

Thursday, September 10, 2020

Teach me your Way

- Pastor Hank French

*Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me
on a level path (Psalms 143:10).*

While I was living in Japan and studying the Japanese language, I discovered an interesting linguistic difference between the Japanese word for Christianity and the Japanese words for Shintoism and Buddhism, the two primary religions in Japan.

The word Shintoo consists of two characters— “Shin” which means “gods,” and “too” which means the “way” or the “path.” So, Shintoo literally means “the way (or the path) of the gods.”

The word “Butsudoo” also consists of two characters— “Butsu” which means “Buddha,” and “doo” which means the “way” or the “path.” So, “Butsudoo” literally means “the way (or the path) of the Buddha.”

The word for Christianity is “Kirisutokyoo.” “Kirisuto” is the way Japanese pronounce Christ and “kyoo” means “teaching.” So, “Kirisutokyoo” literally means “the teaching of Christ.” Big mistake. Early Japanese Christians should have followed the lead of Shintoism and Buddhism and named Christianity “Kirisutodoo”— “the way (or path) of Christ.

In the book of Acts which gives the history of the early church, the faith is not called Christianity and people of faith are not called Christians until toward the end of the book. Christianity in the earliest days of the church was called the “Way of the Lord,” or simply “the Way.” And people of faith were called “people of the Way.”

There is a huge difference between understanding Christianity as “the teachings of Christ” and “the Way of Christ.” The word teaching implies that Christianity can be reduced to a head trip, to a way of thinking or a way of believing. The words “Way” or “Path,” however, insist that Christianity is a way of life. It is not something you only think about; it is something you do.

In today’s text from the book of Psalms, the Hebrew poet implores God “teach me to do your will... Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.” All people of Christian faith should do the same— implore God to teach us “to do” God’s will and to lead us on the true “path.”

Prayer: God of the Way, lead me in the Way today and all days. Amen.