

Greetings in the living name of our Lord and Savior,

SCRIPTURE:

1 Peter 3:15 (MSG) – Larger reading: 1 Peter 3:13-22

“Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you’re living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.”

STORY:

Henry Sloan Coffin tells this story: “One of Yale’s foremost teachers of generation ago began his career with a glowing religious faith and entered the ministry. When called from a pastorate to a chair of economics and social science, he considered himself a Christian believer. But as the years went by and he ceased to take any active part in religious efforts, he found himself slipping into less devout modes of thought and finally lost all religious interest. In explaining the change which had come over him he said: ‘I never consciously gave up a religious belief. It was as if I had put my beliefs into a drawer, and when I opened it, there was nothing there at all.’”

OBSERVATION:

It was a chance encounter. In 2010 I was working at our church’s pumpkin patch when a gentleman walked up. He wasn’t interested in buying any pumpkins rather he was promoting his auto detailing business. As the conversation developed we got beyond the original purpose of him stopping by. It turned to discussing church – specifically his church. As I listened to him expound upon the rightness of the independent non-denominational nature of the church he participated in the conversation swung from a fearless holy boldness to simply a fearless boldness that had lost anything holy about it.

The gentleman began to “cheery pick” scripture to prove the point that his church is the “true” church because they didn’t use instruments in worship, women were silent in the church ... well, I think you get the drift of the conversation. In the process he also was trying to illustrate why my church and denomination, as well as every other denominationally related church were all wrong ... and unscriptural.

I will hand it to him, he knew scripture, but wasn’t willing to acknowledge any validity in my faith and faith expression. Bold and fearless were qualities definitely found in his personality. He wasn’t hostile, just a little judgmental or should I say, self-righteous. He knew what he believed and why he believed it ... and he was ready and willing to share it openly with whoever would listen.

As our conversation was winding down I looked him in the eye and ask, “Would you admit that I believe in Jesus Christ, that he is my personal savior and that I have committed my life to serving his cause?” I had to come back to this question several times as he continued to make his point where I had gone astray. Finally, he heard the question and reluctantly admitted that it might be true. Then, quoting John Wesley, I shared the following: “If your heart belongs to Christ then give me your hand and we

will walk together,” I continued, “We don’t need to agree on the finer points of our theology (which he disagreed with since his wasn’t a “theology” but strictly biblical), but each of us are trying to serve the cause of Christ in our particular way.”

What I admired about this young man was his enthusiasm and deep desire to share his relationship with Christ. It was definitely his passion, albeit with a fair amount of judgment thrown into the mix. It was like I was witnessing Martin Luther as he stood before the Diet of Worms declaring that “Here I stand. I can do no other.” As Henry Sloan Coffin’s story illustrates ... a faith that is not shared soon disappears. By its very nature the Good News of Jesus Christ is meant to be shared or it simply withers or dries up.

Maybe the state of today’s church in America is a result of members afraid to take a stand on what they believe. The phrase often heard is, “Well, I don’t want to offend anyone.” And, so in our attempt not to offend, we fail our Christ at the very point that is most needed and fundamental to the faith. Christ and His kingdom desires men and women who are willing to take a stand for the faith ... who are willing to be heard ... who are willing to share the passion of their soul ... with whoever will listen. May we do no other than to bear witness to the faith that grips our souls and quickens our hearts.

QUOTE:

“In the midst of a generation screaming for answers, Christians are stuttering.” - Howard Hendricks

PRAYER:

When others bury their faith, let mine shine. When others simply places their faith on hold, let mine grow. When others let others pass their way without share the Good News of Christ, let my lips give forth with praise. May I always be ready to tell why I follow Jesus. And it is in his precious name I pray. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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This Sunday we are asking ... “am I just a Fan or am I a Follower”? Join us in the sanctuary for in-person worship or via our Facebook page.

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