

Sunday, October 13, 2019

Be His: Discipleship in Christ

Our fall series continues as we look to what it means to “Be- a part of Christ’s Church”. What does “Being His” mean? His who? God= Jesus- both? What does it mean to know that we are Christ’s disciples in faith? These are questions that sometimes are left unanswered yet as we celebrate Thanksgiving we might be confused as to why we should and whether if we are really His at all. For often what happens is that we do not see the Giver of the blessings which we receive and take what is around us for granted.

There is a story about a man who was lost in the woods for many hours. His family reported him missing as he had wandered away from a hiking group to see something in the woods. Eventually help was called in- police on foot, airplanes flew overhead and even divers were brought in to see if his pack left by the lake was a clue to where he was. His family and the community prayed for his safety. Later one, after his safe return home, the man described the experience. He shared how frightened he was and how he had even finally knelt and prayed. Someone asked, “Did God answer your prayer?” “Oh, no,” the man replied. “Before God had a chance, a guide came along and showed me the way out.”

Sometimes we look for our blessings from God and do not see what really is before us. Like that man, many people are blind to the many blessings that God daily showers upon them. They awake to see the sun shining, and do not give thanks to God. They hear the birds chirping and see beautiful flowers and trees, but they don’t give it a moment’s thought that God has given those blessings and given them the senses to enjoy them. They grumble about having to eat the same old cereal, forgetting that many would gladly exchange places with them and eat anything for breakfast. They complain about their jobs, forgetting that many would be grateful just to have a job or even to have the bodily strength to go to work. They complain about their lack of money, forgetting that they spend more on entertainment each month than many around the world earn as their total income. And we wonder why this secular holiday is still celebrated in many homes across the nation. Maybe it has something to do with the should, would could. We should give thanks because Jesus would want us to even though what we do have we have paid for it ourselves. Yet there is hope beyond this sense of entitlement especially when we reflect upon what others not only in our city experience but within our country of Canada. And as Christ’s followers we choose to make a difference because we are His—Disciples in faith!

Our reading from Luke 17 takes place between Samaria and Galilee with Jesus and his disciples en route to Jerusalem. The group enter a small village and a group of ten men who suffer different forms of skin disease approach Jesus. They did not swarm him or come close to Jesus because they knew the social laws would not allow this. They were diseased men, but knew of Jesus and what he could do for them would and could change their lives. These men would have lived in the streets because their families would not be able to help them and in order to prevent others from getting the disease, they did only interacted with people from a distance. They would have suffered from this disease for a long time as diseases of the skin did not have any cure not were causes understood. Infections went right through them in time and this led to their eventual deaths. But as they suffered with these diseases, they were treated as if they were dead: cut off from society including their family. They would have to wear old, ragged tattered clothes, have their heads uncovered in the hot sun so that others could see them, They would also cover their lips as disease would also be in their mouths and all would lead to the public humiliation of having to shout, "Unclean, Unclean" So that others would keep their distance..

But these 10 men knew Jesus, as he walked on the street. They called to him, "Jesus, master, have mercy on us." They did not specify what they wanted Him to do- but asked for his mercy. Jesus could see that they needed physical healing in order to live in community again. They would need to be officially welcomed back into the community by the local priest. So Jesus tells them to go and talk to the priest. And while they were walking away-boom- they were healed. Nine of them did what Jesus told them to—go and see the priest. But one saw what had happened to his skin. He was healed and when he saw it, he left the others, turned around, praised God with a loud voice so everyone could hear him, and then fell down on the ground at Jesus' feet and said, "Thank you."

Jesus did not know these men by name, or who they were, or what they believed. He healed their physical problem. In response, one a person who had probably heard about the man Jesus and he stopped. He saw his body whole again, praised God and went to give thanks to Jesus.

