

Dear Confirmation Class and Parents,

Thank you for sending me your answers to the first confirmation assignment. Everyone gave insightful answers, and some of your answers may have been more profound than you thought when you wrote them down.

Below are my responses to some of the questions and your answers:

Question 1: What prophet spoke about the coming of Jesus Christ?

This obviously demonstrated my inability to ask a good question. The answer I was looking for was ISAIAH, but two of you answered with JOHN THE BAPTIST. I guess both answers are right. John was a prophet and was the first in Jesus' day to speak about Jesus. The prophecy in Isaiah that is quoted by Mark was actually about the coming of John the Baptist rather than Jesus.

I guess the point I want to make is that Isaiah lived 800 years before Jesus or John were born, and if you read all the Old Testament book of Isaiah, you will find several places where Isaiah prophesied about John and Jesus.

We do not have time now, but there are many other places in the Old Testament that speak about the coming of the Messiah - Jesus Christ.

Questions 2-4 are about repentance.

Several of you defined repentance: to be sorry or sincere regret. It is true that one cannot repent unless they are sorry for their sins. However, repentance is a little more than regret or to be sorry.

For example, let's say I walk by someone who is starving, but do nothing to help. Later that night I think about the starving person and feel bad or sorry about walking away; however, the next day, I walk by the starving person again without helping. This is obviously not repentance. To repent is to recognize the wrong I have done, and with God's help stop doing what I know to be wrong. I hope this makes sense.

One of you wrote, "To move away from sin," as your definition of repentance. This was a great answer.

Question 8: What is a synagogue?

Once again you gave great answers. Some wrote a synagogue "is a building where a Jewish congregation worships." A couple of you used the word "church" in your definition. A synagogue is like a church, and like a church it is a building and it is not a building. How confusing is that? We call the building where we worship a church. A Jew would call the building where he or she worships a synagogue. However the real church is the people. We are the church, as we worship and serve Jesus Christ together. The same is true of a synagogue; it is really the Jewish congregation.

Question 9: How was Jesus' teaching different from the teaching of the scribes?

Everyone got this one: "Jesus taught with authority, and not as the scribes." I have wondered what it means to teach with authority. Did Jesus teach with a loud voice? Were the scribes boring and Jesus was interesting? I don't know. I like to think Jesus was very interesting.

I think the authority came with the fact that Jesus practiced what he preached. The scribes may have taught the people to love God and your neighbor. But, when Jesus taught us to love God and our neighbor, he actually loved God and us.

Questions for Reflection

Question 1: What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?

It was obvious that everyone who answered this question gave it a lot of thought. Putting all your answers together, I came up with the following: "To follow Jesus means to study his teachings, and do what he wills even if it means losing friends." It means to love people even those who are unpopular and not liked by others. It means to serve people who are in need as Jesus would (or as one of you wrote, "To act as he would (very kind and caring)).

Question 2: Why do you think John felt unworthy to "stoop down and untie the thong of Jesus' sandal?"

The truth of the matter is no one is worthy to approach God, even to untie Jesus' sandal. However, as we will learn later, because of what Jesus did on the cross we can dare to approach God.

OK, that was the Bible study, now for the answers you gave about worship:

Question 1: Every Sunday the church gathers for worship. We read from the Bible, pray, sing hymns, collect and offering, and listen to a sermon. These are the thing we do in worship, but how do you define worship?

Here are your answers:

"Praising Jesus and God. Accepting them as our savior. Declaring we believe in Jesus and God."

"I define worship as a way of honoring God and Jesus with others through music and scripture readings."

"We worship so that we recognize God as the almighty, we praise him and ask for forgiveness and seek his will and truth so that we may be more like him."

"Praising God with all your heart, soul and mind."

"Following the Ten Commandments and loving everyone."

WOW! you put your answers together and we have (as they used to say in my day) "hit the nail on the head."

Worship is what we do in response to God's grace and love. It is what we do on Sunday morning with our church family, and it is how we live out in the world. We praise God for creation, for our family, for caring, for sending Jesus, for dying for our sin, for the glorious resurrection, for the hope of life after death, and so much more; and we live to God's glory.

