

PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on Being a Disciple, Part 3.

Two months ago I mentioned the Biblical background of this model of a disciple:

AN ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ:

- 1. Is involved in regular Christian service to others;**
- 2. Is a student in a regular Bible School, Sunday School, or other learning environment with a teacher or mentor;**
- 3. Is a regular in corporate worship and private prayer;**
- 4. Is looking for and working with pre-Christians and new Christians to be a mentor for them.**

Now I want to focus on the second of these: being a student. The word the Bible uses for student is DISCIPLE. The word for someone who is sent out on a mission is APOSTLE:

Then Jesus summoned His twelve DISCIPLES and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve APOSTLES: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

These twelve Jesus SENT OUT with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food.”

Matthew 10:1-10 (NRSV)

Jesus did many miracles in the time of His earthly ministry, but the bulk of the story we are told is of Jesus teaching, and most of the time is to His disciples. He was training them for what is to come. We don't have the exact years, but generally we assume this took about three years. They were sent out at times very early in that time – it was a very “hands-on” kind of learning – but it took time for them to be ready after His crucifixion and resurrection. And then on the day of Pentecost, we read that:

*So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

Acts 2:41-42 (NRSV)

So it makes sense to me that if we are to be true followers of Jesus, we would want to learn as much about Him (and the Bible He lived by) as we can. Every Christian is to be a life-long learner.

For a church that has had Sunday School classes for children and adults, and multiple Bible studies, it might be hard to imagine that any church could exist without them. But one of the churches I served in my early years had a children's Sunday School class during worship, and that was all. There was not any adult Bible education, unless the pastor had led a class. There seemed to be an idea that education, Christian or otherwise, was just for children. This was a problem. Ironically, this church had begun many years earlier as a summer vacation Bible School serving both children and adults, and for many years the attendance of the Sunday School was larger than that of the worship service. I find that this was very common in churches about a hundred years ago: there was a great emphasis on life-long learning.

When we gather for worship, this was not meant to be an educational experience. It is meant to be a celebration of the Lord, combined with a tangible remembrance of His death and resurrection through communion, and a time of community prayer. Preachers like me have made it to be educational because most of the people we see are not in a regular learning environment. This is unfortunate, because a person in a small interactive class will learn more in a couple of weeks than in a year of sermons. Not only do we learn more, but we are better able to go out (like an apostle) and live it.

Even pastors need to be learning from someone. We all need to ask the question, "who are my mentors today?" One of my church members years ago told me a major change in his life came when he heeded the advice of a TV preacher. I can give you no better advice than his:

- Find a spiritual guide or teacher for you.
- Learn from that person all you can.
- Be accountable to them in growing and living as a fully devoted follower of Christ.

This member was one of the quietest people I've ever met, but today he is a respected Christian leader in his church and the kind of person sensible people want to learn from.

My prayer for all of you is the fullest of life in Jesus Christ, as a student as well as the other aspects of life.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Ken' or similar, written in a cursive style.