

Aug 10 – What is A Disciple?

One Who Invites.

Mark 5:18-20

Today we finish up our series on what is a Disciple. We finally get to evangelism. This is the part of discipleship that we are all squeamish about. But it is part of what a disciple does. Now take a deep breath and relax. I am not asking you to go around your neighborhood and pound on doors and hand out pamphlets like some groups do. I am not asking you to buttonhole people and invite them to church. I am asking you to do what Jesus asked the man who was healed from demons to do.

First he was to tell people what God had done for him. In his case he had quite the story. He had lived amongst the tombs for who knows how many years because he was possessed by evil spirits. Everyone was scared of him. In confronting Jesus he found one who was not afraid. He talked to the man and to his demons. He challenged them and ordered them to leave. We have the story of them going into a herd of pigs that then runs into the water. The end result is that he who was so troubled is cured. He who was in agitation is at peace. This all happened because Jesus said a word and he believed and was healed. He wanted to go with Jesus, to become one of his traveling disciples. But Jesus instead asks him to stay and share his story. Tell people what God had done and was doing in his life. It says he went around that whole eastern part of the Sea of Galilee and shared his story. Think about the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. He talks with her and offers her living water. He shares how he knows about her past broken life. What does she do? She goes and tells her village, the same people who had been shunning her, about Jesus. Her story is that he knew my story and so he must be a prophet.

We too are asked by Jesus to tell our stories of faith, of failure and redemption, of fear and trust. Now your stories of what God has done in your life are probably not so dramatic as the woman at the well or the demoniac but each of us has a story to tell. The good news is that people ask us to tell them our stories! This means our story telling isn't a pushy kind of let me tell you about Jesus but instead a response to

questions. The people wanted to know how the demoniac had changed. The people in the village where the woman lived were interested to hear about this man who knew all about her and still treated her with respect. People are interested in our life stories. We all are asked at times to share a bit about our past. When we do, we need to be prepared to add in the faith component. When we do it within the context of answering another's question it is thoughtfully received.

Let me give you an example. You have been sick and a friend, particularly one who doesn't go to church, asks you how you are making out? You can say you are doing better now. You can talk about how your friends have been a support. But you can just as easily tell about how you were supported by your church, their prayers, their cards, and their casseroles. We all know how important this support network is to all of us but those who do not go regularly to church may have no idea of its value and importance. Or perhaps a grandchild asks you to tell them about some important event in your life, like what was it like when you were young? You can talk about what school was like, what games you played and how much gas cost. But you can just as easily talk about going to church and what you did in youth group or camp. When we are willing to tell our stories it provides openings for further conversations. They don't always happen but sometimes they do. We have all been impacted, at times, by hearing another's faith journey and it has caused our faith to strengthen as well.

Because you are here today I know that God, through your faith, through the community of the church, has had a powerful influence on your life. Jesus asks you to not keep this a secret. Share what God has done and is doing for you when you get the chance. People, when they ask questions, are open to answers. It won't be seen as pushy but it is being a faithful disciple.

Secondly the demoniac was to tell how God had shown him mercy. His was an easy message to tell. He had been cured of his demons and now, instead of living amongst the tombs his life had meaning and purpose. How has God shown you mercy, or compassion or forgiveness? These are all synonyms for that great concept of unconditional love that God offers to each of us. This is sometimes more difficult to talk about. It causes us to be a little vulnerable. We have to think about those times where

we failed and were forgiven and loved because someone was trying to live out their faith. It is about times when we were feeling lost and did not know what way to turn but God came to us, perhaps in an individual or maybe in that still small voice in the night, but the path forward became clear.

Think of the other ways you have received God's mercy. You have friends you would never have had because of your faith. You have given of your time and talents because you felt God had asked you to and it made a difference in people's lives and that has given you purpose. You have been given permission to try again and had people standing with you. You have stories to tell of God's mercy, compassion and love.

Let me share a personal story. Early in my ministry I was going through a tough time personally and professionally. I had gotten to know a minister from another denomination in town. He stopped by one day to ask how things are going. When I paused in answering he said that he had noticed at our last clergy meeting that I seemed a little down and felt God's nudge to come by. He was an older man who had many years of experience in ministry. All of a sudden I just poured out all of my stuff. He quietly listened and then taking my hands in his prayed for me. I still remember part of that prayer. He said, "God, I know Bill is in a tunnel right now, but let him trust in the light." After praying he said, "I am there for you. I will stop by frequently until the end of the tunnel has appeared and you are walking in the light." And he did just that. I was able to return the favor awhile later as he had his own tunnel moments but it also has made me strive to be there as a support for clergy, whether in my denomination or not, because all need someone to walk beside them when they are in the tunnel. I tell this story to other clergy when they ask me why I am so passionate about clergy support groups.

What are your stories to share, for God through others has and is loving you, caring about you, supporting you and walking beside you each day. We sometimes take this for granted because it is part of what it means to be the community of faith for one another. But those who do not know this support, this is good news indeed

Although Jesus didn't say it to the demoniac we can look for ways to live our faith among people we do not know. Living faithfully and intentionally in the world is another way of sharing what God is doing in our lives and sharing God's mercy.

Here is an example. I read about a man who smiles and asks every clerk who waits on him how their day is going. He does it with real compassion. Why? He sold shoes for a number of years and recalled how often he was treated as a thing instead of a person. People felt they could say anything to him and treat him anyway they wanted because he was there to serve them. He also remembered those bright moments when someone treated him kindly. He vowed that he would always treat every person who waited upon him with respect and as if they were Jesus. He was telling his story by actions. He goes on to say some clerks don't respond at all to his kindness. Some respond curtly. Most smile and he recognizes the look of "you really see me as a person." Occasionally it has led to conversations. They share with him because he shares how he did such work and knows how hard what they are doing is. He also shares how he wanted someone to smile at him when he was working and so now he smiles as part of his faith. Often that ends the conversation. But, sometimes the conversation goes further, sometimes much further. He has ended up praying for people in the checkout line as they tell them what is going on in their lives.

So a disciple is one who is called, who learns, who worships, who cares, who is generous and one who invites, invites through telling their stories of what God has done in their lives. It is a big list but as we continually are open to God and open to opportunities we will find ways to grow in all areas. In being faithful we will deepen our faith and grow in love.

The simplest story you first told is still the best. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. Tell of God's love and you will be one who is invitational to others.