

Generous Disciples: to serve and to give

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

How is it with your soul, Generous Disciples? How did you participate in building God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven?

As we've learned, the call to Discipleship, taking up the cross, involves a commitment to let go of this world (its things, its ways) and to participate in a life of grace (regular spiritual practices/holy habits) reflects priorities of JOY(Jesus, Others, Yourself).

Today we continue to focus on using the holy habits in building God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven. John Wesley and the early Methodists believed God was still speaking. However, hardened hearts, distractions, pride, possessions, temptations, and spiritual obstacles impede our hearing God speak.

So, the first question for reflection, who is the 'master' of your world? (aka the ruler; in charge; the first)

In reading the letter to the Hebrews, we have heard how God's word is living, active and still speaking. In God's Word, our hearts are laid open, laid bare for the sight of the One to whom we must give answers for our thoughts, words & deeds. The writer proclaims the good news that Jesus Christ is CHOSEN to be the HIGH PRIEST, the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted, to be distracted, and to have obstacles put in his path. Yet, Jesus persists in offering himself as the REDEEMER who overcomes sin (obeys) to reconcile humanity with God through an eternal covenant in love. THIS IS

WHY JESUS IS THE LORD OF ALL (Melchizedek= 'my king is righteousness'¹)

Reflect on this for a moment: How do you keep your focus on JOY? (the attitude of a disciple is to serve with JOY (Jesus, Others, Yourself))

Holy habits help support us in ignoring distractions and help focus us on the real deal... the main thing...Jesus... and moving to be more like Christ in our lives, being transformed on the inside so that we might participate in the mission to transform the world by transforming others' lives to become disciples.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus has redefined his mission and what it means to be a disciple. The symbol of discipleship is the cross. Jesus re-presents discipleship as having a heart on fire for God's kin-dom, not the human value system. As we've learned, a Disciple is a follower of Jesus whose life is centering on loving God and loving others.

So, what does this understanding of Discipleship mean in light of this story of James & John asking Jesus to grant whatever they ask? (v35) And their request to sit on Jesus' Right and Left when he enters into glory?

REFLECTION: 1) How do you react to this request? (The 10 disciples reacted with anger (10:41) towards James & John.)

2) How does Jesus react A) to their requests... and B) to the anger of the disciples?

This is the THIRD time Jesus has stated the outcome of his mission...

Jesus and his disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, with Jesus in the lead. The disciples were amazed while the others following behind were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he told them what was about to happen to him. ³³ "Look!" he said. "We're going up to Jerusalem. The Human One^[a] will be handed over to the chief priests and the legal experts. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will ridicule him, spit on him, torture him, and kill him. After three days, he will rise up." (10:32-34).

If you ask me, the disciples are full of shock and awe; and possibly the disciples are in a state of denial of the painful truth.

¹ CEB Wesley Study Bible, 2011. Genesis 14:17-24, study notes. Page 20.

Every time Jesus has shared this outcome statement, the disciples have responded with some degree of misunderstanding and spiritual blindness.

- First, Peter told Jesus that couldn't happen. Jesus told Peter his mind was set on the ways of the world, not God's kin-dom.
- The second time, the disciples argued over who is the greatest. Again, God's way was contrasted with the world's ways.
- Now, the disciples seem focused on position, power, & honor when Jesus comes into his 'glory'.

None of this seems to match the definition of a Disciple: a follower of Jesus whose life is centering on loving God and loving others. No, this is very much self-centered, ME ME ME- thinking; future security in the human values system.

So, how does Jesus respond? He responds With God's system of honor and values, sacramental generosity.

- 1) What do you want me to do for you? Jesus hears their need and responds
- 2) Can you drink the Cup and receive the Baptism? Jesus points to the moment in Last Supper of sharing cup and in Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus refers to his Baptism not only in the Jordan River, but in his shed blood in taking up the cross.

REFLECTION: What is the root of the disciple's spiritual blindness?

For the 1st century people, the way of Jesus has been an adventure and a time of learning. It has been a time of being valued and included, being seen and known. Perhaps, it is possible that the disciples DO understand what lies ahead in Jerusalem. In their shock and awe, they may have fear, not be power hungry.

For 21st century people, we have lived through seasons of fear: war, terrorism, insurrection, and now a pandemic, which brings its own layers of fear and insecurity.

We've experienced all kinds of responses to fears: surveillance, pre-emptive war, even hoarding of toilet paper and hand wipes.

Fear breeds a desire for security. (BTW, we discussed this last summer in our sermon series Unafraid and also in the series Unraveled.)

Taking up the cross and following Jesus is Baptism in the way of Jesus. Sharing the cup at the Communion table invites us all into the way of the crucified Jesus. As faithful communities, we are called to light the way with servanthood and generosity, just as Jesus did.

In fact, theologian Charles Campbell suggests we can hear Jesus' words, not as a warning, but as a promise: 'You will not always be driven by fear and need for security. Rather, you will be empowered to take up your cross and follow me. You will be faithful disciples even to the end.'²

REFLECTION: What does this mean for the Church?

Jesus offers a call to action to the whole group of the disciples, and to us, as a 21st century faith community that is an alternative to the human value system of domination and oppression. Jesus' way of the cross is a way of resistance to systems of domination (power over others, control of others, ranking society in hierarchies of dominant and subordinate, winners/losers, insiders/outsideers, honored/shamed).

In this narrative, Jesus' way of the cross is not just INDIVIDUAL forgiveness or self-denial. Rather, Jesus issues a call to the community of faith to offer an alternative to the ways of the world and bear the suffering that inevitably comes as a result.

For example, in the Fall of 2019 (preCOVID), SJUMC offered a Fall Festival for the first time. It was free... food, games, scarecrow building, bounce house, popcorn...a balloon making Clown, a food truck, and a fabulous band... all for the Community!

The planning team received lots of comments and criticism. Well, there were over 230 people... grandparents brought grandkids and had a terrific

² Campbell, Charles L. Feasting on the Word Year B, Volume IV, Kindle edition. Location 6925.

time! Church members who gave of their time were amazed at the fun they had serving others. Did we make money...NO! Did we serve the community...Yes! Was this project a success...in the way of the world, probably not. In the way of the cross...giving & serving others, sharing love... YOU BETCHA!

During COVID, we expanded our call to provide food beyond our local area, and you responded generously. In addition, we are now collaborating with a sister church to provide 50 bags of food for weekends in two schools. This expansion reflects your JOY in generosity and willingness to serve the needs of others.

As Professor Amy-Jill Levine states, “The Torah and the gospel were not designed to make those who are rich feel comfortable, but responsible: ‘to be generous, to be compassionate, and to be aware of the needs of others because that’s what it means to be part of the family of God’³

As disciples, our task is to live by God’s ways, loving God and loving neighbor as ourselves, Being Generous Disciples as we serve and we give. Next week, a focus on a different response to Jesus question, “what can I do for you?” and generosity guidelines John Wesley style: earn all you can, save all you can & give all you can.

Friends, What will you do differently this week because of this Word?

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Let us JOIN TOGETHER WITH THE LITURGIST, Antuan Hairston, AS HE LEADS us in prayers for God’s people, church & World ...

³ The Difficult Words of Jesus, Leaders Guide, by Mike Poteet. Abingdon Press: Nashville. 2021. pg 17.