

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"Why I Believe" (part 7)

A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION

We have been doing a series begun on Easter Sunday entitled *Why I Believe*. If someone were to ask you why you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, how would you respond? So far we have looked at four reasons. Today we will look at reason #5. Recall that they can be found in our Anglican liturgy.

Please turn in your prayer books to p. 55. Look at what is said: "*We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us 1) in creation; 2) in the calling of Israel to be your people; 3) in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in 4) the Word made flesh, Jesus, your son.. 5) In Him, you have delivered us from evil and made us worth to stand before you (life transformation) 6) In him, you have brought us out of error into 7) truth.*

And recall who is the "us"? The Church of Jesus Christ! So these are the seven reasons why I believe. So what is the fifth reason? Life Transformation. What is life transformation? It is a life changed by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? It is when you know that Jesus is Who He said He is – Lord of heaven and earth and you accept Him as Lord of your life. And second, it is when you recognize that Jesus is also your Savior – that you need to be forgiven of your sin and that you can't save yourself. Only God in Christ can save you. And so when you know that Christ is Lord and Savior and when you accept Him as your Lord and Savior – you are born again. Jesus said, Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you can't enter the Kingdom of God. We have to be spiritually reborn; spiritually awakened. And when that happens, we understand Who God is, who we are, and what life is all about. And if we truly are born again, there will be life transformation, life change.

We find examples throughout the Scriptures of people whose lives were radically changed by God. Think of the Apostles. I want us to briefly look at the Apostle Paul's life. He gives us his testimony in **Galatians 1:11-16**: "*For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.*

18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me."

Here Paul shares how he came to Christ; but not only how he came to Christ but how his life was like *before* he came to know Jesus and how his life is now *after* coming to Christ. His is a powerful

testimony. Before He knew the Lord, he was a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the first Jewish believers. But then Christ appeared to Him and he realized his sin. He then followed Christ and obeyed the call the Lord put on his life. As a result, many others not only came to know Jesus but the conversion of St. Paul encouraged the faith of many, for ***“they were glorifying God because of him.”***

You see, that is a genuine reason to believe – how Christ changed your life and how Christ has changed countless others from every walk of life, from every time in history, every race and ethnic group, from all parts of the world. Billions of lives changed throughout the ages.

Each of us has a personal testimony. And I believe God wants us to be able to share that testimony with others. Whether it is dramatic or fairly non-eventful, the sharing of the story of our spiritual journey is important. It is important because it is a testimony of God’s grace and mercy. It is a story of what God has done in us. And to know our story is a way to defend the faith. The Apostle Peter wrote in **1 Peter 3:15**: ***“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”***

Our testimony doesn’t have to be long. In fact a good testimony can be as short as three minutes. And it can be broken down into three parts: 1) your life before Christ 2) how you came to know Christ as Lord and Savior, and 3) how He has changed your life since becoming a Christian. It is also good to share a struggle or issue that you had and how the Lord helped you deal with it. As someone has said, a true testimony often does not happen without a test and a lot of moaning!

The beauty of a personal testimony is that it is your story. No one can really argue with you about it because it is your experience. That is why if a Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon missionary comes to your door the best thing to do is to share with them how Jesus has changed your life and why following Him is so important for you. It is fruitless to try to debate with them over doctrine and Scripture. But a testimony to Christ’s grace and power in your life? They can’t argue with that and it will leave them speechless.

The other benefit of a personal testimony is that it is a way to encourage others in the Church. For when we hear about the struggles and concerns of our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord and the difference Jesus made in their lives, it will bolster our own faith as well!

Since our own personal experience is so important to our faith and believing, I have invited a member from our parish to share their personal testimony at each service this weekend. They are going to share with you how they came to Christ and how He changed their lives! May we seek to do the same when God presents us with the opportunity! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!