

## *The Way, the Truth and the Life*

Discipleship – II

March 26, 2017

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

*<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

John 14:1-7 (NIV)

Last Sunday we began looking at the 3<sup>rd</sup> foundational pillar of the church – discipleship. If someone were to ask what it is that separates Mennonites and Anabaptists from other Christian denominations, or better yet what might be those areas which we emphasize that others might not emphasize as much, the two primary areas would be: 1) a personal acknowledgement (confession) of one’s faith in Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord beyond the age of accountability – thus strongly rejecting infant baptism; and 2) discipleship – that one’s Christian faith is expressed in more than just belief and acknowledgment, it should be demonstrated in one’s actions – sometimes referred to as “bearing fruit.”

The emphasis on Discipleship is what attracted me to the Mennonite church many years ago. Growing up Catholic, living apart from the church and apart from Christ for many years, upon coming back there just seemed to be a pretty serious disconnect among many in the Catholic Church between what they claimed they believed, even those who attended church every Sunday, and how they lived their lives Monday – Saturday. It just seems to me that God calls us to more than that.

For those adult Sunday school classes that are studying the quarterly, last Sunday it focused on Jesus’ words recorded in John 15 –

*This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

John 15:8 (NIV)

As Alex pointed out last week starting out this portion of our series, “A Well-Balanced Church is a Healthy Church,” discipleship is all about following. Forty-three times in the New Testament Jesus is quoted as saying, “follow me.”

*<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.*

<sup>21</sup> *Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them,* <sup>22</sup> *and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

Matthew 4:18-22 (NIV)

Sometime later Jesus came across Matthew who was sitting at his tax collector's booth. All it says in Matthew 9:9 is, "Jesus told him, "follow me," and Matthew got up and followed him."

There must have been something very special and unique about Jesus. The original disciples were willing to drop everything – leave their jobs and their families – and follow him. I find it even more interesting that they had no idea where they were going. Much the same way that Abram, soon to be Abraham, dropped everything, left his family and the land of Ur to go into the land of Canaan, without any real idea what the final destination or the journey was going to be like. I think there is a pretty good reason that Jesus didn't tell them where they were going. Because if they knew where they were going they probably wouldn't have been so quick to follow. The journey of following Jesus ends at the cross.

If one carefully examines the four gospels, especially the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, just as noticeable as Jesus' command to his disciples, "come follow me," is how many times following is referred to as being on "the way." The journey of following Jesus along the way is just as important as the destination.

Our Scripture this morning begins with the destination.

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know **the way** to the place where I am going."*

The destination is eternal life. As Alex pointed out in his message last Sunday, the beginning of the Christian spiritual journey, otherwise known as discipleship, begins with belief:

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, for whosoever believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

But God doesn't just leave us stuck in our sinful human condition waiting for our life here on earth to end, whenever that may end. Jesus says, "come, follow me, I am the way and the truth and the life." The Christian life is not meant to be a passive life, like Jesus did all the work and there is nothing for us to do anymore. For far too long and for far too many we have understood Jesus' words there, "I am the way and the truth and the life," as it being all about Jesus, that all we need to do is ascent and believe and we don't need to do anything else.

What if Jesus was talking not just about himself there but also about his disciples, both those that were there when he said it and for all to come in the future? That if we want to experience eternal life in the life to come we need to start experiencing it now, the way Jesus experienced it during his life here on earth.

If that is the case then what did Jesus mean when he said, the way, the truth and the life? I don't think any of the three is more important than the other two, they're meant to be taken together, so we'll start with "the truth."

"The truth" about Jesus is training our minds to think the way Jesus thought, which is different than the way the world thinks. Paul tells us in Romans 12:

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*  
Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Jesus made so pretty incredible claims. Claims like:

*"I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."*

*That he was the Son of God – which puts him on par with God.*

*That he was going to die on the cross, be resurrected on the third day, and then ascend back into heaven and be seated at the right hand of God – where he is interceding for all those who believe in him still today.*

*If you have seen me [experienced me], you have seen the one who sent me.*

*What I teach is not my own teaching: it comes from God who sent me.*

*You study the Scriptures to find eternal life, but these very Scriptures speak about me.*

*Whoever hears my words and believes in the one who sent me will live forever.*

Or how about, "*all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me?*"

Those are just a fraction of the statements that Jesus made that we have recorded in the Scriptures that are hard for us to wrap our minds around, just like many have had difficulty throughout history.

In fact Jesus tells us that we can't use our minds to see until God removes our blindness and allows us to see.

