

ARE CHRISTIANS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES? ACTS 10:44-48

Are Christians an endangered species? This is really not the most pleasant question to consider. But at some time or another I would imagine we have all thought about it.

Faced with an uncomfortable question, we find comfort and assurance in God's Word. Speaking of Jesus, in John 1:5 (GNB) it says, "His life is the light that shines through the darkness - and the darkness can never extinguish it." Never, it says. The power of God's light can never be extinguished. The good news about Jesus will always be good news. Sin will have its triumphs, but it never will completely prevail.

Most of the danger to Christianity does not come from the outside but from within. I would like to consider with you three of the dangers from within referring to them as Christianity's sin from within.

There is the endangering problem of self-centeredness or the S of sin from within. Often, we get so caught up with our own church or our own denomination that our world view of Christianity doesn't go much beyond our congregation's front door. In our quest to preserve our peculiar understanding of Scripture, we often fail to bask in the good news of a Christ who stands at the center of Scripture. The New Testament abounds with encouragement for us to be one with each other - to rejoice in that which unites us in the Body of Christ rather than to dwell upon our theological idiosyncrasies. It is incompatible with Christianity for us to separate ourselves from other Christians in order to do just our own thing. We are going to spend our eternity with all these people. The time to get acquainted and work together is now.

Another aspect of the problem is inhibited love. Inhibited love is the I of the sin from within. There is no virtue in loving someone who is lovable. Anyone can do that - even non-believers. There is no virtue in loving someone with whom we agree, that is almost like loving ourselves. Jesus said, "If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels do that much." But there is virtue in uninhibited, unconditional love. We are called by Jesus to embrace with forgiving love a brother or sister who has disappointed or even offended us. Forgiveness flows in a church when the Spirit of God resides in its members. Love that flows freely is the love that Jesus spoke about when he said, "Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you. In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven."

The final sin from within, represented by the N in sin, is nonchalance. Too many of us take our Christianity too casually - with nonchalance. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, encourages us to put on God's armor so that we will be able to stand safe against all the strategies and tricks of Satan. We are encouraged to use every piece of God's armor available to us.

Self-centeredness, inhibited love, and nonchalance - three sins from within that endanger Christianity. And so we return to our question, "Are Christians an endangered species?" Some are and some are not. Although we have the promise of God that the light will never go

completely out, our task together with the total church is to make sure we shine brightly. We continue to do battle with the forces of evil from both without and from within. To plan to do less is to risk joining the list of endangered species.

How are you living your faith so that the light of Christ will shine brightly long after you are gone?

God bless,
Pastor Barbara