



## Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

July 29, 2021

### DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

What is “authentic Christianity”? – asks the ODB meditation below. In the first centuries of the Common Era, to be a Christian was not exactly ‘life-insurance’. You could be tortured, executed and lose everything you had, including your family. Still, thousands rather lost their physical lives than giving up the treasure they found in Jesus.

Then, in 313 AD the Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity, and soon it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. During the centuries, Christianity – identified with Roman Catholicism – had evolved to be the ruling religious and political power in the old continent and the conquered new lands. During these times, those people faced persecution and execution who didn’t agree with the official doctrines of the authoritative Church.

The Reformation birthed – also with a lot of pain - renewal into the Christian faith and values. The principles of Sola scriptura (“by Scripture alone”); Sola fide (“by faith alone”); Sola gratia (“by grace alone”); Solus Christus or Solo Christo (“Christ alone” or “through Christ alone”); Soli Deo gloria (“glory to God alone”) rekindled the personal faith of many. The translation and printing of the Bible made it possible for people to actually understand and revisit the stories of Scriptures, and the encouragements and guidance provided by these holy texts.

The above is history, but many of us remember that decades ago, Christian religion still used to be a main social drive in the developed countries. You could barely hear: *“I am not able to go to church this weekend, because my family - or kids - visit us.”* Families attended Sunday worship services together! People were expected to show up in one of the churches, and in my understanding church events provided the good portion of entertainment in those years. It was a common time of social and business interactions.

So, what now, when there is gazillion other events and opportunities to attend on Sunday mornings? Or when the families - exhausted by weekdays work and responsibilities – are just happy to sleep in, and just to ‘chill’ together? When the goodwill and authenticity of Christian religion is questioned because of sins of the past? What does make us Christians, and how firm is the foundation of our beliefs?

I believe that amidst the ideological changes of the millennia it is faith that matters. Faith in the Creator God, who has **“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”** (Jeremiah 29:11). In the Redeemer God who **“so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16) This love is our foundation, despite of uncertainties, as the Psalmists put it: **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though ...”** (Psalm 46:1-2)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## Authentic Christianity

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.*

Matthew 5:12

### READ Matthew 5:3–10

I applied for a position in a Christian organization years ago and was presented with a list of legalistic rules having to do with the use of alcohol, tobacco, and certain forms of entertainment. “We expect Christian behavior from our employees” was the explanation. I could agree with this list because I, for reasons mostly unrelated to my faith, didn’t do those things. But my argumentative side thought, “*Why don’t they have a list about not being arrogant, insensitive, harsh, spiritually indifferent, and critical? None of these were addressed.*”

Following Jesus can’t be defined by a list of rules. It’s a subtle quality of life that’s difficult to quantify but can best be described as “beautiful.”

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–10 sum up that beauty: Those who are indwelt by and dependent on the Spirit of Jesus are humble and self-effacing. They’re deeply touched by the suffering of others. They’re gentle and kind. They long for goodness in themselves and in others. They’re merciful to those who struggle and fail. They’re single-minded in their love for Jesus. They’re peaceful and leave behind a legacy of peace. They’re kind to those who misuse them, returning good for evil. And they’re *blessed*, a word that means “happy” in the deepest sense.

This kind of life attracts the attention of others and belongs to those who come to Jesus and ask Him for it. – By **David H. Roper**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**Spirit of God, please produce these characteristics from the Beatitudes in my life. Amen.**

Which of the attributes from Matthew 5 do you especially need in your life? How can you grow in this?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

In his classic work *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote of “the utter deceitfulness of sin,” which “is always offering happiness, and . . . always leads to unhappiness.” In contrast, he noted that the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–10) show us the path to true happiness. The characteristics Jesus describes here—the poor in spirit, the mournful, those hungry for righteousness, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted—define the true believer in Christ. Lloyd-Jones asserted that these traits aren’t naturally possessed by any of us. Such a way of living comes only by God’s grace and can be put into practice only by those in whom God’s Spirit resides. The “Beatitudes lifestyle” is entirely, radically dependent on the Holy Spirit. God will transform our lives so that those around us can’t help but notice the joy within us. – By **Tim Gustafson**

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