What Disciples Do—Part 1 of 8

Disciples Take Faith Seriously

Luke 14: 25-

OT14C-22

Sept. 11, 2022

What Disciples Do

Disciples Take Faith Seriously

Welcome to Homecoming, friends.

Welcome to the start of a brand-new year of mission, ministry, and program here at Towson Presbyterian Church… as we seek to follow Jesus Christ… the one who calls us to hate father and mother, spouse and children, siblings and even life itself.

That’s why you’re here, right? In response to Jesus’ invitation to discipleship? Ready and willing to hate family and friends in pursuit of the way of Jesus Christ?

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It’s quite the Homecoming invitation, don’t you think? It’s not just shocking… it’s also probably the most bassackwards quote in all of Scripture. As Gospel readers already know, Jesus’ entire ministry—his *entire* ministry—was about revealing that radically inclusive love and grace of God. Everything Jesus has done up to this point… and everything he would ever do… was done in love… for love. So to hear Jesus even use the word hate seems out of place… but to actually hear him inviting people to hate family and friends… it’s alarming… even upsetting.

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Which is, I’m sure, precisely the point. Let’s be clear here. Jesus was intent on getting the crowd’s attention—as well as yours and mine.

You see… Luke makes clear at the beginning of our lesson that *large* crowds had begun traveling with Jesus. Along the way, these crowds were blessed to witness amazing things. They’d seen miracles of healing and restoration and transformation take place. Just as they got to listen, firsthand, to Jesus’ lessons on life and love and the ways of God. To them it all looked beautiful… and easy. Too easy. Blessings without cost. Grace without sacrifice.

For the crowd hadn’t yet encountered some of the tougher, harder parts of discipleship themselves. The masses weren’t there when Jesus told the 12 he was going to be betrayed… arrested… and killed. Just as they weren’t there when Jesus told his disciples that true greatness wasn’t found in being first… but in becoming the last and the least. Just as the crowds had yet to experience what it meant to be sent out in mission to serve a hurting and broken world… amid the risks and obstacles and humility one must overcome to truly serve the hurting… and the hungry… and the outcast.

To this point, the crowds had only seen blessings without cost… and grace without sacrifice.

So before he took one more step on his journey, Jesus needed the crowd to understand… Yes… the love of God changes lives and will, soon, change the world. Yes… the grace of God is beautiful and freeing and life-giving all at the same time. Yes… this way of life Jesus revealed… this way of love and grace does lead to real life—life in all its fullness—as God intends.

But just like every other thing in the world… this way of discipleship is not without its cost. It’s not all a bed of roses. Love and grace… they may not cost money… but they demand both commitment… and fidelity. They require persistence and sacrifice. “So if you want to be my disciples,” Jesus proclaimed, “you must be prepared to commit… and sacrifice.”

“You must be willing to commit to me… and me alone.

“You must be willing to put my priorities of love and grace before all other things. Including your pride.

“And you must be willing to sacrifice everything… everything you think you know… all the other priorities you used to have… in order to put me… and my ways of love and grace first in your life.”

Like a coach telling her team that there is no offseason… that they better commit to their training and their diet and their skill development if they want to win gold… Jesus is telling would-be disciples that this path is not for the faint of heart.

Like the businessman so determined to climb the corporate ladder that he worked nights and weekends and missed out on family events that won’t return… Jesus makes clear the way of discipleship demands tough choices… and some things will be missed.

Like the young couple eagerly expecting their first child… reading every book and saving every penny they can amid a futile attempt to prepare for the emotional, physical, and financial sacrifices parenthood requires…

Jesus is being up front and transparent. To pursue something not just significant but transformative… to strive for something not just life-changing but life-giving… we better be prepared to commit… and sacrifice.

And the Church does no one any favors pretending otherwise. We don’t.

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Now granted… we don’t want to scare people away… or make folks think that a relationship with God is anything less than wonderful. Because faith isn’t and shouldn’t seem scary. People need to know how wonderful… how life-giving… how life-changing a relationship with God can be.

But we also need to be clear… it also takes work. It also takes practice. And a lot of it. I’ve been at this pastoring thing for over 20 years now and I still feel like I need as much practice as ever.

Practice putting God first.

Practice putting others first.

Practice putting love first.

Practice putting grace first.

In this do more, achieve more culture of ours, this is as counter-cultural as it gets. Which means there are times it seems downright foolish to put faith first… And there will be times we fail miserably at this thing called discipleship. Times we may feel foolish… times we may be judged…

But as Jesus makes clear… if we’re committed to it… if we’re willing to practice it… if we’re willing to sacrifice our time for it… if we’re willing to mold our priorities towards it… we’ll begin to uncover that the blessing that is the journey of discipleship, in and of itself.

