

'At the Heart of It All'

Scripture: 1 John 4:7 – 21

2/16/25

Have you ever heard of this phrase - 'Cut to the chase!' It goes back a long way. It was first used in movie making in the 1920's when a director would give orders to cut to the chase - meaning a change from a dramatic scene to an action scene.

There have been times in my life when I needed to cut to the chase. There have been times when I needed to change from a dramatic stage in my life to an action stage of my life. Have you had times like that?

Maybe it is right now as you say to yourself - 'Pastor, cut to the chase!'

Maybe I deal too much with dramatic things, and I need to get to things of action. So let us cut to the chase!

As busy as life is, we do not have time to deal with trivial things. As much pressure we are under, we do not need to deal with the dramatic. We need answers! We need some help! We need action!

We face a crisis, and we want help. We receive a diagnosis about our health, and suddenly a lot of the issues we thought were important are not important any longer. We face a decision that will affect our lives radically, and everything seems different. Let us cut to the chase!

In the very early 1800's, a Presbyterian minister from Scotland named Thomas Campbell made the first sound of our denomination when he dropped his token on the communion table in Scotland. We will remember that more during our communion time.

Thomas Campbell left Scotland to journey to America – the land of freedom of religion. In Philadelphia, he attended a Presbyterian conference for ministers in America, and he was appointed to a Presbyterian Church in Washington, PA (just south of Pittsburgh, PA). Thomas Campbell again started giving communion to everyone, so he left the Presbyterian Church and started a new church – The Christian Association of Washington, PA. Thomas Campbell also wrote our very first document – ‘The Declaration and Address’ in 1809.

His son, Alexander Campbell, had to stay behind in Scotland until he could afford for the rest of the Campbell family to sail to America. While in Scotland, he got a degree in ministry. Alexander Campbell and the rest of the family finally saved enough money to journey to America. Once in America, they journeyed to see Dad in Washington, PA. When Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell met somewhere near Washington, PA, Thomas showed Alexander the Declaration and Address. They both agreed that this is what their ministry would be all about – communion for everyone, unity in Christ, and no Creed but Christ.

At about the same time, in Kentucky, was another Presbyterian minister named Barton Stone, who declared through the document called ‘Last Will & Testament of the Springfield Presbytery’ his wishes to leave the Presbyterian Church and start the Christian Church. Barton Stone left the Presbyterian Church over the communion table also.

These Presbyterian ministers started new denominations, and eventually they joined together to start the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

They cut to the chase. They established their own churches over the communion table.

In the late 1800's, people from Baltimore and Pittsburgh became people of action. They cut to the chase. They established a retreat center here on the beach for spiritual growth! They raised funds to build an octagonal Tabernacle, designed after Alexander Campbell's study in Bethany, WV. They cut to the chase.

On July 21st, 1901, they had the first worship service on the beach in the Tabernacle. The seal of the town of Bethany Beach has the tabernacle depicted on it.

In 1960-1961, the original tabernacle was torn down, and the present tabernacle was built. It serves as the dining hall for the camp.

In October 1998, the church began year-round worship services in the Chapel.

In July 2001, the present Chapel was modified to coincide with the town's centennial.

This camp and conference center is here because people cut to the chase!

Today's passage speaks about cutting to the chase. It focuses on what we need to know about life and how life is to be lived. Here is what is at the heart of the matter. Let us cut to the chase!

The bedrock of life is God's love! Our God is not a distant God. Our God is not an uncaring God. Our God is not a God who ignores us. Our God is a loving God!

These three little words are at the heart of the matter - God is love. These three little words cut to the chase - God is love!

God cares deeply for us. God is love.

How do we know this? Of course, it is a matter of faith, but the reality is that our God sent his only Son into the world. God's sending his Son shows us unmistakably how much God loves us. God sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God sent his Son to rescue us from the mess we are in. God cut to the chase through his Son.

So how does this affect our lives? All of life is changed when we live on the basis that God is love. Living on the bedrock belief that God is love helps us cut to the chase.

No longer do we need to be afraid or uncertain about facing life - God is love. No longer do we need to be afraid about facing death - God is love.

God has been here. God, through Jesus Christ, has faced the wonders, the thrills, the threats, the worries, and the hardships of life. He knows our pain and rejoices in our joys.

God is love must affect our relationship with other human beings. God is love must require us to worship God.

Over 200 years ago, three very faithful men from PA & Kentucky cut to the chase and joined together to establish a church denomination called the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), based on the love of God found in this communion table.

Let me end on a personal note:

The great evangelist Paul established many churches in Jesus' name, but he truly loved one of those churches above the others. Do not get me wrong, Paul loved all the churches he started, but there was only one church Paul allowed to support him in his missionary trips - that was the church in Philippi. The church in Philippi was Paul's beloved church.

For over five years, you have been my church in Philippi. I loved you. You are my beloved church.

In Philippians 2:1 - 4, Paul gives us the characteristics of a good church community. Paul states clearly his characteristics of a good church. Here are those characteristics. The church must be encouraging, consoling in love, sharing in the Holy Spirit, compassionate, and tender.

You are a good church community because I know you have those qualities and characteristics. You are an encouraging church, a church that consoles in love, a sharing church, a compassionate church, and a tender church.

God bless the Bethany Beach Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)! Let us always cut to the chase. God bless each and every one of you. Let us get to the heart of the matter - God is love!