

Luke 18:9-14
2 Timothy 4:1-8

CHRISTIAN IS A VERB

Have you notice the memes

- Turning nouns into verbs
 - o I can't adult today
 - o I can't mom or dad today
- There have been days I could be tempted....

A pastor and writer is a blogger who expressed this same tone in a post titled: "I can't Christian today."

- Only in his case, he wasn't trying to be funny or sardonic. After declaring, "I can't Christian today," he added, "I can no longer be tethered to this thing that is so toxic and so painful to so many. I can't wade through any more bad theology and predatory behavior from pulpit-pounding pastors who seem solely burdened to exclude and to wound and to do harm. I can't sift through all this malice and bitterness masquerading as Christianity to try to find what of it is left worth keeping."
- Wow!

He continued in that tone, and it quickly became apparent he'd had his fill of people who were Christians in name, but weren't, in his view, demonstrating the love of Jesus in their actions.

Jesus must have had his fill too

- Tells a parable about a self-righteous Pharisee
- After the Pharisee praises God that he is not like the sinful tax collector, or robbers, evildoers or adulterers
- he proudly lists his own pious acts:
 - o "I fast twice a week;
 - o I give a tenth of all my income" (v. 12).
 - o Only lists things that effect himself.

- The tax collector, on the other hand, does not dare talk to God in such a manner.
- Instead, he recognizes his lowly status before a holy God.
 - o He knows that he has sinned.
 - o He does not rely on fasting or tithing to make his relationship right with God.
 - o Instead, he cries out for mercy.
- The way of God's kingdom is announced at the end of verse 14:
"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

It's hard to imagine that the Apostle Paul would have ever said:

- I can't Christian today.

He had no reservations about doing Christian.

Certainly he was frustrated with some who called themselves Christian

- But behaved in ways not in line with the gospel.

Paul sent out a clear warning in Romans 16:

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, I urge you to watch out for people who create divisions and problems against the teaching that you learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ People like that aren't serving the Lord. They are serving their own feelings. They deceive the hearts of innocent people with smooth talk and flattery.

From the beginnings of the church

- There having always been those who abuse the faith for their own gain
- Those who claimed a superiority
 - o Or exclusions

Though he was distressed over those who misrepresented the good news of the gospel

- He never shied away from claiming to be a follower of Jesus.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel: it is God's own power for salvation to all who have faith in God... (Romans 1:16)

And to the Philippians he wrote from a prison cell:

²⁰ It is my expectation and hope that I won't be put to shame in anything. Rather, I hope with daring courage that Christ's greatness will be seen in my body, now as always, whether I live or die. ²¹ Because for me, living serves Christ and dying is even better.

It would be hard to imagine Paul writing in one of his letters:

- I can't Christian anymore.
- Or that Paul was done Christianing.

Have you been to one of the lighthouses on the Oregon coast?

- It's hard to imagine how ships would navigate the dangers of the coast without them.
- Hard to imagine what it would be like to operate a lighthouse.

Today there are still lighthouse keepers

- But modern lighthouses are operated by a computer far away with data streamed by various sensors.

That's not the way it was, of course, back in the day.

- The 11 lighthouses out on the coast,
- built in the late 19th century
- each one had to have a real, live human being living onsite.
- Because of the remoteness of those coastal and island locations, the keeper's entire family would live there as well, in a little house at the foot of the tower.

Everything that family needed had to be delivered, often by ship.

- They cooked their food, mended their clothes, tended a little garden patch.
- If there were kids, they were home-schooled.
- Laundry was dried on a clothesline, flapping in the ocean breeze.
- You didn't get one day off in seven. It was round-the-clock responsibility.

Most of the time, there wasn't a whole lot to do.

- But as night fell, one of them had to climb the winding stair and light the giant kerosene lantern.
- The light from its flame would beam out across the waves,
 - o amplified by thick glass lenses.

It was during the storms that the keeper's job was critical.

- Can you imagine climbing that winding stair as the winds howled and the waves crashed upon that swaying tower?

Yet it was when things were at their worst

- vital to keep that beacon beaming out across the waves.
- For mariners out at sea, in wooden ships, that beacon was the difference between life and death.

Thank God for lighthouse keepers, said those mariners.

Thank God, too, for those who offer themselves as keepers of the faith,

- Shining the light of Christ to guide others in dark and stormy times.

So Paul says to his apprentice Timothy in our reading:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

- He could say that because Christian was a verb that would carry Paul to the end of his earthly life.
- As long as he was alive on earth, even in a prison cell,
 - o He could still do Christian one more day.

But, to be totally honest, sometimes it's hard.

- Sometimes doing the gospel seems to get nowhere.
- The definition of Christian has been tainted
- Those looking from the outside in don't like what they see.

How can we be Christian when we are splintered into divisions and factions?

- When politicians hijack the faith for their own cause?
- When boundaries are set up to keep people out rather than open doors that welcome people in?

That's when some say that they are "nones" – with no religious affiliation.

- If that's what it means to be Christian....
- Or we just quit and say: "I can't Christian today."

But if we make Christian a verb

- Then we don't have to worry about those of questionable positions on politics or practices.
- We can be part of those who serve God faithfully...
 - o Who Christian in this hurting and hungry world.

Those like:

- Your own partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Santa Clara, Cuba and the mission team you send every other year.
- Your support financially and physically to the Neighborhood House Food Pantry and the other ways you serve the Neighborhood House.
- Your Ziploc Ministry to distribute needed items to those living on the street.
- The food and holiday gifts you share with the Salvation Army's West Women's & Children's Shelter.

And many individual things you might be doing in your own neighborhood....

- Those who volunteer in the local schools
- Those who deliver meals with Meals on Wheels
- Those who visit elderly whether homebound or in residential care.
- Those who value those with other abilities and see them beyond a handicap.
- And the good work under the banner of Christian that goes on and on.

These are not about to stop because of misguided, ignorant or immature Christians blabbering out in public or on social media.

One pastor suggested that we take a clue from something the resurrected Jesus said during a breakfast conversation with Peter on the shores of Galilee.

- It is the last recorded interaction we have between Jesus and Peter.
- After Jesus renewed his call to Peter to serve him, Peter looked at another disciple and asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?"
- Jesus replied, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" (John 21:22).

In other words, "What is that to you that some don't interpret Christianity as you do? I'm talking to you, not to them. *You* follow me!"

Here are seven words to remember when we get distressed with other Christians:

- *What Is That to You? Follow Me!*
 - o Print this
 - o Write it on a sticky note
 - and put it on your laptop.
 - Your fridge
 - Your mirror
 - The dashboard of your car.

What Is That 2 U? Follow Me!

Christ calls us to be people who say,

- "I *can* follow Jesus today."
- Who make Christian a verb

We don't need bickering Christians in the world,

- but we need more of Christ in the world,
- and that is what we are called to do, with God's help.

That's what will empower us to stand with Paul and say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."