

Aug 3 – What is A Disciple?

One who Cares for Others

Matthew 25:31-46

Have you ever stopped to ask the question: Why do we here at Trinity help people? This is a key question. There are many groups who do good things in Sequim. Many of you are members of these groups and take great pride, with justification, in the things you are doing and the people you are helping. If I am honest some of these groups may even be better at helping people than we! So back to the question and too often our answer is something like, “We help because we care and there is a need.” Now I am not saying that this isn’t a good reason but if that is our motivation at Trinity than we have turned ourselves into being just one more club or group in town.

As you can probably guess, I believe that there are some important theological reasons for why caring is such an important part of our ministry. Just looking at our programs for the year you see that we place caring and concern high on our priority list. Think about how much time and resources we give to putting on a monthly community meal. Or the energy we expend on our yearly rummage sale with a major portion of the profits going to help others in the community. Or, that we have a Shepherding program that reaches out to members when they cannot, for health reasons, be with us in worship. And our neighborhood groups, they were formed partly to give support and help to each other. We need to understand and embrace the reasons we care as individuals and as a church. We need to share what we do and why we do it with others if we are truly disciples of Jesus. Remember as a disciple we are to follow his example and Jesus was one who cared about people. His deep compassion was partially behind his ministry of healing. His caring led to the feeding of five thousand. His compassion caused him to be concerned about his mother when he hung on a cross. Caring, it was a big deal to Jesus and it is an important part of our faith and identity here at Trinity.

So why do we care? To begin to answer that question we need to again hear part of the parable that I read this morning.

“Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” 34-36

“When you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you have done it for me.” 40

We are first called to be compassionately aware of needs and do something about them. Those condemned either did not see others needs as their concern or ignored them all together. Compassion for others is essential but if this is our sole motivation then we are, as I have said, just like and other club that does good in the community. Their good deeds are motivated by compassion.

What is different for us, as Christians? We should believe that we see the face of Christ in each person we meet and that the offering of care and help is also giving something to Jesus our Lord. From this idea three compelling motivations should inspire our caring.

In seeing the face of Christ in all we meet we are proclaiming that all are of worth. It challenges us to understand that our caring is doing something with another not just for them. Compassion is doing something for another. Christian caring is coming along side someone and saying let me help you carry your burden. It reminds us that we all, at times are in need, we all need care, and we are all children of God.

To help you understand let me give you an example. In one of my congregations a young woman was facing surgery. The community rallied to provide meals for her husband and kids while she was recovering. She mentioned to me how she always looked forward to when our church and most of the other churches brought the dinner. I assumed it was because she knew the people. But it was something more profound. Others came with an attitude of we know you are in need, here is food and often were out the door again in a moment. The church people came and sat and asked how was she feeling, did the kids need anything, was there anything they could do to make it

easier for her. Many groups helped but it was the churches that came along side and tried to walk with her and her family through these difficult times.

Secondly, our caring is an act of love for God and so our caring is a form of worship. Did you ever consider that idea? Jesus said that when we do it for others we do it as if it were for him. We love Jesus and want to express that love. We do that through service and so our caring is a profound type of worship. We may not think it feels like worship when we help out at the community dinner but it is. We may not think of it as worship when we give a friend a ride to the doctor, but it is. If we approach each opportunity to care with the fact that we are doing this for and in Jesus' name it takes on a profoundly holy aspect.

Last year I was around when our church hosted the Sequim Toy drive. It is always a fun time to see the parents faces light up as they think about those toys being under the Christmas tree. One young mom asked to visit with me. I assumed she was looking for additional help. I took the time to visit and I am so glad I did. She had gone through some really difficult times. She was currently being watched by CPS and the doctors because her little baby girl was not putting on weight and they were talking about taking the girl from her claiming she was an unfit mother. Why did she want to visit? First she just wanted someone to hear that she loved her little girl and was doing all she could for her. But then she said, "I grew up in the church. I hadn't been in one in years. Today reminded me of those times, they were some of the best times I ever had. Your providing my girl some toys reminded me of all the kind people who cared about me growing up. I just wanted to say thanks and ask that you pray for me and my little girl." That was all. She didn't want anything. We had a prayer and as she walked out the door I saw not her, but Jesus. She didn't give me her name so I could never follow up. I wonder what has happened this year. But I know she understood that we were hosting that event not because it was the right thing to do but because we love others, seeing the face of Christ in them. It was probably the most holy and worshipful moment of that entire Advent/Christmas season.

Our caring is a sharing type of evangelism. There is that word that some of you are so uneasy with. But it is really part of what it means to be a faithful disciple. When

we care as a part of the church we need to let people know why we are doing this. And why are we doing it? The answer is because Christ sent me. Too often we seem embarrassed to acknowledge this fact. We usually don't have to mention it when we are doing something here in the church. Those coming here get the connection between what we do and it being a part of our faith commitment. At our community dinner I am often thanked by our guests as they leave but the thanks isn't to me for what I did but to you, the church which I represent. Often I hear, tell everyone thank you. But at other times, times when we are not in the building, we need to be willing to share that what we are doing is motivated by our faith. This is not pushy kind of evangelism but instead claiming whose we are. Service groups when they are doing things in the community wear hats or aprons to let everyone know what group is involved. We don't ask that of you, but maybe we should. But we need to proclaim our faith.

Whenever I mention this I am reminded of a story that I read. Her car had broken down again. How was she going to get her children to school and to work? She was barely making ends meet as it was and had no money for expensive repair bills or a new car. That afternoon her neighbor greeted her as she always did and asked, "How's your day going?" Instead of saying fine the woman mentioned her car and her worries. The neighbor lady asked, "How are you going to get your kids today?" When she told her she was going to walk to the school which was almost two miles away and then walk them home. The neighbor would not hear of it and said, "I'll take you and I am sending my husband over to look at your car." Before long he was poking around under her hood. The next thing she knew several men were looking over her car. People came and went, parts arrived. She went out once to ask how much this was costing and they just smiled and kept working. When she returned home with her children from the school her car was sitting outside running better than it had in months if not years. She thanked her neighbor's husband and then screwed up her courage to ask how much it cost. Nothing was the reply. It is our gift to you for taking such good care of your kids. When she quit crying she asked, "Why would you do such a thing?" She was use to people taking and never giving. His response, "Jesus asks us to use our gifts and talents for good." It was a simple thing but it got her thinking and soon she was

attending church with her neighbor wanting to learn about this faith that cares for people like her.

We, as disciples are called to care. When we have the community dinner, help a neighbor, or give a ride we are living out this part of our discipleship. We need to remember why we do it. We do it because we love God and so it is worship and we do it because we see the face of Christ in all and we do it because we are to share God's love with all. So care, but tell people why, when asked, because we are disciples of Christ.