

## To Be... Or Not To Be... A disciple of Christ!

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Today let's look at Jesus' parable and put it in modern terms. Jesus poses a question; there was a father who had two sons. Both sons are home hanging out in the family room, junior's stretched out on the sofa and the younger one's sprawled out in the lazy boy chair, just flipping through the channels watching TV. Walking through the room, the father sees his sons just hanging out and asks them to go out and work in the garden. Junior who was laid out on the sofa boldly answers, "Nahh, I don't think so Pop." The other son is sitting in the chair flipping through the channels with the remote says, "Yeah, yeah, get right to it". The father continues walking down the hall to the kitchen. The one son who is holding the remote flipping through the channels quickly forgets what he said, and never even bothers getting up from the chair. The other son, decides that he might as well go out and do some weeding in the garden, because he knows he'll never get a chance at the TV as long as his brothers there. So he goes and works in the garden even though he said no. Later the father looks out the window and sees the one son who said no, actually working in the garden, and he can hear the other son still watching tv in the family room. Now think hard, says Jesus, which son do you think pleased the father more? The chief priests, elders and priests of the temple answer the only way they can; they say, "The one who said "Nahh", but then went and did it anyway."

They had no choice in how to answer. Only by drawing in the religions leaders into this story do they get it. They have known about Jesus for years. They have heard about him from many peoples and groups I am sure. But only when he draws them into learning and seeing what he is talking about first hand do they get it. Only by putting it into action do they get it.

I would say that is probably true for all of us. We learn best when we put something into action. You can try studying and memorizing every fact and procedure of an action but until you attempt to do it will you really know it. You can't learn how to play golf, baseball, volleyball, you name it whatever sport, you can't learn from just sitting still listening to a lecture on the basics of how to play. Real skill, talent, ability only develops when you pick up the club, racquet, bat, ball and actually start playing it. The theory of the game is all well and good, but until you get up and do the sport, putting your body into motion moving the ball, swinging the club, training your body to move like its second nature in repetitive ways then and only then do you really understand how to play.

Or how about another example, think back to your school days, did you ever have to read any of William Shakespeare's plays? I was an English Lit major in College so I of course had to read a lot of Shakespeare's plays. Most people I knew in college couldn't stand those plays. The old language and hard to say sentences. But the key to Shakespeare is that Shakespeare never expected people to sit in a classroom and read and study and memorize his plays. He wrote plays that were to be seen and heard, to experience them, to feel the emotion, to see the facial whimsical expressions. You could memorize every Shakespeare play and know every word of it but unless you experience one of the plays then you will never know Shakespeare.

Something happens in ministry. At seminary, we sat in classrooms and learned many great things from some very well educated professors. We talked and discussed and debated many theological issues in and outside of the classes. But the most effective things I learned, I received from hands on experience, working in a homeless shelter. Working in churches in York, Cincinnati and Columbus. All the theological debates and issues only really came to life when we started putting the word into motion. Just saying Yeah, yeah, I got it, doesn't mean anything. Only when you hear the word and do it does it become effective.

The Holy Scripture is the foundational Word that is core to everything Christian. But Christian faith is not just words in a book. We can read these words day after day in our morning devotions, or we can hear them week after week in worship, but we only get to know what those words really mean when we put them into practice. You see it boils down to this. Being a Christian is not simply giving the head nod and saying yeah, yeah. Being a Christian is more than just a guiding philosophy for life to which you give your ascribe as a signed on member.

Jesus didn't lay down a new system of beliefs and theology. He didn't write volume one, two and three of systematic theology. There are tons of others who have written volumes of thick books about what the Christian church teaches and believes. Jesus didn't write anything, instead he spoke God's message to all people but more than that he lived it in action and deeds. He didn't just speak wonderful words about loving God and each other. He didn't just teach about forgiving and caring for one another. He didn't explain how to pray or heal others. He actually lived those words as he traveled from town to town healing, encouraging, forgiving. The teachings of Jesus came to life as he carried out his daily ministry to others, as he gave his life out of love, as he rose again victorious from the grave. Jesus didn't ask us simply to agree with him but to follow him. Come Follow me. Go and Baptize. Go and Teach and preach. Go and do. That's where the rubber hits the road. It is the doing that really matters. The Christian faith is only known in its performance.

As a preacher, I am in the business of words, communication of words is very important. I write and speak and think words in sermons, lessons, Bible studies. as I did for this sermon. I speak words. But as a preacher I am also aware, sometimes too much so, that I can say all the words in the world in the most magnificent way, but alone those words can do nothing.

