

July 20– What is A Disciple?

One Who Worships

Luke 4:14-21, 11:1-4,

As we continue to look at what a disciple is and does, I almost feel silly talking about this next attribute. After all, it is so obvious that we really don't need to talk about it, do we? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Not all see the importance of public and private worship for their faith life. Yet, when you examine the life of Jesus we see how central both types of worship were to him. It says that Jesus went to the synagogue as was his custom and today we read about his first time back to Nazareth after his public ministry had begun. Where did he go? To the synagogue. Also we hear how the disciples, after being with him for some time, ask him to teach them to pray. They would not have asked this unless they would have seen and experienced the importance of prayer life for Jesus. And, we hear how early most mornings Jesus went away to a quiet place to pray. His life was bathed in prayer and the disciples knew that his deep faith came from this source and so they too wanted to pray like Jesus. Since we have said yes to being a follower of Jesus and we want to act like a disciple, one who not only follows but imitates the one they are following, let us look at the issue of worship.

We know the importance of public worship. You made a choice to be here today among many other alternatives so, well done. But, as a pastor I have been amused and saddened by the excuses I have heard for people not being present at worship. Let me share a few that I remember. It was a sunny morning. I needed my sleep. I didn't want to be asked to help with.... And my all-time favorite, all my pantyhose had holes in them. So, it is safe to say that being here for worship is not always the priority that we pastor's would wish it to be.

But I and the worship team also realize we have a part to play in your presence. No one would want or expect you to come to dull, boring, and lifeless worship. The Worship Committee, music team and I try all we can to enhance our public worship. We spend much time in planning and preparation. If the reason you stay home from worship, at times, is that we are not engaging you, let us know and suggest to us what

we can do to change. But, and here is the hard one, public worship is not all about you. We are not here to just please you. I know this is a shock to hear but we have to please others as well. This means we will not always sing just your favorite hymns. I will not preach just about things you want to hear about. We may not always do special services like we have done them in the past, just the way you like them, but do things a bit differently. Why? You might ask.

Because, part of worship is to be invitational and inviting to others. We need our services to be such that you feel comfortable inviting your friends to worship. We need to be always asking what our likely guests would want in worship. If the church never changed we would be singing Gregorian chants, using no instruments, speaking in Latin or possibly Greek, and...you get the idea. Our public worship is a continually evolving dance of word, music and community. When it becomes static and predicable we begin to die.

I recall in one of my congregations a desire for the youth to get more involved in the worship service. We had an active group of teens. So I approached their leader and he thought it would be great to have a youth Sunday. The choir, organist and pastor were given the week off and the only thing we were told was to show up. They did the entire service from music through the sermon. Many of the elders were taken aback by the drums and guitars. We definitely did not sing the traditional hymns and the sermon was a play written by the youth. Afterwards, in coffee hour I heard a few grumbles about the service. Then one of the matriarchs of the congregation smiled and said, so all could hear, "Wasn't it wonderful that our children wanted to lead our worship? We are so lucky!" That put a different spin on things and for a number of years there was a youth Sunday.

So public worship, it is important to be here and it is also important to invite your friends to be here and we need to make it a welcoming place for all to worship.

But the other important part of worship for a disciple is the private or individual side of worship. It begins with prayer. We have already said what an important part prayer was to Jesus' faith life. Who among us can forget the scene in the Garden of

Gethsemane when, just hours before his arrest, Jesus spends that time in fervent prayer. It was done to first of all check out if the road ahead was what God really wanted him to take. He took time out to ask that question. He was willing to take the road of arrest, mocking and crucifixion but only after making sure there was no other alternative blessed by God. It was also a time where he was strengthened for the journey ahead. In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and us as well to pray for, and this means work at, making God's will happen, to be trusting that God will provide for our needs, forgive and be forgiven and that we keep on the path of faith. I believe that last part is what is meant when we ask to not be led into temptation and delivered from evil. Jesus' prayer is one that we should pray in some way each day as we seek to do God's will, to trust, to forgive and to be faithful. Living that spoken prayer is part of being a disciple.

Most of you, I believe, do practice the art of prayer, perhaps not as frequently as would be desired but you do it. One of the other parts of private worship that I see many falling down on is the reading of the Bible. We know how important it is to be filled with the word of God yet I know that many rarely open their Bibles except when they are at church. Again I have heard all the reasons for not reading. Among my favorites are: I'm not smart enough, it's boring, I don't have the time, I don't know where to start, and it is too confusing. My all-time favorite is I don't want to read the Bible because I might have to change!

Let me address a few of these. Reading the Bible takes no more intelligence than reading the paper. You might not understand all the concepts and ideas but that is ok. I don't understand everything! There are resources to help. And, like anything, the more you do the easier it becomes. As to where to start there are two sure ways to begin reading the Bible that guarantee failure! The first is to start in Genesis planning to read it from cover to cover just like you would any other book. You can probably keep going through Genesis and Exodus because there are many great stories in those books. But by the time you hit Leviticus you are doomed. It takes a special person to slog through that book. You will usually give up. The other method is the potluck method. Each day you open the Bible somewhere and read a bit. With no context or help it makes no

sense. After a while it seems a waste of time. No, you need to read some each day and in ways that make sense. Start with a devotional magazine like the Upper Room and read the full scripture, not just the highlighted verse. Then read something interesting to you, to begin with read something like one of the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles. Then, as you begin to get into the habit of reading you can become more adventurous and read parts of the Old Testament, beginning with the stories of Ruth or Joseph. If you like poetry read the Psalms. Like any habit it takes a while for it to become a part of our lives, but once it is, we will keep it faithfully.

And finally one of the parts of worship that we don't do well in public and even worse in private is to take time for quietness so God can speak to us. We are often so busy with our agenda in prayer; our mind is in such a dither, that it is hard to focus on what we are reading. We never still our mind. Quiet, meditation, being open to the Spirit of God is so important. We need to be open to God, listening as part of our being a disciple.

So, worship, public and private it is part of what we do if we are a disciple. May it be so.