

Do you ever wonder how to grow in faith? What is being a disciple of Christ, really all about?

There was once a Sunday school kindergarten teacher who had prepared a very fine lesson on the subject of Christian discipleship. The lesson included a game, a song, and a story. At the close of the lesson she asked for questions.

Several of the children waved their hands wildly, proving to the teacher that the lesson had been a success. Calling upon a little girl whose arms had been waving more frantically than the rest, she asked, "What do you have to say about disciples?"

"Well," she began, "I just wanted you to know that I know a lot about disciples. Because at my house we disciple everything. We have a disciple can for plastic, a disciple can for glass, and a disciple can for paper. My mom says discipling will save the earth!"

I enjoy that little story. This little girl might be confused between recycling and discipling, but she is really onto something. Discipling can save the earth.

What is being a disciple really all about? That is what we are going to talk about today. We are in the midst of a sermon series called *Beginning Again: The Basics of Faith - Wesleyan Style*. Two weeks ago, we talked about how Sin is a problem, because it gets in the way of our placing God first and living a life of faith. Last week, we talked about how God's grace is active in our lives even before we know it, inviting us to be faithful. We talked about how when we respond to God's grace, we have a shot at living life.

Today, we are going to talk about what we can do, when we have made a commitment to place Christ at the center of our life. How can we live as disciples (or followers) of Jesus Christ?

Paul, in our scripture for today, says it is all about letting Christ transform us. In this scripture he talks about such things as taking our clues from God, not the world when we make decisions. He talks about loving from the center of who we are and not faking love. He talks about running from evil and clinging to God.

He talks about building prayer into our life, so we get our nurtured by God, so we don't burn out. He talks about crazy things like praying for our enemies, not insisting on getting even. He talks about not letting evil get the best of us, but by us getting the best of evil by doing good.

He gives us some challenging words. Words that, I confess, I need to hear. Because like the little girl in our opening story, I don't always understand.

John Wesley, the founder of United Methodism, over 200 years ago, had a remarkable ministry. He traveled throughout England and offered a life of faith to people who had been turned off by the church. Many in his society, outside the church, saw the church as irrelevant to their lives. They saw the church this way, because frankly they felt that the people in the church were more concerned about their buildings than they were about the people inside and outside the buildings. Does that sound familiar?

Wesley didn't stay in the church and wait for these people who had written off the church come to him. No, he went out into the world to share that grace of God that had touched his life.

When people began to see in Wesley and his followers, the grace of God and started to turn to God, they asked, "What do we do now? How can we be followers of Jesus Christ?" And John Wesley told them the following things that I find to be helpful today. He said, "Once you commit to Christ, First, do no harm to another."

Then he would tell people, engage in the means of grace. What are these means? If you look in your bulletin, on the back of the prayer card you will find them. I believe if we take them seriously and build these disciplines into our lives, they can help us grow in faith as well.

He broke these means of grace up into two categories: Works of Piety and Works of Mercy. Here is what they are:

Works of Piety

- A) **Read the Bible every day** to see how God acted in the past and to understand how God is acting today.
- B) **Get involved in some type of Bible Study, Sunday School or small group** that can help you grow in your faith and understanding of how God is at work in your life.
- C) **Make a practice of praying each day.** Set aside time, in which you can pray to ask God to guide you and so that you can learn what it means to be God's friend.
- D) **Attend worship at every opportunity you can.** Then you can remember how much God loves you. This helps you remember that you belong to God and to the others who worship with you.

Works of Mercy

- E) As often as you are able, practice acts of mercy, **taking time to do good to others** (such as visiting in the hospitals, shut-ins, in Nursing homes, in the jails, etc.).
- F) **Engage in Christian conferencing** (i.e. be involved in some type of fellowship group that you can pray for them and they can pray for you as you learn to support and care for each other).

John Wesley felt that if we took seriously this task of coming before God and growing in faith; that God would work in us, that it would make a difference for us. He understood what it meant to place ourselves in a position to succeed. These Means of Grace, help

us succeed in allowing God to shape and transform our lives. Are you willing to let these means of grace shape and transform your life?

I want to close by telling you a story I heard of Richard Belling, a young boy in South Carolina, who is the son of a Baptist minister. One Saturday night, Richard decided to shine his father's shoes. The following night his dad put a new dollar coin on the top of Richard's dresser with a note commending him for what he had done. Then he wrote, "This dollar is your reward."

The next morning, when the father put his shoes on, he felt something hard and metallic in one of them. When he took off his shoe and reached inside, he found the dollar coin that he had given to his son the night before. Along with the coin was a note that simply read, "I did it for love!"

To be a Christian is to love Jesus so much that you want to be like him. To be a Christian is to try and do what Jesus would do, not for reward, but out of loving gratitude for all that Christ has done for us.

My hope and my prayer is that we will learn to love Jesus so much; that we will live in loving gratitude for all that God has done and is doing for us in Christ. It is my hope and prayer that we will take seriously these means of grace and build them into our lives, so we can let God shape us into the people God calls us to be.

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen.