

May 7, 2017

“Discipleship”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

James 2:14-18; Matthew 28:16-20 (Msg. versions)

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Today, we're going to talk about discipleship. What is a disciple of Christ and what does a disciple of Christ do. And I'm going to show you two videos. The first, I've shown before, but it's so appropriate for today. Because it shows how *not* to do discipleship. And then, the video at the end will show you how *to do* discipleship. So let's watch...

Discipleship Draft

Obviously, the original disciples, Peter, James, and John, had trouble two thousand years ago recruiting genuine, hard-working disciples for Jesus Christ that had the characteristics of leadership, experience, faithfulness and commitment. The same problem we seem to be struggling with today. And so, rather than settling on a last minute, desperation game of chance to find disciples, like in the video, I think the better idea is to develop disciples through discipleship. Now what exactly is discipleship? Well, interestingly, the word never appears anywhere in the Bible. However, its root word, "disciple" does, and it basically means "imitator." A disciple of Christ is an imitator of Christ. One who is Christ-like. Who walks in the footsteps of Christ. And I hope all of us here want to do that. I mean, let me ask, does anyone here *not* want to be Christ-like? Well, then, let's see what we need to do.

The first thing is we need to realize that discipleship is a journey that continues throughout our life. It is a continual, never-ending process. Some people mistakenly think that knowing the basics is adequate. Like Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is love, Jesus rose from the dead, we should love and forgive others. And these are all right and good basics to know, but they certainly aren't enough. You may remember the book by Robert Fulghum in which he said he learned all the important things in life at a very early age. Things like play fair, share everything, put things back where you find them, say you're sorry when you hurt someone, and so on. In fact, he titled the book, *“All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten.”* Now this is a nice concept and it sold a lot of books. But we all know it's not true. A kindergartener has not learned everything they need to know. They have the basics on which to grow, but they can't stay at the kindergarten level if they want to live as mature adults. And we can't stay at knowing just a few Christian basics if we want to be a mature disciple, living a Christ-like life.

And that's where we, as a church, the Body of Christ, come into play. The church exists primarily for two purposes: to worship God, and to work for his kingdom in this world. Let me repeat: to worship God and to work for his kingdom in this world. Now on the surface, these seem to be relatively simple things to accomplish. But if they were that simple, the world wouldn't be in the mess it is today, would it? So let's first consider worship. You know that one hour a week in church is not sufficient enough for the worship of God and growing in our faith. That's because there are 167 hours left over in the week to worship so many other things. And, the truth is, we become like what we worship. Those who worship money, become money driven. Those who worship sex, become obsessed with their looks and their lusting. Those who worship power often become more and more unfeeling and even cruel. Those who worship celebrities spend their time wanting and wasting to be like them. You get the point. Yet, how many of us put the effort into truly worshiping God, so that we become more like God. Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright says, "Worship of God makes you *grow*... grow in the love in whose image you were created. Conversely, when you give that same worship to anything, or anyone else, you shrink." You shrink, and become something less than you were made to be. Therefore, learning and growing in our faith is critical for us, and this happens in and through worship.

Now the second purpose of the church is to work for God's kingdom in this world. It's not enough to know about God, have faith in God, we must also work for God. That's why we heard St. James tell us about the importance of both our faith, and our works. How you can't have one without the other. And so not only do we need to learn and grow – we must act. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, that means you and me, to go out, "and *train* everyone in this way of life... *instruct* them... *teaching* them to obey all I have commanded you." Like walking the extra mile, forgive seventy times seven, feed the hungry, clothe the needy. As you can see, the operative words here as to how to accomplish God's work is through *training* and *instructing* and *teaching*. And we do this by our words and our actions – exemplifying Christ in all we say and do.

I'm sure most of you remember a popular phrase that was born a few years ago, *What Would Jesus Do?* WWJD? Remember that? The question, which was subjected to a certain amount of ridicule and parody, can give rise to such thoughts as, Would Jesus drive an SUV, a Prius, or a pick-up? Would Jesus vote for Hillary or Trump? Presumably, the answer was to be determined from a study of Jesus words and actions found in Scripture. But according to the late Harvard professor, Rev. Peter Gomes, "When people ask, 'What would Jesus do?', they are asking the wrong question. The question should be put differently. Not what would Jesus do, but rather, more dangerously, 'What would Jesus have me do?' What would Jesus have me do?"

Well, to repeat today's Gospel, he tells us as clearly as possible. Go out, "and *train* everyone in this way of life... *instruct* them... *teaching* them to obey all I have commanded you." Now this verse is referred to as the "Great Commission." It is not the "great suggestion." And trust me when I tell you this theme of learning, growing, instructing and teaching, is found, not only in these passages, but throughout the Bible. Obviously, this is critical, not only to discipleship, but to the growth of Christ's church. And just think, if we really took Jesus' words to heart. Then every Christian would be helping non-believers become believers by teaching them about Christ through their words and actions. That's discipleship, through outreach and mission. Every Christian would be helping other Christians grow and become more mature in their faith. That's discipleship through fellowship. And, finally, every Christian would be finding ways in which he/she continues to learn and walk at a deeper level with Christ. That's discipleship through spiritual growth.

And all of these things will be coming together in two weeks at our all church retreat on Saturday, May 20th from 8:30 – 3:00. We had one a couple months ago, what a time of joy and growth and fellowship. But, because you expect me, the pastor, to say that, let me share with you what your brothers and sisters had to say about it.

Retreat Video

Yes, that's how you do discipleship. By sharing, learning, growing, and equipping each other to be a disciple and to "go and make disciples." In your bulletin is a form for you to fill out. A continental breakfast and wonderful lunch will be provided. As you can see, there are a variety of topics. Please consider making this a priority. Circle the sessions you want to attend, and give it to Jenn Linton, or drop it off in mailbox outside the office. As you heard in the video, this is a time for you to get "charged up," to be "in a Christian community who can accomplish wonderful things," "to be inspired," "to learn," "to have a natural high." I hope to see you all there as we continue our journey of discipleship! Amen