

Sunday, June 21, 2020

Romans 6:1-11 Matthew 10:24-39

Discipleship in Jesus

It was during a traditional worship service that the minister asked the children gathered around her a discussion question for the day. What is the purpose of the Christian church? One child answered 'so we can learn about God'; another responded "because we like to see people who are like church friends;" and still another stated, 'so we can get disciplined'. The minister was not quite sure what this child meant and so asked, 'can you explain that?' Sure, you know when you were bad and your mommy or daddy tell you what you did wrong. So why do we come to church then? Because Jesus' friends needed all the *discipline* "discipling" they could get and Jesus was a good teacher. This child actually had it correct in one way—Jesus' friends were known as his disciples. They needed to learn what to do to follow him because they were not sure who Jesus was nor did they fully understand what his life's purpose was until much later in his ministry and even close to the time of his death. These followers of Jesus were just a group of people whom God help Jesus choose to learn about the Way of Jesus, and to come to faith and believe in him as the promised Messiah.

Yet when we think of discipline we often refer to the act of punishment or correcting a wrong. Much like the father who tried to put his little boy to bed. It was the eighth attempt when the dad 's patience was running out. When the dad heard the boy cry "Daddy" again the dad yelled out, "If I hear you say Daddy one more time I'm coming there to take a sleeping toy away." For a little while, all was quiet. Then a little voice whisper, "Mr. Brown, can I have a drink?"

But who are the disciples of Jesus? Maybe as children you learned the song which taught you the names of Jesus' 12 disciples- There were 12 disciples Jesus called to help him: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, his brother John; Philip, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon, Judas and Batholomew. But this song also states that Jesus has called us and what we are to do His work. And who are Jesus' disciples today? People who believe in Jesus and seek to follow him in their daily life. Being a disciple means that we want to put God's word into action by seeking to live the way Christ wants us to live with God's help.

But discipleship costs! Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that for Christians there is more to being a disciple of Jesus than following him. Christians are also called to disciple making. But unfortunately, most just do not do it because the cost is high. In Matthew 28 (16-20) we read

what is known as the great commission. He states, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." He also ended by saying, "And remember I am with you always, to the end of age."

Jesus said that we do not make disciples on our own because we are not alone but many faithful people fear telling others about Jesus. I wonder if the person who first told you about Him was afraid? As Paul wrote to Timothy (2Timothy 2:2) what you have heard from me must be entrusted to others and then taught to even more. This is what might be called spiritual parenting.

Today is Father's day when we recognize the men in our lives who through words and actions have enabled us to become who we are through love, encouragement and work. Many fathers have taught their sons how to shave or will do so in the future and this is a part of being a dad. But both fathers and mothers have influence in their children's lives which includes not only their physical or mental or emotional health, but also their spiritual growth. As parents we are to carefully and prayerfully teach our children what has helped us through our difficult times and how we cope with the many changes and challenges we each face every day. This is sharing the message of Christ's love not just at Christmas with presents and Easter with chocolate, but sharing what it means to be a disciple of Jesus throughout one's life. We know that the cost of discipleship is high but it is also challenging and rewarding. For when an individual makes the decision to follow Jesus, there is peace and hope renewed!

In Romans 6 Paul writes that as believers and disciples of Jesus we have been changed from people who sinned and could not be forgiven to people who are now 'enslaved' that is tied or linked with God for all of eternally. This is because (vs23) the wages of sin is death but in Jesus Christ we receive the free gift of eternal life with God. This is linked to discipleship because we must realize first that we are sinners and we will sin again. But God knows us and calls us to Him to seek forgiveness and live again for Christ. This is part of spiritual learning and spiritual growth.

It is difficult to be a disciple of Jesus. There are people who will *oppose* your commitment to Christ and there are people who say it is all right to be Christian but do not wish to hear your story or that of Jesus. We may do all the best things we can do yet we will also share in suffering. We remember Jesus died on the cross and Paul was put in prison because

he so wanted to make disciples! When people do not want to hear your faith story it is hard to *stay focused* and tell them what has done. But we must remember that Jesus knew his purpose and stayed focused. We often *want to please other* people instead of pleasing God in our actions. This is especially difficult when we have to say no to our involvement in some activities that we know do not follow Christ's way of living and faithfulness.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all we had to do is ask God to give us those who are interested in becoming disciples of Jesus and send them to our church family? We must *persevere* in our disciple making endeavours. We need to be intentional in sharing Jesus' story because through him lives can and do change. And it takes a lot of *energy* to make disciples. Are you willing to spend your time and energy to reach out to others. What is amazing is that once we say we believe, God enables us to have the strength and energy we need to that we can walk in faith, lean on Him and amazingly enough- we are energized anew.

To make disciples today we need to take the *initiative to lead* others away from what might harm them to something that will increase their self-worth and their identity will become as Christian- a follower of Christ. The other thing to note about the cost of discipleship is that it takes *time*. Disciples are not made like pudding. We cannot just add milk to powder and whip it for two minutes and it becomes pudding. Making disciples includes the *giving* of time, energy, attention, and making sacrifices. Sometimes it means embracing obscurity and still sharing who we are with others.

Jesus also spoke of discipleship in Matthew 10 in the form of an idiom. Jesus states, "Don't think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I haven't come to bring peace, but a sword." Jesus came to teach us how to live lives of love with convictions of justice for the sake of others. We are to love others, yes, but you are to love Jesus even more. Because Jesus is God we are to love people less than loving God. God must be first; and if we truly wish to be disciples of Christ we must remember that no matter what we face, we have nothing to fear. Jesus has our backs- our lives and he is with us each step we take. In order to be like Jesus we are to model his sacrifice and obedience to God that is to put our faith in Jesus. If we do this, it will seem we lose so much, and it will be lost. But in Jesus, by losing what we might think as important, we will gain so much more in Christ! What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

It means taking up the cross and following him in faith. IT means letting go of your old way of living in sin and sorrow and want and moving into follow the light of Jesus wherever you go without fear. And if we are fearful, we need to remember that through prayer God will help us

no matter what we face—whether illness, grief, opposition, hurt and pain God will comfort us because of his love for us. Jesus calls us to follow him. To grow in faith and to trust him with our lives. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Are you ready to answer this call? Are you willing to share your faith? Come let us renew our faith as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Holy God of grace and love we thank you that you love us no matter what we say and do because we believe and trust in you. You call us to serve you. We continue to answer this call as we take up the cross of Christ and follow. Hear us O God as we come before you in faith and with hope. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen..