

Pentecost 03 B, June 9, 2024

"Everyday Disciples: Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!"

Read: Mark 3: 20 – 35 and/or memorize: Mark 3: 35 NLT

We are "Everyday Disciples: Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" When you hear those words, what do you think about? By "everyday disciples" does it mean that we're common and ordinary? Absolutely not. Nothing that belongs to God can be common or ordinary. We are "everyday disciples" because we bear the cross of Christ wherever we go; on every day of the week.

Certainly, for us, Sunday is the high point of our week. It is the day on which we gather to worship our Lord Jesus. But we don't just worship Him on Sundays. He is the Lord Almighty, who is present with us always. Wherever we go, whenever we go there, Jesus goes with us. We are followers of Christ.

He says we are more than that. The Gospel reading for this morning gives the account of Jesus' problem with His family. He's early on in his ministry and they don't quite understand what's going on. In a sense, they've come down to get Him because they think He's lost His mind.

Nothing like a family, squabbling in public. His family hears that He's in a household and they send somebody in to tell Him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." Jesus is a dutiful son, He's also the son of His Father in heaven. His family calls Him out. He turns to those with Him and tells them that they are His brothers and sisters and mother. How can He possibly say that? Here's what He tells them: "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

So, that's one of our definitions of being "everyday disciples:" we do the will of God. We're using four words to describe that will of God: gathering, growing, giving and going. Those are the functions we understand "everyday disciples" carry out. We have to be careful in saying that. We don't just do those things because they're required of us. We do them because God has called us to them and He has changed our hearts about them. In obedience to His Lordship, we respond in joyful obedience.

We gather each week in the name of Jesus Christ. We gather to share Jesus and change lives. It was interesting last week, one of the grandmothers of a preschooler came up to me and paid us a compliment. She thanked me for welcoming them and said that she could feel the warmth and hospitality of this congregation in this first time she's ever been with us. I can't tell you how much that thrilled me to hear.

When people gather in the name of Jesus Christ, they should reflect the love of Jesus to all who come together. It is vital that we do this because we are the embodiment of Jesus in this world. Yes, I know the Holy Spirit is the power behind that, but He needs bodies to help Him touch people with that love of Jesus.

In the world in which there is a great deal of conflict, we are a sign to all who enter our building, that diverse people can get along, they can care for one another and reflect the love of Jesus that they have in their hearts. It is in gathering that we get the greatest opportunity to touch the lives of other people with the love of Jesus. To show them how a group of people can welcome the stranger and make them feel at home.

It's easy to fool ourselves into thinking that the most important thing in gathering is how many are in attendance. We are sinful people and it's easy for us to get caught up in the trap of the more in attendance, the better we are. I know that is one of my prideful problems. Perhaps that's why Jesus set the bar pretty low. He said "Where two or three gather in my name, I am with them." He also reminds us that one lost sheep is worth going out and finding.

We have lots of lost sheep right now. It's important to remember that we are the ministers of the Shepherd. So, on your daily travels, as you meet people who you remember as part of our congregation and they're not here, it's a wonderful thing to say to them, "We miss you." That may make the difference between them returning or not.

We are growing. As we look at the world, we know that God had one plan. Things would grow. Just look at how bountifully the grass has popped back from the dead of winter. The trees have blossomed out and the flowers are all returning. Some of us know that only too well because our noses are stuffy and our throats starts scratching, but we want to remember that Gods intention is growth.

Once again, it's always easy to make that about numbers, also. God's plan for growth includes more people, but it also includes our own personal growth in the faith. We do that through Bible study, small groups, and other events. But most importantly, we do that in our own home, when we tend to personal devotions and Bible reading.

As we look for opportunities to be "everyday disciples" in our community, it's important for each of us to have a way to serve God by serving our neighbors. It's a phrase you hear often because it is vital. It's the biggest opportunity we get to share Christ and change lives because we're in person and we know the person. Often times, we know the needs that they have and it is a joy for us to help them in that need.

We are giving. It almost sounds incredible but through April of this year, at a time when many people are saying how difficult it is, we've seen an 18% increase in our weekly offering gifts. What a wonderful testament that is to your faithfulness. We also saw a 50% increase in our Christmas offering, which was designated to help others.

Giving isn't only about money. It is all the things that people do here to make us the congregation we are. You will need to look in your bulletin each week to see how many people are involved with helping in some way to make sure that our congregation continues to be vibrant.

All that work pays off in compliments by neighbors and people who know me who mentioned how well kept our physical property is. We give a big thanks to our landscape and mowing team for all that work. I'll put a plug for them here. They're doing a great job, but they wouldn't mind having a few more hands to help them do it.

Ron Chapman regularly takes over a bin full of food to CCIA to help to provide for our community's needs. JoAnne VanBuren and Glenn Banke will be sharing some information about how we may better serve through Family Promise this summer. We're still trying to figure things out with Habitat as they go through a major change in their organization.

All of which leads to our final category of going. It's kind of interesting when we talk about that. A lot of people think you need to go far, maybe to a foreign land to bring Jesus to people who don't know him. The interesting thing is over the years the foreign land has come to us. We are a much more diverse country and many of those people don't know Jesus. They are our Jerusalem and Judea, the people right around us. They don't know Him and won't know Him, unless we share Him with them.

That's going to be our emphasis as we begin the next year. How do we become better witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, our own local community, and Judea, our wider region. Then there's Samaria, the area way beyond our regular contacts. We partner with 6,000 other congregations, as part of our national church, to reach people and serve them throughout the United States and to the ends of the earth.

We may never personally meet them, but through the support of our congregation, and our 6,000 fellow congregations, we are seeking to fulfill the command Jesus gave to his church to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Your gifts help us to do that. We month we send a contribution to our national church through our regional district to support this work.

Over the coming year, we hope you will take the opportunity to grow in your ability to be a witness. Does that mean you have to go knocking on doors? No, not at all. Do you have to plan to be a foreign missionary? No, not at all, unless God calls you to that and you respond.

Whether we realize it or not, we are always witnessing. By our words, our actions, the way we use the blessings that God gives us and by the way we live our lives, we are witnessing. As Everyday Disciples we are witnessing for Jesus Christ.

I hope we can all learn how to be more intentional about that witness. So that, as Peter explains it in 1 Peter 3:15: "Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks you about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way." We can never argue anyone into faith in Jesus, but we sure can invite them to meet Jesus by our words and actions.

Count me in: What will you do to become a more mature following of Jesus in you Gathering, Growing, Giving and Going?