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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

November 29, 2015

### Distinctive Claims of the Christian Faith

*“Pray like this: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven,’”*  
Matthew 6:9 (Common English Bible)

The decline of mainline, Protestant Christianity in America is well documented and reported. Fewer people claim identity as Christians today and fewer numbers occupy seats in worship services on Sunday morning. What seems to be increasing is a notion that no religion is supreme or unique and that each one possess much truth. Tolerance has replaced the missional impulse of the church. While no authentic reading of the Bible supports “intolerance” toward other forms of spirituality or faith traditions, it does advance vigorously the distinctive claims of the Christian faith. Perhaps a renewal of the missional vigor of the church requires a recovery of those claims.

The first of those claims is captured in the first words of The Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who is in heaven.” Those words capture the truth that God is both otherworldly and is knowable, understandable, and lovable. There is a mystery around the periphery of the Christian faith but at its center is a God who seeks to know us and to be known. The first two chapters of Genesis capture beautifully both attributes of God: Chapter one speaks to the mystery of God – a God who by the sheer authority of the spoken word creates and, chapter two, a God who draws near enough to us to fill man and woman’s nostrils with God’s very own breath.

The second claim of the Christian faith is that in the person of Jesus we see God; that in Jesus we see what God is like. We may know God – though limited – by turning to the person of Jesus Christ. In the life and death and victory over death of Jesus, God is revealed not only in words but in a real person. In the person of Jesus we witness a God who forgives those that sin, values those pushed to the margins of society and seek the restoration of broken relationships. The Christian faith is not about a formula. It is about a person that desires a relationship with us.

Finally, the Christian faith not only points the way to live, the faith gives witness to a promise that God gives power to those who believe that enables us to live as God desires. Moral insight has little value without moral power. The image that comes to mind is that of a two person paddle-boat. Alone, our best efforts results only in moving in circles. But with a second person paddling with us, the paddle-boat moves steadily forward. God joins us in that paddle-boat, God’s strength working alongside our strength, to move toward that life that satisfies. It is that vital union with God that gives new life. And it is that union that results in a growing love for Christ. A vigorous church will be one that recovers again and again these distinctive claims of the Christian faith.

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