

February 8, 2009  
Houghton Lake UMC

“The Task of a Disciple”

Mark 1:29-39

Jesus’ disciples quickly benefitted from His presence in their lives. The disciples witnessed Jesus’ face-off with the evil spirits they came in contact within the synagogue, and they stood in awe of Jesus’ power. They later learned that it was the power of the Holy Spirit working through Jesus that wrought the miracles they witnessed. Then Jesus, James and John went to Simon Peter and Andrew’s house in Capernaum, where Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. Jesus and the others stayed at Peter’s home, and the disciples were able to witness Jesus’ healing ministry at work as “Jesus healed many that evening as the whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.”

It is often the same with us, as well, when we ask Jesus to come into our lives. Often we are the benefactors of God’s grace and miracles before our walk with Jesus really begins in earnest. It is one way we learn to trust Him, because of what God has done for us in the past. Because Peter, Andrew, James and John witnessed Jesus’ miracles, they remained steadfast with Jesus later on when times got tough. They knew that Jesus had done wonderful things -- impossible things -- and as they witnessed miracle after miracle they also learned to expect them from Jesus time and time again. The more they witnessed, the more they learned and the more they expected Jesus to do the impossible.

This is a lesson we need to learn from Jesus as we walk with Him by faith. As Jesus answers our prayers and works wonders in our lives, we also learn to depend upon His presence and power to work wonders in our future. In time we learn to expect Jesus to do the impossible as we think exponentially, learn lesson after lesson, and find Jesus to be both dependable and trustworthy.

Back to Jesus and the disciples at Peter's house. . . . The next morning when the disciples awoke, they knew that more of the town's people would be looking for Jesus. They got up expecting Jesus to continue where he had left off the night before. But, they found that Jesus was not in the house. He had already risen earlier before the sunrise, and they found Him in a solitary place praying to His Father. This would become a common occurrence for the next three years. When they inquired of Jesus and expressed their expectation of more healing back at Peter's house, Jesus had other things in mind. This too would become a common occurrence in their life with Jesus . . . often Jesus did not do what they expected Him to do. Thus, the disciples learned to expect the unexpected.

How often this is true of us, as well. How can we tell Jesus to do anything? How can we expect Jesus to do what we expect? We pray, asking God to intervene in this various situations, but we have no idea how Jesus will answer our prayer. God will be unpredictable in the area of "how" God get things done, and we are usually the ones who stand in awe and celebrate a "God-moment" that came to us unexpectedly.

"Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." Jesus became a traveling evangelist, living day to day by faith as God provided for Him. The disciples did the same, because where Jesus went, they followed. Did Peter go back home to his wife and tell her that he was leaving with Jesus and that Jesus would not be there for lunch? We have no idea. What we do know is that Peter did follow Jesus, and I would assume that Peter had his wife's blessing.

So what are some of the lessons we can learn from this first chapter of Mark so far?

When we become a disciple of Jesus Christ we begin a spiritual journey that will last a lifetime. We begin this journey much as an infant begins life. When a grandparent picks up their grandchild and looks at them for the first time, they understand what this child will face and what they may endure -- more than the new parents understand -- because of the experiences Grandma and Grandpa have already faced, endured, and survived. Will the grandparent pray for this grandchild? You bet -- and much more than the new parents will. New moms and dads are on a new journey too, and will face the unknowns of parenthood that grandparents know all too well.

It is the same when we begin a spiritual journey as a new disciple. More mature Christians know all too well what the new Christian may face and the pitfalls that await them. But, how many older Christians take a young Christian under their wing and help them to grow in their faith? This is one of the primary roles of the church that honestly we do not do well. In fact, too many of us hold the attitude that others will grow on their own and learn the hard way, the same as we did.

The same may be said about a new pastor as he or she begins their vocation. Older pastors receive them with joy and know the road these new leaders will endure as they work to be faithful to their new calling. However, few pastors take new pastors under their wing and mentor them along the way. The more experienced Christians should take the younger Christians under their care and disciple them in the way of spiritual life and discipline. This is why the Sunday School class is so vital to a congregation that wants to grow and thrive into the next generation. We have to take up the mantle of teacher and share the knowledge we have with all those who come after us.