Truth also means being honest with ourselves and with one another. Recently I have been drawn in many different ways to Psalm 15, our Call to Worship this morning. A good Scripture passage to use to allow us to take inventory of our own Spiritual lives, especially during this season of Lent – <sup>1</sup>*LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?*  
<sup>2</sup>*The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart*

Alex's first question on his outline from his message last Sunday was, "what traits does a person have to have for you to follow him," might be best asked of us, "what traits does one have to have to follow Jesus?" The three that stand out to me are 1) truthfulness – truth of who we really are, yes the good but also all the bad, the sin, and the recognition that often we don't even really know our own motives, why we do what we do; 2) Humility; and 3) Submission or obedience. Truthfulness, humility, and submission – three traits that are drastically missing in our world today, including among many Christians. "Truth" is represented in Jesus.

"The Life," that Jesus is talking about in John 14:6, is not just about the life to come, just like eternal life is not just about the life to come. It is about living life the way Jesus lived life here on earth. Following Jesus is about a lot more than just using our minds. Yes, Jesus was a teacher, but he was also a lot more than a teacher. Jesus was and is also a compassionate friend.

One of the things mentioned in one of the Sunday school classes from the John 15 passage is Jesus refers to his followers, his disciples, as his friends:

*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.* John 15:15-17 (NIV)

Another time Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). During his time here on earth Jesus had compassion for those who were tried, worn out, down on their luck, poor, disenfranchised, sick, dying, sinful and lost.

The life that Jesus lived here on earth was the life of God incarnated, "*the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" That same incarnated life that Jesus lived during his life here on earth is supposed to be incarnated in the life of believers through Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension, and then the sending of the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost on. Is that life of Jesus embodied in us? Hopefully the people who knew me before I committed my life to Jesus as Savior and Lord can see something in me that is different than I was before. And since our Christian spiritual transformation never stops during our life here on earth, hopefully the life that Jesus is living in me is different today than it was last year, five years ago, ten years ago.

The life of Jesus that lives in believers stays with us only when we stay connected to Him. "*I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me*" (John 15:5).

Jesus is the truth, and the life, and the way. As Alex pointed out last week, it's not just enough to believe, even some of the demons believed. It's not even enough just to know the truth, the Pharisees and the Scribes knew the truth. Or at least they thought they knew the truth, but they couldn't recognize it when he was standing right in front of them. We need to follow him in the way he commanded us to follow him and in the same way he walked during his life here on earth.

Jesus challenges us to believe certain things about him. He desires a personal relationship with every single one of us – so much so that when we repent and put our faith in him – he calls us his friend, his brother or sister, and he empowers us with the Holy Spirit to live the way that he lived. The same way! We need to step out in obedience and walk in his will and his way. He says to his disciples, “if you love me you will obey my teaching.” If we’re not obeying, we’re not following. Does that mean that we will be able to obey him perfectly at some point during our time here on earth? No, we will always fall short. But that doesn’t cancel out Jesus’ command to obey.

As the apostle Paul writes in Romans:

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* Romans 6:1-4 (NIV)

That new life commands us live our lives in the same way that Jesus lived his life here on earth. Most likely that will put us in opposition to our surrounding culture, on just about everything. Jesus said:

*“Do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you.”*

*“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*

*“Do not store up riches for yourself here on earth.”*

*“Sell all you have and give the money to the poor.”*

*“Anyone who wants to be great must be a servant of the rest.”*

*“It's not enough not to commit adultery, you must not even look at another woman or man lustfully.”*

*“Forget about yourself, take up your cross and follow me.”*

*“Oh, and if anybody else does any of those things, and a host of other things, you must forgive them, because through me your heavenly Father has forgiven you.”*

Most followers of Jesus seem to be drawn to some parts of Jesus’ message but willing to overlook others, of equal importance.

As James Kraybill, our guest speaker a few weeks ago, wrote in one of his books: “I see no indication anywhere in the life and ministry of Jesus that we’ve been given the option to pick and choose arbitrarily what we happen to like about Jesus and to leave the rest behind.”

If we could pick and choose then we wouldn't need to take up our own crosses at all. That approach of picking and choosing seems to fit quite nicely with the American Way. But it doesn't fit with the Jesus way, the one whom said, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus didn't suffer and die for half the cause, he died for all of it.

But here's the rub, or where the rubber meets the road along the Jesus way. None of those more demanding commands of Jesus can we do on our own. Just about the entire *Sermon on the Mount* is impossible on our own. It's only after we repent, put our faith in Jesus and confess Him as Lord that God begins to do His real work inside of us, infusing us with His Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately it seems like many stop along **the way**. Like we have already arrived and God is done with us. It doesn't work that way during our time here on earth. God is never done with us.

I couldn't help but be impressed by Dwight Hostetler's daughter, Phama's reflection of her Dad at his memorial service yesterday, and how he reflected all the gifts of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's the way and the truth and the life of Jesus and that's God's ultimate desire for all Jesus followers.