

Revolution of Christ Today
Isaiah 61:1-4

A revolution is a quick switch from one authority to another's fundamental beliefs. My first thought, when I hear the word "revolution", is the Revolutionary War. The rule and authority of the Queen no longer fit with what was happening in America, but in order to break free war commenced. War is only one example of a revolution. The industrial revolution helped Americans transition from handmade labor to machine made mass production. Revolutions have existed almost since the beginning of time. In the biblical days of Isaiah, prophets declared themselves anointed by God to be the official authoritative voice of God on earth. God spoke through them to God's people. Even Jesus used the words of Isaiah, as he preached in the temple, to announce the purpose of his ministry. Jesus came to begin a revolution of returning authority to God as the ultimate power. Simply speaking, a revolution is a shift in what we value as being most important in our lives. What comes first in your life? What do you see come first in the lives of your Christian friends and family, today?

Last week, we took a careful look at why the 30's and younger generation claim to be "Spiritual, but not religious" or totally leave the Christian faith. We were reminded that our definition of a church is as a

noun, a building where anyone can come, rather than a verb, the church taking Christ into the world. Being a Christian has fallen to attending worship, putting a check in the collection plate, and helping with fundraisers to meet the budget obligations. This current image of Christianity is not how Jesus expected Christians to follow. Jesus demands action that attracts others to come and learn more about God. After Jesus' death, Christians truly carried out their mission and ministry by following Jesus to their own death.

In the first three hundred years after Jesus' death and resurrection Christianity was illegal. Anyone claiming to be a Christian was executed, thrown in the coliseum to be killed by the lions as a means of entertainment, hung on crosses, beheaded, or burned. Allegiance to God, as sole authority, left Caesar second which was not acceptable to those who did not know Christ. In Rome, Caesar trumped God and any belief otherwise was heresy. It wasn't until around 313 A.D. that Constantine, the new ruler, had a change of heart. He realized that the Christians devotion to Jesus as Lord would not change regardless of how many Christians died. Therefore, Constantine chose to join Roman authority with Christian belief by legalizing Christianity. He even allowed the Christian flag to be flown under the Roman's flag. As a result, Christians no longer were martyred for their faith and belief that Jesus was Lord.

While some might think this was a great victory, it had a great consequence to the role of a Christian. For example, while the Christian flag was free to fly it still had to be placed under Caesar's flag. In the world, Christ could be discussed and free to worship, but allegiance to the Roman Empire was first. This is still true today in that protocol shows the American flag flies higher than the Christian flag. Don't misunderstand me, I'm all for the supporting my country and those who have physically fought and are still fighting, to keep me safe. I proudly fly the American flag, but Christ is still my Lord. My concern is how Christians proclaim, and show that Jesus is their Lord to the world. Constantine made Christianity the Religion of Rome (the creation of the Roman Catholic Church), but made Christianity part of the norm rather than something to fight for and keep alive. Michael Slaughter writes, "Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch share a quip from an archbishop who once said, "Everywhere Jesus went there was a riot. Everywhere I go they make me cups of tea!" Instead of risking life to proclaim God as Lord, have we settled for a cup of tea and a Sunday morning conversation with God?

Christianity has become passive instead of assertive. God comes second to many things in the world today. Michael Slaughter writes about how we are more affluent in "stuff" than in God. "Christians continue to accumulate superfluous stuff, stricken by "affluenza" along with the rest of

the culture. As proclaimed Jesus followers, we need to remember that we are not saved by what we believe but by what we obey. The revolutionary lifestyle requires so much more than the simplistic, easy believe-ism that we propagate within the institutional church.” I watch as Christians wear crosses, have the bible on their electronic device, come to worship and Sunday school, and say they believe Jesus is their Lord. What I don’t see, is the action of their belief. Wearing a Christian piece of jewelry or owning a bible doesn’t constitute a Christian. Christianity is taking the knowledge you gain from Christ and making it your lifestyle. Jesus said “feed my sheep” Jesus meant both physically and spiritually.

The key to the task of Christianity is choosing God over all earthly stuff. This doesn’t mean you have to walk away from all the stuff you enjoy, but it does mean choosing God over that stuff. If Christ is your Lord and your loyalty and obedience is to God, then the God stuff comes first when the situation arises that you have to choose one activity over another. It also means full participation in the life of the church as it worships God and ministers to the world. Michael Slaughter remind us that “Faith is acting on Jesus’ directive to follow, which means that his lifestyle becomes our lifestyle. Our soul and sole priority are to be based on Christ’s life and teachings.” It is here that Jesus rebels against the teachings of the Temple leaders.

The lifestyle of the Religious Leaders and Pharisees was to keep God locked up in the Temple and separate God from God's people. Jesus came to free God and reunite God to all God's people. Today, we are still keeping God in the church building. Our task as Christians today is to reclaim God as first priority of life and begin the revolution to set God free into the world. How is this done? Michael Slaughter once had a friend who met Mother Teresa. He asked her for advice as he was a young beginning preacher. Her response, "Preach Jesus, the true Jesus, the real Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, and not a Jesus of people's imaginations." The time has arrived for the church to create a new image of Christ for the world. "As Christ followers, all of us this Lenten season must commit ourselves to realigning our lifestyles with the renegade gospel of the real and rebel Jesus. We must stop remaking Jesus into our own image." The warm, fuzzy, comfortable Jesus no longer identifies the true Jesus who went to the cross. I believe the time has arrived that Christians unite to take God back out into the world. This is when I, and other clergy, need you to make a full commitment to God as your Lord. I need people who are ready to study God's word, teach God's word, and find places in the community where you can take God's words. Instead of telling me it was a "good sermon" show me how your life changed and how God has become a

priority for you. As Michael Slaughter says, "If you are ready to make that commitment, pray this prayer with me:

Lord, in the midst of my doubt, skepticism, and uncertainty, I make the commitment today not only to confess you with my lips as Lord Jesus but to go where you are going and do what you are doing. I will leave no route for retreat or escape. I will be called by your name, and I will be numbered among your people. And it is in your name, Jesus, that I pray. Amen.

When and where is God calling you to study God's word, teach God's word, and be the living word of God in Denison and around the world? The time is coming for a new Revolution of Christ. How will you respond?