Jesus asked around to those who had been watching, passersby, disciples, friends and family members of the former lepers about what they had witnessed. "Were not 10 made clean? Where are the other 9? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Turning this man who had just been healed Jesus told him to "Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well." The others' had been healed right? Why was Jesus acknowledging the faith of this Samaritan man as being the reason for his healing? Was it because the others did not know what to

do, had been shy or did they not understand what had happened? Did they question it? Or had they already debated amongst themselves that Jesus would be able to do this? Either way, Jesus healed them all. Yet the Samaritan now believes in Him-Jesus. He had heard about him through the conversations of others as they walked by on the street. What caused the ten to ask for mercy and only one giving thanks? What about the others? Maybe they had excuses which we might even use today!

Someone has made a list of nine suggested reasons why the nine did not return: One waited to see if the cure was real. One waited to see if it would last. One said he would see Jesus later. One decided that he had never had leprosy in the first place. One said he would have gotten well anyway. One gave the glory to the priests. One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything." One said, "Any rabbi could have done it." One said, "I was already much improved." Why did only one man cleansed from leprosy return to thank Jesus? 10% 1 of 10! Don't we wonder what the current percentage of giving thanks to God is right now? 10,5,3 1% There are many who are do not give thanks to God because in fact, it often seems that the more we have, the less gratitude we feel.

We are called to 'Be His: disciples that is to live out our lives with discipleship to Jesus. But what does this entail? What does it mean to follow Jesus? The cost of discipleship is linked to what we are doing today- eating with thanksgiving. But eating of the bountiful harvest is different than what Jesus referred to in John 6. For many people Thanksgiving marks the end of summer and preparations for autumn are moved into full gear. Cottages, trailers, are closed for the winter and boats are put into storage. Pools are closed and covered and garden furniture is stored away. Yet when we reflect on the reason we celebrate Thanksgiving it is because the farmers have or will soon complete their work, bringing in the fruits of their harvest enabling us to feast with friends and family. Good food is plentiful in our region and the opportunity to share it with others is reason to celebrate. There might also be pastries and fruit and pie. But at the heart of many meals is bread- a staple eaten by many people in different forms- gluten-free, flat, pumpernickel, rye, oat, corn – all have their heritage beginnings but serve the same purpose, the basis of many meals. The crops from the fields becoming the food on the table.

In John 6, Jesus had fed the crowd of thousands and had slipped away to be alone. His disciples had also left him and yet the people still searched for him. What did they want? They were to go home after their meal but they were still looking for him. Jesus is exhausted—teaching all day, then feeding the crowd and now they still want his attention. Jesus tells them straight out—you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you are fill of the loaves. He then states, "Don't work for food

that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” Were the people seeing Jesus as a means of free food? Or was it because they wanted to learn more about him, following his teachings and knowing him not only as the Son of Man, but the Son of God.

They asked, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” He responded by saying you must believe in him whom he has sent. What sign are you giving to give us then so that we may see it and believe you. What works are you performing? They wanted Jesus to explain. They told of their Jewish ancestors who ate the manna in the wilderness. But Jesus says it was not Moses who gave them the manna bread, but God the Father. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. So they connect the manna from God with the bread Jesus shared. But they wanted the bread that is consumed or perishes quickly not realizing that what they were asking was really—we want you.

They wanted to follow Jesus. And Jesus answers I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. How are we to understand this today when we know that there is abundance in our stores yet people go hungry? How are we to share the good news of Jesus as the bread and water of life? We must say we are his disciples in faith and we are his. We believe in him as the bread of life which sustains us not just when our stomachs need refilling, but whenever and under many circumstances we find ourselves.

Jesus is the bread of life that will nourish us when we question ourselves; when we look to God for healing for self and others and even when we pause to say Thank You. We are a part of Christ’s church because we belong and serve Christ. We are his through faith and we must give thanks to God for His many blessings not just today- but always.

As we reflect on our commitment to be a part of Christ’s church we must focus on Christ Jesus and know him for He knows us and we are His through faith. This is something for which we must be grateful for we are the feet and hands of Christ Jesus today. Let us remember this as we prayerfully sing “Take Up Your cross” AMEN>

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