

Dear members and friends of St. John,

We've all known people who we have thought of as "**pious**" individuals. A simple definition of *piety* is the way a person's doctrine or beliefs are lived out in their daily lives. Maybe it was a grandparent, parent, or other relative whose life was shaped and ordered by their beliefs. **Piety, like anything that springs forth from our beliefs, can be good or bad.** The person who is caught up in a false religion or false teachings can be deformed by them, and their life although dedicated is not "good." Good piety for the Christian is a life ordered by the study of God's word, worship attendance (and the reception of the Lord's Supper), frequent prayers for the wellbeing of others (especially their spiritual life), and the love of our neighbor as carried out in our vocations. **Notice where the attention of the pious Christian is located: On Christ our Savior and His power.** Good Christian piety is always a life focused **outside of ourselves. Always.**

Enter **American Christianity** over the last 50-60 years. The **piety of American Christianity** centers on the "**personal relationship with Jesus,**" "**quiet time,**" and "**prayer time.**" Where is the central focus of American Christian piety? **Me, myself, and I** (notice the triune nature of self-worship). Sure, Christ is present, but as a tool for personal health or strength, or as a yard stick, a barometer used to measure "my" performance as a Christian. "What would Jesus do?" springs from this type of piety. The focus is on **individual blessings.** It's on **performance** as a measure of how good a Christian I am. Don't believe this? Look at how the American Christian church has changed worship. In many churches, worship centers on the "individual experience," "personal feelings," and "opportunities to express oneself." For example, look at contemporary Christian music. A majority of contemporary Christian music that I've listened to is about "me." "My" feelings, "my" sense of communion with God. I had a well-intentioned visitor to our congregation tell me that he knew that the worship service he just attended was "good" because it made him "feel good." It was all about him. In a paradoxical way, God did come to strengthen the visitor, to restore his life in Christ. But the way this is accomplished is by the killing of the "old Adam" inside of us, replacing it with the "new man" in Christ. Our focus needs to shift from "self" to "Christ alone." Good Christian piety focuses our life on Christ and therefore our service to others as "little Christs."

In the book "Has American Christianity Failed?" (CPH, c. 2016, p. 185), author Bryan Wolfmueller states, "The piety of American Christianity springs from [the] decision for Christ and [the Christian's] commitment to follow Him." From the very beginning of a person's life in Christ (so they teach), **the individual is in charge.** *They* made the decision. *They* made the commitment. It's all about *them.* It's all about "me."

Continuing with Wolfmueller's book,

"**Biblical piety** springs from the Lord's gift of Baptism and the miracle He accomplished there. It might seem to us like Baptism is not a particularly important part of our daily Christian life, but a closer look at the Scriptures gives us a different picture...Paul connects Baptism to our Christian life. In fact as Paul moves in his letters from talking about what we believe to how we live, he connects them by teaching about Baptism. Paul sees Baptism as the fountain and source of our Christian life."

Wolffmueller continues with Romans 6:3-4: *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"*(Rom. 6:3-4). **Luther understood the daily need to drown the "old Adam," so the new man can emerge. Baptism is a reminder of God's promise to do so in our lives.**

The piety of the American Christian is found in the reading of the Bible for insights and instructions on how to be obedient to God. Lost is the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness found only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Wolffmueller:

"Biblical piety, on the other hand, reads the Bible in its fullness, with the blazing light of Law and Gospel illuminating the words. The Law shows our sins, teaches repentance, orders the world, and shapes our love for our neighbor."

As Lutheran Christians, we have a great deal to be thankful for. We have a church that has **not** abandoned the truth of God's word to satisfy the whims of men. We have a church that **rightly exposes our sins to God's light (His Law), and provides the healing balm of His love (the Gospel)**. Personal piety is the result of us growing to be more like Christ. True Biblical piety is a thing of beauty, because it is **God's work in man, not man's work for God**. May we continue to grow in His Word, and share His love with our neighbor – living a pious life.

Pastor Travis