

## **July 13– What is A Disciple?**

### **One who Learns**

Luke 10:38-42

As we continue looking at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ we hear that we are called to be lifelong learners when it comes to our faith. Last week we mentioned that we must respond to the call of Christ and this is a daily process where we again commit ourselves to faithful living. We know that the disciples had to learn from Jesus. Often it says in the gospel accounts that Jesus teaches them. It was an essential part of their time with Jesus. If we want to really see how important learning and understanding what Jesus was sharing was to him we only need to look at the scripture that I shared this day.

We know the story. There is Martha. She is the Biblical poster child for type A behavior. She is busy with all the arrangements for dinner. It is a big task, for you would have the normal household group plus Jesus and all of his disciples. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching. Mary was not oblivious to Martha's activity. I am guessing she thought that things could wait just a bit. It didn't matter if there were flowers in the center of the table or the napkins were folded just so. People would get fed but she wanted to learn. Martha gets upset with Mary and wants Jesus to scold her and tell her to get to work. Jesus instead says that Mary has chosen the more important thing. This, for me, is a reminder that we can be too busy doing the work of a disciple and not take time for being a disciple. And part of what this means is a disciple is one who engages in continuing thoughtful learning.

Yet, my experience as a pastor is that many faithful seem to think that lifelong learning isn't necessary to being a disciple. They think they learned everything they needed to know during Sunday School when they were a child. Or they feel that in attending worship on Sunday they get all of the education they need. Now I am the first to admit that I strive to educate you through my sermons but it isn't the same as being in a class where some study and reflection is called for. Where you come prepared to listen and to talk. We all need to be in something that causes us to stretch mentally and

be challenged in our thinking, our faith and our life actions. Yet, sadly many do not see the importance of learning. Why do I say this? Think about what we offer on a regular basis here at Trinity. We have weekly Bible studies, a monthly spiritual growth group, quarterly Trinity U offerings and now a twice a year all church book study. When I examine the numbers of those attending they are always a small percentage in relationship to our total active faith community. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, organized his fledgling group around small group meetings whose purpose was to teach people and just importantly to hold them accountable.

So this day let us see why it is important, if we take the title disciple seriously, to be a lifelong learner.

The first seems so obvious but in case you think this is the case let me assure you that we don't know it all. No matter how many Bible studies you have been to, you don't know everything there is to know about the Bible. Almost every time I get out my commentaries and begin researching for the sermons I am about to preach, I learn something new or gain a different insight. Each teacher approaches the Bible from their own unique perspective and reading or listening to them makes a text that I thought I knew well come alive. Many of you mentioned how much you gained from the sermon I preached right after Easter about the walk to Emmaus and the fateful words of Cleopas, "we had hoped." That entire sermon sprung from just one phrase the person I was reading shared. He said, "How many times do we say the words, 'we had hoped' signifying our lost dreams. What does Jesus say to these moments?" I have read the story of the walk to Emmaus many times and had gone past that phrase without a thought. Those words changed for me the meaning of the passage and I will never read it the same again. Also it makes me more attentive when I hear those words uttered by someone in a time of crisis. I get their profound feeling of being let down and now talk about this Bible story as a symbol of hope. We all have things to learn and that learning will change us.

Without continual learning we grow stale, or even worse, our faith stays immature. Remember that famous passage from I Corinthians 13 "when I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, but now that I have grown up I put away childish

things?” Yet more often that I want to admit I talk to very mature adults who still carry with them faith understandings that they had as a teenager. They haven’t been to classes since and so their faith has not grown or I might say kept up with the times. Life changes and so must we. We would never be happy if someone said the science I learned in high school is all I need today. After all we know that the scientific world was much different all those years back. We understand the need to know so that we can keep abreast of current learning. It is the same with faith. When I was a child, Africa was a continent far away that you sent missionaries to. Now we are in instant communication with that continent and all the world. It means a different response as being part of a global community. So we learn to keep fresh, to keep challenged. I think that was why Mary sat at Jesus feet. She heard things she had never heard before and was trying to process them. It caused her to change.

Finally, when we take education as being a part of being a faithful disciple, we become disciplined and accountable. I love the stories of the early Wesley classes. They always began, “And how is it with your soul?” This was true confession time. If you tried to side step the question by saying fine the leader would usually be able to challenge you about some behavior. Everyone knew each other and so the leader would know if you had been angry or gossiped and would challenge you so that you would change. We don’t do that today. I am guessing that if that was a part of membership I wouldn’t see many of you back here next week. But being in a group causes you to show up. It challenges you to show up prepared and it makes you think about your actions.

I recall being in one group of men where they were talking about the issue of forgiveness. The leader mentioned that forgiving is something we do for us not for the other. He stressed that we all need to work on releasing negative feelings over past things done. One of the men mentioned how he was so glad that he had learned this gift. One of his friends got a look of absolute incredulity. He said, “Didn’t you just say to me yesterday that you would never forgive so and so for what he did to you?” The first man blushed and said, “Well I wasn’t talking about that incident.” Learning caused him

to look at his actions and later he admitted to the group that he was struggling with, but making progress on forgiving.

I have heard so many stories of how learning helps. I have read about people talking how they memorized scripture when they were young, and it was there when they needed it in crisis. Or going to a class and having a long held belief challenged causing change. Mary did choose the greater thing. We have to be careful to not be so busy being a disciple that we do not do those things which lead us to deeper relationship with God and learning is one of them. Perhaps you will remember this sermon the next time the ed. team mentions a class to be offered.