You are right we worship by listening to what God is telling us in the Bible, but by also doing what we know to be right. It was worship when you served others during the mission week.

We worship by singing God's praise in church and at home.
We worship by caring for others.
All of life is to be worship. Think about what the means.

Question 2 (well it is not actually a question): Close your eyes for a couple of minutes and picture our church sanctuary, then make a list of as many things of the things that are in our sanctuary.

The class listed: choir, candles, flowers, pews, friendship notepads, piano, organ, chairs, Bibles, hymnals, offering plates, pulpit (podium), doors, fire for the candles, bread, grape juice, lights, windows, a cross, and baptismal font.

I think you about got everything except for the dead insect that did not get vacuumed. Maybe it is gone now. OH, I don't remember reading in your answers the Communion Table.

Most everything you noticed that is in our sanctuary has a reason for being there; however, there are three pieces of furniture that are almost essential. These are: Pulpit, Table and Baptismal Font. Yes, these are simply items of furniture, but they represent three very important places where we know God:

The Pulpit represents where we hear the Word of God through Scripture and preaching

The Baptismal Font represents the place where we are received by God into the church. It is the place that should remind us of water and as water washes our bodies the water of baptism washes us of our sin.

The Communion Table, where we receive the elements of bread and wine (grape juice) -- the bread being for us the very body of Jesus which was broken on the cross and the juice the blood of Jesus that was shed for our sin.

So if I were to ask you what are the most important pieces of furniture in our sanctuary, you would answer: Pulpit, Font and Table

Now a little about the candles, when you are an acolyte, you brought into the sanctuary a fire. The fire is not the presence of Jesus, but represents the presence of Jesus with us in our worship. The two candles represent the dual nature of Jesus Christ that is he was a human being, and he was God with us. When you take the fire out of the sanctuary at the end of the service, it is a reminder that Jesus leads us back into the world.

Question 4: The order of our worship is basically: Do you see any reasons for the way we order our worship?

I noticed that of all the questions this one was the hardest, so let me give you the reason we order worship the way we do:

We begin with a Call to Worship. You should notice that we always use a passage from the Bible for the Call to Worship. The reason is it is God who calls us to worship, so we use an appropriate text of Scripture from God's word.

Following the Call to Worship we sing a Hymn of Praise, followed by the Prayer of Adoration. These acts are to proclaim us of the majesty, wonder and love of God and to express our sense of awe as we adore God in prayer.

Realizing that we cannot worship God unless we are willing to admit our sin and repent (yes, we have discussed repentance), so immediately after our prayer of Adoration we spend time in confession. Remember, the liturgist will read a passage of Scripture that calls us to confession, then we confess our sin together using a prayer that is printed in the bulletin, then we provide a time for silent confession.

When it comes to the silent confession, if you are like me, the ten to fifteen seconds of silence is not time to confess to God all my sins, but it does give me time to recognize before God that I am a sinner (one who neglects to do the will of God).

Following the time of confession we read a passage of Scripture that reminds us that because of what Jesus did on the cross all our sin is forgiven. This is the Assurance of Pardon

Now we are ready to hear God's Word to us. This is done through the reading of the Scriptures and preaching. In the case of our younger children, I spend time with them during the Time for Young Disciples.

It is appropriate that every time we meet we proclaim what we believe and we do this by reciting one of the creeds of the church usually the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. We will learn more about these at a later date.

To this point of the service we have praise God, confessed our sin and listened to the Word by reading Scripture and preaching, we conclude our service with an offering. First we offer our prayers to God (Prayers of the People) and we offer our lives and resources during the offering.

At Westminster we do the offering before the sermon rather than at the end of the service. We do this because, several of our parents wanted their children to be present for the offering before they leave the sanctuary after the Time for Young Disciples.

Well that is the first lesson; we have many more to go. Thanks for getting your assignments in, and for the thought you put into them. I will be sending the second set of assignments out tomorrow.

And by the way, I am sending this response to parents and students thinking that it will be helpful for you to visit with each other about what I have written. If you have any questions or any reaction to my responses please let me know.

Yours in Christ,
Steve