TPC’s Values: Curiosity (Part 1)

OT 28B-21

John 13: 1-5, 12-17

Matthew 28: 16-20

Oct. 24, 2021

**Prayer for Illumination**

**John 13: 1-5, 12-17**

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

**Matthew 28: 16-20**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,

to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him,

they worshipped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them,

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given 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. And remember, I am with you always,

to the end of the age.’

TPC’s Values: Curiosity (Part 1

*Rabbi’s teach. Disciples learn.*

It’s a truth that sits at the very heart of the gospel… and our relationship with Christ… even if we don’t often tend to think of Jesus as our rabbi.

Of course, there’s good reason we may not think of Jesus like that. Scripture gives Jesus many titles. It says he called himself things like Son of Man. Son of God. I am… While his followers assigned him titles like Lord. Savior. Messiah. Some called him a King.

But there’s one title… one title in particular that everyone used for Jesus. He used to it describe himself. His disciples and followers used it. And even his biggest adversaries… the religious authorities of his day… they agreed… *Jesus was a “rabbi.”*

A rabbi—which we, today, connect with ordained leaders of Jewish synagogues. But that’s not how the term was used in Jesus’ day. No. Back then, the title rabbi meant… teacher. Well, a “master” teacher, really.

Back then, a rabbi’s primary role was to teach the meaning to be found in Hebrew tradition and Scripture. It’s why rabbis taught the way of the Torah—Hebrew law. But they didn’t just teach the literal letter of the law. They taught how they believed these ancient texts should be interpreted And, most importantly, they demonstrated how these truths should be applied to daily living.

Rabbis were also often on the lookout for those they deemed particularly faithful… perhaps capable of one day becoming rabbis themselves… who they’d invite to come and follow them. To learn from them. To study both their words and how they lived them out.

These committed followers were called disciples. A fancy word that really means… pupil… or student.

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*So rabbis teach. Disciples learn.*

It makes sense, then, that the rabbi, Jesus, called disciples to follow him. To learn how he interpreted Hebrew Scripture. To study how he applied Scripture and the way and will of God to his daily living.

It’s also why Jesus spent so much time teaching not just his disciples… but the crowds who began following him once they realized Jesus was not your average rabbi.

We see this in Jesus’ first act of public ministry. Matthew says he saw a huge crowd gathering around him… so he climbed up a nearby mountain in Galilee and began teaching not just his disciples… but all who could hear.

In Matthew, we call it the Sermon on the Mount. But let’s be clear. Jesus wasn’t really preaching a sermon. He was teaching people about the ways and will of God. He called it “the kingdom of God,” the way of life we uncover when we live into God’s intentions.

On the one hand, it’s clear that these lessons he taught were shocking because the ways of God’s kingdom seemed so different from the ways of the world. And yet, they were also beautiful.

* Beautiful to believe that mercy is more satisfying than vengeance.
* Beautiful to think that humility is more fulfilling than prestige.
* Beautiful to wonder if life really might be found in giving… rather than taking.

He taught all of that and a whole lot more up on top of that Galilean mountain. But, of course, the lessons didn’t stop when he came down.

*Because rabbi’s teach. And disciples learn.*

* In fact, in the very next chapter, he taught the disciples to trust in God’s provisions even when the storms of life seem to rage against you. But some of the disciples were still afraid and struggled to trust.
* Time and again he showed them that no one—no one—was too far gone, too bad, too this or that to be loved and cared for. Yet the disciples still tried to shield Jesus from women or children or other undesirables.
* He taught them that love… self-giving love of God and love of neighbor is the most important law… the center of faith… the epitome of what God desires. But they scolded and rebuked him when he taught them that love also requires sacrifice.
* And he taught them that selfless grace is more powerful than any thing this world can wield… but they argued which one of them was the greatest. And then… one of them betrayed him. Another denied even knowing him. And the others all abandoned him as he spent his last breath revealing what grace can do.

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*It’s true. Rabbi’s teach. Disciples learn.*

But by the time we get to the end of the gospel… it may be fair to wonder just how much the disciples had actually learned. It’s not like they’d gotten a heckuvalot right… including the part about Jesus dying and rising. I mean… Jesus flat out told them he was going to die and rise again on the third day, but as we see in Matthew 28… it’s as if the disciples had no recollection of it all. After Jesus died, Matthew’s clear… there was no talk of resurrection. No talk of going to see Jesus. Heck… the disciples weren’t even interested in going to his tomb.

