John 14:15 where he said, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command,"** and argue that the number one objective for disciples is to live a life of obedience, doing good works, helping others, making the world a better place, and allowing others to see, and not just be told, what it means to be a Christian. I hear that answer quite often, as well.

Certainly, spreading the Gospel and living a Christian life are important aspects of being followers of Jesus. But as we look through the words of Scripture, and study Jesus' directives, there is one that stands out. It was given by Jesus as he spoke to an extremely large group of people who were claiming to believe in him. In John 8:31, Jesus said this, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."** Just as you could say, "if you fight fires, you are really a firefighter," Jesus lays out the #1 defining characteristic for those who would be

his followers. **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”** Though there are many aspects, many duties of discipleship, there is one priority.

As we think about those words from Jesus, it becomes pretty clear why he would list adherence to his teachings as job number one. The Word of God gives to us the truth of our eternal salvation and it is the foundation of our faith. It is the only source in the world where we can learn about what a loving God has done for sinful people. It is the only place where we can find any sort of real confidence when it comes to where we will spend eternity. So, if we fail to hold to the teachings of the Bible, the Truth will be affected. If the Truth is affected, then doubts will be certain to come. If we fail to hold to all the teachings of the Bible, the foundation of our faith will be affected. And if the foundation is affected, then the faith that is built on that foundation will be left susceptible.

Satan knows that full well, and that is why he attacks us in very, very deceiving ways when it comes to our # 1 priority as followers of Jesus. Satan would like nothing more than for us to debate on what our #1 priority as disciples is. “Don’t focus so much on doctrine,” he might say, “get out there and spread the Word.” “You don’t need another Bible class on the doctrine of justification, you need something that is more applicable to your life.” The reasoning doesn’t sound bad, does it? In fact, I hear comments like those often, and I see many churches that take up that mantra. Less doctrine, more spreading. Less teaching, more applying.

Perhaps you are asking a question, “Is it really that bad if people think their first priority is to go and spread the Word? Is it really a big deal if living a good life is focus #1?” Let’s consider.

If I make it my priority to go and spread the message, but I am unsure about the Truth, or shaky about the Truth, or even wrong about the Truth, and now I’m giving that to others, who benefits from my spread of that message? Is it Christ, who wants his pure teachings to remain as the foundation of faith? Or is it Satan, who looks for the smallest opportunities to create doubts and uncertainties and then pounces on them to destroy faith?

If I make it my number one focus to live more and more like the Bible says I should, but I don’t fully know why I’m trying to live according to the commands of the Bible, who benefits? Is it Jesus, who died on the cross so that I wouldn’t have the burden of obedience in my life anymore? Or is it Satan, who would like nothing

more than for me to look at my life and slowly convince me that I’m better than others, or that I’m good enough to stand before God on my own?

Satan is very good at steering us where he wants us to go, and deceiving us into thinking that we are doing what Jesus wants us to do when we are not. And that is why Jesus corrects our focus today with very clear words. “You might be passionate about spreading my Word in the world; you might be dedicated to living how a Christian is called to live, but if you don’t hold to my teaching, you aren’t really my disciple.” Though there are many duties, there is one priority.

Jesus gives us that #1 objective for this reason: Satan wants us to focus on our work; how are you spreading the Word; how are you living according to the Word; and he wants us to focus on our work because he can easily attack that work. However, if we hold to Jesus teachings, it will always take us back to his life and work, and Satan can’t touch what Jesus has done for us. That is why it starts and always returns to Jesus’ teachings. Yes, we carry the Word to others; yes, we live as well as we can; but it all starts by holding to Jesus’ teachings.

That means that for the church, there is going to be a large focus on education. As disciples of Jesus, our #1 priority is to be in the Word of God, studying all the teachings that God has given to us, so that we can grow in our faith, so that we can stand firm in our faith, so that we can share our faith. As a church, we take our doctrine seriously.

It is why we meet for weeks, and not just hours, with those who want to become members; we do that because Jesus says, “Hold to my teachings.” It is why we don’t just preach for 15-20 minutes on Sunday morning, but also teach for an hour in Sunday school for all ages and offer other Bible studies during the week; we do that because Jesus says, “Hold to my teachings.” It is why we don’t just send our children to school to learn math, English, history, and science, but use hundreds of thousands of dollars and many resources to operate a Christian school to also teach God’s Word; we do that because Jesus says, “Hold to my teachings.”

That decree, given to us by Jesus, is our number one priority. Holding to the teachings of Jesus marks us as his disciples, and the ways that we teach and train are going to be our focus for the next two weeks. However, today, it starts with you. Jesus doesn’t just say, “Hold to my

teachings,” to the church, he says it to you personally.

Consider these questions today as we close: Is that your number one priority in life; to hold to Jesus’ teachings? Are you in the Word every day? Do you sacrifice time to be in Bible study? Do you crave teaching? Do you discuss doctrine? Do you know Jesus’ teachings? There are so many duties and tasks, but there is only one priority. Jesus says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” Consider what that means for your life. Amen.