

As Paul describes his faith journey
in our second reading today,
it is clear to me
that he is not really leaving behind what he grew up with –
the entire Jewish tradition
which is summarized in these 10 Commandments.

Despite his protests
of having left it all behind,
it's still part of his DNA.

In a sense PAUL IS growing up,
moving beyond the letter of that law.

There is that new influence in his life,
Christ.

But don't be fooled.

He's not really leaving the past
including his Jewishness,
behind.
It's still there-
Like a computer program running in the background.

Like Paul,
many of us grew up with the 10 Commandments.

We also grew up with social structures built to support that:
play well with others –
don't hurt or kill speak ill of them,
or steal from them.
Respect your parents.
Get married,
and so forth.

But like Paul,
we are ALL are called to acknowledge Christ
In our hearts

as the final authority.

Christ is more important
than any external playbook
be that a religious book-
or our own life experience.

Our book of the law,
is most likely not written
in black ink on the white page.

For most of us,
our book of the law
is really the sum total of our individual experience.

All that we have experienced and learned
During our days here on earth.

And it is to that book that we are to add Christ.

This sounds incredibly abstract.
Let me make it more concrete.

I'll use myself as a specific example-
My experience growing up in Texas,
as an only child of two Missouri Synod parents
informed and formed
who I was and who I am.

I never ceased being a teenage boy-
Full of fear and rebellion,
Conflicted feelings
And paradoxes.

But I have added many things to that life.

Carrers as a spiritual leader,
A banker,
A husband and father,
Partner to another man,

That life has been rich and full and meaningful.

But
Christ calls me today
to take the sum total of that life,
today exactly 61 years
or 22,265 days,
or 534,360 hours,
or 3,206,160 minutes
Christ calls me
to continually form
and transform that life
with Christ.

Whether you and I have been alive
for five minutes, five years, or five decades,
We all have material for Christ to work with.

That is incredible good news.

But it also imposes an incredible responsibility.

To follow Christ,
To live life to the fullest,
we continually,
day by day,
moment by moment,
experience by experience
need to offer those new pieces of our life to God in Christ.

People often talk about the need for conversion,
the point at which they received Christ as their personal savior.

I have no argument with that.
I went through that experience myself at age 14,
at a Billy Graham Crusade Texas Stadium.
September 26, 1971 .

I walked the aisle,
I prayed the sinners prayer

to receive Jesus as my personal savior.
I took the literature.

That experience has made an incredible difference in my life.

Yes I was baptized
as a baby at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Dallas Texas.

But that sunny fall Sunday afternoon-
not unlike this one today,
when I walked the aisle,
I came to own the Faith is my own.

All these years,
47 more of them since then to be exact,
I have walked
and wavered
and wondered
and wandered.

Learning every day
That Christ has called me to be born again
Each day...
to take those experiences that I go through
and make them his.

That is true conversion.
That is true life.

Someone wise once said,
the real question is not – “have you been born again?”
The real question is- “are you alive today?”

Paul said
For me to live is Christ.
Are you alive today?

Amen.