



How many times have you heard the phrase, “I’m spiritual but not religious”? If you’ve listened at all to the culture around us, this is a slogan which has gained a lot of traction over the years. Heck, I used to say the same thing myself back in my college days. Having had enough of all the religious hypocrites in church who spoke words of love without actually living them, I became the poster child for being spiritual but not religious. Even in seminary, I put down those who were “religious” presuming that those who claimed to be religious automatically saw themselves as better than everybody else. While there are some religious Christians who wrongfully elevate themselves by judging the lives of others, I am beginning to see that being religious is not such a bad thing. In fact, being religious might be a more faithful following of Christ than simply being spiritual.

As we know, the word “religious” is “religion” dressed up as an adjective. “Religion” comes from the Latin, “religare” which means “to bind together”. In other words, “religion” implies a communal identity; Or as the Methodist pastor, Roger Wolsey puts it, “giving a damn about the well-being of others”.

Contrast this to being spiritual. To be spiritual is to be connected to God. Though being connected to God is a really good thing, what happens when this is all we focus on? Spirituality becomes just a “God and me” kind of thing. Sure Yoga, meditations, exercise and clever Facebook posts might imply that we’ve got the goods on being spiritual and that we’ve arrived on our spiritual faith journeys, but is that what the baptized life looks like? Am I really just a spiritual free agent seeking to walk with God to improve myself, or is there more?

Enter organized religion. Yup, I said it organized religion. What keeps our spiritual disciplines from becoming selfish practices of isolationism is organized religion. Where else can we come together from all walks of life to be nourished by a God whose barrier-breaking son has been poured out in love for the world? Where else can we gather together to pray for one another as well as the world? Did you know that when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we never pray it for ourselves? It’s one of the most communal prayers we have as it’s always prayed for the

neighbor beside me in the pew. My prayer for “daily bread” is always for you as yours is always for me. Jesus was pretty brilliant in giving us that prayer.

Speaking of daily bread, where else can we gather together to add our meager coins with those of other ELCA folks in helping wipe out Malaria in Africa?

Still don't think that organized religion is a good thing? Tell that to those religious communities instrumental in ending slavery, promoting Women's Suffrage, and furthering the Civil Rights movement. The fact remains that random acts of kindness just aren't as effective as the organized ones.

I'm not saying random acts of kindness are bad, nor am I saying that we're not called to be spiritual; We certainly are. But so too are we called to be religious; to be in community loving one another and the world which God has loaned to us.

What we do here in church on Sunday morning is important. We don't come here to be seen by others. We don't come here to get right with God. We don't come here to become better people. We don't even come here because we have light bills and salaries to pay. We come together here at 597 East Avenue, because that is how Jesus connects us to God. Being active in a congregation is how we are connected not only to the heart of Christ, but to the entire Body of Christ as well. It is here on a Sunday morning where lives of faith are nourished as we do life together. It is here where we pray and play together; where we grieve and celebrate together; where we love and serve our neighbors and God together. Not a bad way to spend a Sunday morning. So, am I spiritual or religious? Yes.

Peace and Love,
Pastor Doug