The women were the only ones with the faith and courage to do that. It’s why the women were the first to see the risen Christ. It’s why the women had to run back to tell the disciples… “We’ve seen Jesus! He’s alive! He’s risen from the dead! And he wants you to meet him in Galilee!”

Can you imagine the disciples’ thoughts? Their conversations as they journeyed back to Galilee? Wondering if it could possibly be true. Wondering if Jesus really overcame death. Wondering if love and grace really are the most powerful forces in the world, after all. Wondering if Jesus had been right and the world had been wrong, all along?

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Matthew says Jesus greeted them on a mountaintop in Galilee. An appropriate place for a rabbi who spent so much time teaching atop mountains.

But before he could offer his disciples one more lesson, Matthew says that when the disciples saw Jesus, they **“worshiped him; (and) some doubted.”** They worshipped him… even as they doubted. The disciples worshipped him… the risen Jesus… standing and speaking before their very eyes… even as they struggled to believe what they were seeing and hearing.

Resurrection before their very eyes. Everything Jesus had promised had come true. And yet… they still doubted.

Jesus understood this, of course. He knew the disciples had doubts. He knew they struggled with their faith. He knew they hadn’t yet figured out this thing called resurrection… just as he knew they hadn’t yet mastered all that he had spent his life trying to teach them.

And still… though they doubted and struggled to live the faith he’d been teaching them… this is what Jesus said. “Go. Baptize people of all nations—Hebrews and Gentiles alike—in the name of God. Make sure they know that they each belong to God… that they are all loved and invited to become my disciples just as you have. So go,” he said, “Baptize and teach them everything I have commanded you.”

“Teach them about the law of love… and the power of grace.

“Teach them about the freedom found in mercy and the fulfillment found in generosity.

“Go and teach them everything,” Jesus told his worshipping, doubting disciples, in his final earthly lesson. Entrusting them… doubts and all… to continue his mission and ministry in the world.

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*Rabbis teach. Disciples learn.*

No matter the mistakes. Regardless of doubts.

And yet… it seems that the Church so often tries to connect faith with certainty, doesn’t it? Far too often we assume discipleship means we should have all the answers, rather than being those in search of them.

You know, Joel and I can’t count the number of times we might ask someone to consider leading a group and hear a response along the lines of, “Oh… I couldn’t do that. I don’t have the answers.” Just as we’ve heard from so many parents who feel ill equipped to talk to their children about faith. Because they don’t have think they have the “right” answers.

But if rabbi’s teach and disciples learn… isn’t the Biblical model of discipleship more about learning to ask the questions than trying to find certainty amid their answers? I mean… doesn’t learning actually require questions? Lots and lots of questions… as we struggle… and make mistakes… and, yes, even doubt, at times, the new truths to which God is calling. New understandings of who and whose we are… New priorities and values Jesus calls us to carry. Isn’t doubt and struggle a sort of pre requisite to it all?

It’s why I love that, at the end of it all, Matthew tells us… faith entails doubt. Because faith, time and again, defies our expectations, as God so relentlessly challenges our assumptions and our certainties… bringing us face to face with the difference between what this world tells us and the way of life Jesus has shown us.

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It’s why I’m so proud, Towson Presbyterian Church, that one of the primary values we carry as a congregation is *curiosity*. It’s so much more valuable to a life of faith than certainty ever could be.

As the gospels reveal, curiosity is what leads us to ask faith questions in the first place. It’s what gets us seeking to better understand exactly who God is… and who we’re called to be. It’s what motivates us to find the courage to wrestle with even the divisive and controversial issues of our day… because we’re determined to view all of life—not just parts of life but all of life—every issue and every relationship—through the lens of our faith and the light of God’s love.

And we simply won’t do that if we’re already certain that we have all the right answers, certain that our understanding is spot on. Certain that we know exactly how to interpret Scripture, thank you very much. Certain that God has nothing more to show us… or teach us.

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It seems to me… we *need* to be curious.

* Curious… rather than certain.
* Willing to wrestle and wonder… rather than assume we know all there is.
* Even willing to doubt as we worship, knowing that the strongest of faiths… the most passionate disciples never stop seeking to learn.

So go… Towson Presbyterian… and explore your faith. Ask questions. Click on towsonpres.org and see the spiritual formation opportunities waiting to be explored. Wrestle with who God says you are. Struggle with the values and priorities God calls you to share. Wonder how God might be seeking to use you… as you continue on this journey of discipleship with your rabbi… remembering always…

Rabbis teach. Disciples learn.

Amen.