As a preacher, my first task is not to be interesting, informative, engaging, illustrative, or even humorous. Sometimes I hope these sermons at least are one of those. But none of those characteristics, as important or encouraged as they may be, are the ultimate test of Christian preaching. The words spoken here in worship need to be transformed into doing. Under the power of the Holy Spirit you, the hearer, receive those words as a message from God himself. But that's not the end of the sermon yet. It is then that you act on what you have heard. Hearers must become doers. The faith in the church must be performed in the world. That is the final test of our worship and the hearing of my preaching.

And that is where the difficulty rests. We are so much like that second son in Jesus' parable. We see the Father and hear him call and hear his Word and say, yeah, yeah, I get to it. And then forget that we even said that and so never actually do what we are called to put into action.

Did you hear Paul's encouraging word to the Philippians in our second reading. We have heard it before I am sure, but how many times do we listen. Paul said, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Do you see what Paul is driving at? He wants his readers, and all Christians, to see that belonging to Jesus is not just a matter of agreeing with what Paul is saying but that faith is a busy active doing thing. Be like Christ - forgiving, caring, encouraging, loving in every action. Look at what Jesus did and now you do it. Be imitators of Christ.

You and I know all know these stories. We have heard the parable of Jesus before, we have heard Paul tell the early Christians and even us to be active workers in the body of Christ. We know that our faith consists of more than words and agreeing with them. We know that our faith is one of getting up and doing - but truthfully how many of us find it easier to be the one laying out in the metaphoric lazy boy saying, Yeah, Yeah, I believe, I agree, I know I should do it, I even want to do it, I know it would be the right thing, I know I could probably try it, but heh why bother, someone else or do it, I can't afford it, I don't have time for it, I am just tired of it.

You see our faith is not just something in here, in our hearts and minds, it is not something simply in this room in this hour or two – it's out there getting in our family, our friends, our workplaces, our homes, our hobbies, our lives, its in everything we do.

Whether we are talking about caring for someone in need, showing kindness to someone who is experiencing one of life's tragedies, supporting someone who needs encouragement or simply giving a friendly word, being a light that shines in the dark confusion of moral values, deciding to really make an effort not just to say it's good to read the Bible and pray, but to actually set time aside and do it.

Believe it or not, over my time as a pastor, some people have told me that my sermons are to short, they want more. Some tell me to get deeper, give more examples, give more plans of actions. They tell me I am stopping my sermons, right when I should be explaining in detail what you are to do. But that is just it. You have received the message from God and now it's up to you to turn the hearing into action. Wrestle with how to do it, argue with God about it, weep over it, be challenged by it, repent and change or whatever it is that God is saying to you. And if you still don't know what to do listen to God again, maybe you take a few more discussions to fully understand his message. There are many places of ministry in the world and there are plenty of people in your life who need you to be Christ like to and for them at this time. Your challenge is are you going to do it.

A preacher decided to give a sermon on the rich young man who wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. Because Jesus told him to sell everything he owned and give it to the poor, the young man went away very depressed. The preacher decided for this week that he only wanted to walk the congregation through the story so that they might understand it better. So he retold the story and ended it just like Jesus, the rich young man walked away.

The next Sunday before worship one of the more mature members of the church asked the pastor over coffee what happened to his sermon last week. He said, you restated the story and then just stopped, did you lose your sermon or something? Another middle aged woman standing nearby overheard the conversation and said member standing nearby overheard the comment and said that she wondered also, what happened. She said that the pastor was just getting started and then it seemed that you dribbled out. What was the point to that?

It become obvious to the preacher that his sermon choice to end it with just the story of Jesus, didn't do anything for the people. So he was kind of bitter when yet another young man in

9/28/2008

5

the church came up to him in the narthex and said, "Pastor I want to talk to you about your sermon last week." "Look," the preacher began. "I know what you are going to say..."

Interrupting the young man said quietly, "I just went home and wept".

"Wept?" the pastor asked.

"Yeah, I just lay on my bed, looking up at the ceiling. I kept saying over and over again, "God I am not wealthy, but I have extra, I am not the smartest, but I can read and teach and speak. I am not the strongest, but I can hold my own. But God what do you want me to do, I have done nothing with what you have given me. What do you want me to do, Lord!"

The preacher replied, "Sharing your faith is exactly what Jesus wanted you to do. You could start right now and going over to that elderly man and to that middle aged woman and tell them what last week's sermon meant to you."

Quickly, the young man replied, "No, I couldn't do that. I would be to embarrassed."

What is it the Lord wants us to do when we hear the Word. Do we say yeah, yeah, sure I'll do it and don't or are we going to get up and go do it. The story today is pretty simple. The question is simple. The answer is what is the challenge. Which son are you?

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.