For discipleship isn’t so much a decision we make to follow Jesus…. Nor is it a set of beliefs we hold. That’s religion.

Rather, discipleship is the journey we take as we seek to follow Jesus. A journey of practicing the ways of Jesus until they become more and more a part of who we are and how we live in the world… so that the world might become a more loving and grace-filled place.

Which means discipleship is the time we spend seeking to study and learn the ways Jesus models.

And it’s the sacrifices we make to give love even when love is so hard to give.

It’s the generosity we share when the world tells us to hoard.

And discipleship’s the relationships we build with others as we share ech others questions and doubts… joys and struggles… dreams and burdens…

Quite simply… discipleship is a journey of transformation… and transformation, we know, takes time… and commitment and persevearance, and sacrifice.

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So while, clearly, I have nothing against the Christian religion—I obviously am a Christian—the religion in and of itself doesn’t hold a lot water, you know what I mean? Consider… what does it cost to mentally ascent to a certain set of doctrines? What is transformed by merely calling one’s self a Christian?

You see, nominal Christianity is not the point… and we can’t pretend it is.

Not once in Scripture do we hear Jesus call us to simply be Christians.

He calls us to something much more important… and much more life-giving.

It’s why our mission, TPC—the stated mission of our community is to grow disciples of Christ.

We are called to be a people who practice giving and receiving love… giving and receiving grace.

We are called to be a community that not only welcomes but invites all people of every tribe and circumstance to join us in a journey of transformation as we seek to grow closer to God…

and closer to who God is calling us to be.

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**DISPLAY – Adult Spiritual Formation webpage**

It’s why I’m so proud of the work of so many across this past Spring and Summer… and all those who will be working throughout this fall facilitating an incredible array of spiritual formation opportunities.

As you can see on the screens… this is our website’s Adult Spiritual Formation page… and it has these square buttons which will take you to a host of opportunities to take a new step… a next step… in your journey of discipleship.

**Click on *Belong***

If you’re new to TPC… or simply eager to build fellowship and meaningful connection… *Belong groups* are designed to grow connections and bonds a shared activity… understanding that even amid something as simple as shared fellowship, God is present.

There’s multiple women’s groups… and group on faith and film… A group of gatherings around Monday Night Football… wine tasting… hiking… men’s breakfast… and a social group for parents.

But this is just our Belong Groups

**Scroll up and Click on *Become***

There’s also our *Become category*… designed for those seeking to more intentionally pursue a closer connection with God through study and devotion.

Here you’ll find a monthly Men’s Group… a women’s study and prayer group called Circle 13… Stephen’s bi monthy Sing with Understanding. And there’s a new group this fall that will be exploring how to pray.

There’s also a virtual group on Poetry and Fiathfulness… and then… for even deeper studies…

**(scroll lower)**

you’ll find Bible Studies… a group on Emobdying prayer… another music exploration group… and more.

**Scroll up and Click on *Bless***

Finally… if you click on Bless you find groups in which you can use your blessings to serve those in most need.

This fall the Prayer Shawl group returns… Our Honduras Mission team… and our three Mission Action teams building around hunger… peacemaking and earth care… and all kinds of activities within them.

Some of these groups take place virtually… and some are in-person. Some are here in the church… some are in folks homes.

I’m here to tell you, dear friends, there’s something for everyone. NO matter who you are or where you’re coming from… if you brand-new to this faith thing or comfortable swimming in the deep…

And while we’re here, we also want to make clear how easy it is to sign up.

**Click again on *Become***

So let’s say you want to learn more about a group. Let’s say… under Become… you want to explore more about Animate Faith—a group that will explore some big-picture topics of our faith.

**Click on *Animate: Faith***

Well… as you can see… you just click on that group… and it takes you to a more in-depth description.

And then… if you decide you want to register for it… it’s a simple as clicking the Register Here button… and then entering your email.

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**Go back to Adult Spiritual Formation Page with three blocks (it can just stay here)**

So no, TPC… despite the shock value within our lesson this morning… Jesus does not want you hating father or mother, family or friend. Jesus is not calling you away from life… but deeper into the path of discipleship which always… always leads to love and grace and real life—the transformative life God intends.

But… but… to find such life… to uncover such transformation… Jesus makes no bones about it. There must be commitment. There must be practice. We must be willing to sacrifice time and energy and priorities in order to pursue the path of discipleship Jesus sets before us.

So my question to each and all of you this day is not *if* you will take a next step… it’s not if you will join a small group or study or mission outreach… No.

As we set foot into this new missional year bursting with potential…

As we continue to uncover more and more of all TPC is doing… and is called to do…

As we grow our ministries as well as our outreach…

As we pursue the path of transformation that leads us all to life…

My question to each of you… and I do mean each of you—is not *if* you will take a next step in your journey… but which one?

What next step is God calling you to take?