The task of a disciple is first to learn and then to practice the spiritual lessons that are taught. A new Christian needs to be aware that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere present and working. A new Christian needs to know that God is available for them 24/7, and that “the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” A new Christian needs to learn the value and purpose of fasting and prayer, of regular bible reading and prayer, of meditation, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, and how to celebrate and be pleasing to God.

To learn a spiritual lesson is to practice it over and over, much like a soldier preparing for war. Our practice must be as if our life depended on it... because it does. A disciple needs to practice the spiritual disciplines with the same intensity as a soldier because we will be called to use these disciplines quickly and often in the spiritual battles in which we will be immersed. And if Jesus had to find a solitary place to pray and spend time with God the Father, then who are we to think the same is unnecessary in our lives?

A new Christian needs to know Isaiah Chapter 40:31 “...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” We need to know how to refill our spiritual tank and to become that spring of living water that never goes dry.

A new Christian needs to learn Psalm 147:1-11 and other praise psalms that help them worship the Lord and count their blessings. They need to learn the lesson of verse 6 that says, “The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.” They need to learn in their own life the truth of verses 10-11, where the Psalmist says “His (God’s) pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.” The Christian

disciple needs to learn how to praise the Lord from his or her own experience because they have been taught that all good things come from the Lord.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? What is the task of a disciple?

We begin with what we believe—what we know to be true. We begin with what we know, what we have learned in becoming a believer in the first place. If you are fortunate, the person who brought you to Christ can also disciple you, (mentor you), teach you to pray, teach you how to read the Bible, and answer your questions. They can show you the lessons in the Bible that you need to learn.

Going to church, finding a fellowship, and joining a Sunday School class offers you a place to belong, a place to ask questions, and to glean from other Christians on the faith journey. These are important lifelines in the Christian walk.

And we learn from the reading of the Bible itself. We can learn lessons from the patriarchs, the judges, the kings, the prophets, from Jesus and the Apostle Paul. We learn from the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Golden Rule, the fruit of the spirit, and the exhortations of Jesus, Paul, John and Peter shared in the gospels and the epistles. As we read the Bible we need to have a pencil and paper close at hand so that we can write down our questions and go to the pastor or a more mature Christian to locate the answers.

We can also learn from reading Christian classics like Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan, Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis, and from the writings of famous Christians like John Wesley, John Calvin, Martin Luther, A.W. Tozer and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., gleaning Christian values from their lives and how they put their faith into practice. We hear the messages of today's preachers and read books from Tony Campolo to Tony Dungy, from Bishop Rueben Job to Billy Graham, and from Joyce Meyers to Joy Moore

and Max Lucado. We live in the information age -- a time when we can find and learn almost anything we want to study, and Christianity is no exception.

Jesus was always on the move. He had places to go and people to see. Jesus was confronting evil on one side and making disciples on the other. His disciples were right with him, going and doing and practicing the lessons they were learning from the Master. Are you a student of the Word of God? Are you moving forward in your Christian walk? What have you learned this last year that you are now actively putting into practice in your spiritual life? Are you on the front lines of witness and service? Are you practicing the disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, service and worship?

The church should be busy in the disciple-making business. Every mature Christian in this congregation should have someone they are mentoring and pouring themselves into. As we learn from others we, in turn, need to be teaching others. This is the way the church should grow. This is why Christian education should be one of our first priorities. Every one of us should be active in a small group or a Sunday School class. And if we are not, then we are not learning and growing spiritually as God wants us to.

My friends, the task of a disciple is to always be learning, serving, praying, and sharing. The task of a disciple is to be in training for the next lesson God brings into our path. We are all God's children, all enrolled in his "classroom". In the Christian life there is no such thing as retirement until we reach heaven. (And I think then is when the real learning will begin.) Come and join us on the front lines! Begin to shine as a star on a dark night. "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) The evidence of life is growth. Let's grow together, work

together, pray together, and serve together. In the end, it will help us to worship the Lord together and gain victory after victory. This is our task as disciples of Christ.

Let us pray....

Dear Lord, thank you for the church. Thank you for the opportunity to be your disciple, to learn from you and to grow in spirit as well as in mind and body. Help us to feed on you every day and to find you to be active in our life, teaching us lesson after lesson. We want to be like you in character and truth. We want to shine like stars in the world and be your arms and legs and heart. Help us to minister to those around us and to grow more confident in that ministry year after year. Help us, Lord, to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Make us your children in thought word and deed. Amen.