

Sermon by The Rev. David R. Hackett
Pentecost 3, June 27, 2010

I have a question for you this morning. I want you to answer it to yourself and please use the first answer that comes to your mind. Don't sort through the different answers that will come to you, just remember the first response you make. The question: "What are you?" Not "Who are you?", but "What are you."

I'd love to be able to hear each of your answers: "I am a child; I'm a mother; a father; I am a homemaker, a lawyer, a doctor, a butcher, a baker; I am a Christian; I am a child of God." Wonder if any of you, for your very first answer, said, "I am a disciple." I doubt it. I doubt it because we don't often think of ourselves that way. But that is what we are called to be: disciples of Christ, followers of Jesus.

All of the other ways we think of ourselves are important, but being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, will define everything else about us. It will define *how* we are a father, a mother, a child. It will define *how* we go about our occupations and our daily lives.

Rabbi Harold Kusner in his book, When All You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough: The Search For The Life That Matters, told a story about an 85 year old woman from the hill country of Kentucky who was asked in an interview to look back over her life and reflect on what she had learned. Her answer is laced with wistfulness.

"If I had to do it all over....

She said, 'If I had my life to live over, I would dare to make more mistakes the next time. I would relax. I'd be sillier. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would have more actual troubles but fewer imaginary ones. You see, I'm one of those people who lived seriously and sanely hour after hour, day after day. I've been one of those person who never went any place without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it again, I'd travel lighter.'"

How does that sound to you? It sounds right to me. She had gained perspective. Perspective is one of the most important words in the English language. Perspective most often comes from experience.

This morning's gospel lesson is about perspective. And the gospel is about the cost of discipleship. In Luke's gospel today we encounter three would-be disciples of Jesus. Someone has described them as the sentimentalist, the tribalist, and the conditionalist.

The first man, the sentimentalist, makes a broad sweeping statement, "I will follow you wherever you go." Now, by this time in Jesus' ministry he had managed to offend the "good people." People who mattered, who had status, who were "somebody", didn't want to associate with this strange man from Nazareth. He caused trouble, he broke the laws, he challenged the conventional wisdom, he threatened tradition, and....and he asked people to change, to change their ways of thinking, their ways of living; to move from the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. Because Jesus was more and more being shunned by the good people, he replies, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

After this conversation Jesus turned to a second man and said, "Follow me." This fellow apparently wanted to follow Jesus, he wanted to respond, but he had something he had to take care of first. His father had just died, and being a good son he felt that he was responsible for seeing to it that he was given a decent burial. And so he told Jesus that he would follow him after the funeral. But Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God." Now that would be hard to take. This second man, we'll call the

“tribalist.” Scripture was clear about a child’s duty to a parent, “Honor your father and your mother.” The tribe, your relatives, guaranteed the solidarity of the blood ties which were of extreme importance. Jesus was teaching that when you become a close disciple, allegiance to the tribe, the family, is superseded by allegiance to the Kingdom of God.

The last episode concerns the “conditionalist.” The third man spoke to Jesus saying, “I’ll follow you, but first let me go home and say goodbye.” Again, a reasonable request. It makes sense to want to say goodbye to those who would worry and wonder where you were. But again, an equally difficult answer, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. Here Jesus is addressing the always popular notion of conditional discipleship. This is what I call “yes, but...” discipleship: “Yes, Lord, I’ll follow you, but....” “Yes, I’ll give to the church, but....only when I have something extra, or when I get a raise, or when I win the lottery.” “Yes, I will commit to worship on Sunday, but....only when I don’t have something else to do, or when I catch up on my sleep.”

In these brief conversations that St. Luke has telescoped together he is pointing out the demands of discipleship. Discipleship means have a new perspective on life.

So, being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is not easy, but who said it would be? Whoever told you being a disciple would be easy was not telling the truth. Today I’m afraid there are a lot of *admirers* of Jesus, but not all that many *disciples* of Jesus.

We, who have a tendency to treat God as just a celestial pal, will find this teaching on discipleship distasteful and may end up saying it is impossible. But remember, with God nothing is impossible. Even you and I can be disciples. First we must desire it. To do that we must be constantly asking the Christ to direct our lives. Be honest, when is the last time you did that....really?

Do you remember the *first* time you asked God to direct your life? I remember the first time I did. It was at a summer church camp. Maybe that’s why I think that the church camp experience is so important; why the youth group is so important. At that camp we sang a simple little song. Today I suppose most of us would have a tendency to put it down as too unsophisticated, too simplistic, too sentimental. But remember this: the gospel is simple. You don’t have to have advanced degrees to know and follow Jesus. The song was this,

“Into my heart, into my heart,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Come into today, come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.”

Pretty smaltzy, I admit. But it was an occasion for an encounter with the Divine. I didn’t really know what I was asking, but it was a start at being a disciple.

However you do it, whenever you do it, if you want to be a follower of Jesus, on the “way” of Christ, you must invite him into your life and begin to follow him as your Lord and Savior. This is not a one time event. We do it at every Baptism when we renew our baptismal covenant. Every time we come to this altar and receive the Sacrament, we are ingesting, taking into ourselves, the Lord Jesus Christ. By coming to this table you are asking Jesus to come into your life and are pledging to follow him. In so doing we gain a new perspective and we begin to see ourselves not as isolated individuals but as a part, a member, of His Body.

Isn’t that the perspective you want in your life? Remember my question when I began this sermon, “What are you?” By God’s grace you can be, and are, a disciple, a follower of Jesus. Amen.