

## “The Church is a Discipled People”

John 17:26

Sunday May 27, 2018

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As we come today to the end of the series on Jesus’s prayer in John 17, we come to a bit of a summary sermon. If we look at Jesus’s prayer for what the church would be as a whole, we begin to see a pattern emerge. Let’s skip our way through the passage quickly.

v. 12, Jesus prayed he was with them, and guarded them, v. 13, his joy filled them, v. 14, given them his word, v. 15, kept them, v. 17 sanctified them, v. 18, sent them even as the Father sent the Son, v. 22, glory in him is given over and shared with them, v. 23, unity in them as is the unity in the Trinity, v. 23, 26, love in them as is in the Trinity.

How might you summarize this prayer? What I would say is that Jesus prays that his people are formed to be like him, to follow after him in the ways he lived. In short, he prayed that WE live as his disciples in this world, his followers. What belonged to him he gave to his followers that we would be like him. He took the original disciples, multiplied his life into theirs, transformed them and sent them out; he does and prays the same for us. He finds us, forms us and sends us into this world as his followers. That is discipleship. It is good word that sometimes we lose. When Jesus calls us to discipleship he calls us to followership, meaning, following him in his life. Our lives following his.

There are lots of places in the Gospels we could turn to examine Jesus’s call to “follow me.” We could examine in [Matthew 8:18-22](#) where a crowd had gathered and a religious leader came to Jesus and proclaimed I’ll follow wherever you go. But you may remember, Jesus says essentially, wait a minute. Count the cost; *foxes have holes, birds have nests, but I don’t even have a place to lay my head.* Are you sure you are more than a fan, or think my ideas are good? Are you sure you want to follow me, not just be my fan?

But this morning, there is one spot that lays out the pursuit of a life of followership really clearly and I want us briefly to look at it this morning. Colossians 3. We will look at several parts of that chapter this morning, but for now, hear verses 1-4

[3](#) If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2](#) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3](#) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4](#) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is to have Jesus’s life shape ours, for our lives to be formed to look more like his life. I’m not simply talking about WWJD. Instead, his life mold us by his Spirit, not just do, but love and live has he has. He has taken us as we were and changes us, fits us for his kingdom. Jesus is not interested in recruiting fans to fill the stadiums. He wants to change your life. But make no mistake it is a transformation, and often painful. Whenever the grace of Jesus takes root in our lives, along with it comes disruption. His grace and his love change us and mold us into different people than we were when he found us. That pathway is discipleship.

There is a pathway of following Jesus that brings us transformation. We see it in this passage.

### 1. Following Jesus gives a new identity.

Look at v. 1, [If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above. V. 3, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.](#)

Obviously, Paul is writing to people who are alive, but he says you have died. You have been raised. Now that is more than just saying Jesus died for me, which he did. This is more profound and more personal. What Paul is saying is that when Jesus died on the cross in condemnation for our sins, we died with him. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, Clay was crucified with him. If you have put your trust in Jesus, then when Jesus died physically, you—your sinful old self—were spiritually put to death with him. But not only that, you were raised with him. When Jesus rose from the dead in victory over sin, you were raised with him in power, too, over sin.

When we lay hold of this foundational reality of who we are, then living as a disciple begins to take shape. You are no longer who you once were. Christ was condemned for your sin, and his resurrection life is within you now. You do not have to give in to sin any longer. Where sin once controlled your heart, Christ, by the powerful Spirit of God, now has taken up residence. You have, as Paul says in v. 9 **put off the old self (the one crucified with Christ) and put on the new self, v. 10, which is being renewed after the image of its creator.** A disciple returns again and again to this fundamental truth to who the new me is so we can live as these new people.

As we follow Jesus we grow more and more into that new identity it changes the way we face your everyday life. By way of making this tangible, fill in the blank, I am \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes we fill the blank with a function and turn it into an identity. I am a pastor, a banker, a parent. If that is my identity, then when I feel like I'm failing in that function, then my sense of who I am is threatened. If you tell me I'm failing as a pastor or whatever my vocation, and that function has become the core of who I am, what will I do with your critique? Take a swing, metaphorically, of course. Lash out. Or if feel like failing as a parent, we find ourselves depressed or using shame to control our kids.

When we reduce our identity so some thing: career, our family, having money, being respected, we must realize none of those things last. Your career won't die for you—you might have to die for it but it can't love you. Your money can't be depended on to never leave you nor forsake you. Certainly respect is just one dumb tweet or unwise decision away from having you tossed onto the heap of those saying depart, I never knew you.

So many of the things we live for can NEVER deliver. We can say of these things, gifts of God, I'm glad to have you, to know you, but that's not my life. Even if that thing is lost, I have Christ who IS my life. Instead, we have died and been raised with Christ, and are being remade more and more into the likeness of Jesus. He is the one who loves you all the way down and will never leave or forsake you.

Discipleship begins in knowing who you are. And by faith, we are sons and daughters of King Jesus. Chosen, Holy and Beloved, as Paul calls us in v. 12. His life and his power have been given to you and are growing in you by the Spirit. We must continue coming back to the basic biblical truths of who we are in Christ, for the world and the media seek to disciple us day after day to see ourselves and define who we are by some other measure. You are a child of God.

## 2. Following Jesus reorders our loves.

Going a slightly different direction, in our modern world sometimes we think I must look within, find my deepest longings and desires, and there is my identity. If I look within and am true to myself and authentic (modern buzzwords), then I'll be set free for a life worth living.

But what Paul says here and Jesus says elsewhere, is that when we look within, what we find are loves all ordered around self—selfish concerns which are truly disordered loves. Luther said that when we look within we find a life curved in on itself. He is absolutely right, as Paul says it here, v. 5-11—we find impurity, evil desires (that is an over-abundance of desire for wrong things), malice, wrath, anger...all things oriented around self-advancement. If we look within to find what's really there, what is natural, then what we find is a disordered heart, all bent on self. No one learns to look out toward others, by looking in.

Jesus never said, "I'll accept you as you are, so now go do whatever you find in your heart to do and whatever makes you happy." He never said anything about being healthy, wealthy and wise. That was Ben Franklin. What Jesus said, was take up your cross and follow me. It is the putting to death of the old self, through self-denial, the life of Christ takes up residence to shape us to live in different ways, like v. 12, **compassionate, kind, humble, meek patient, bearing with one another, in love and in peace.** When Jesus gives us a new identity he shapes us to be different people, people who look more like him than we do our old selves!

I was reading this week about Chesley Sullenberger, "Sully", who was the pilot to land his plane in the Hudson River in NYC in 2009. Do you remember him? The plane took off from LaGuardia for Charlotte and promptly hit a flock of geese, not one goose, but a flock of geese and the engines lost power. What now? A flying metal tube full of people over NYC with no power. As an experienced pilot, Sully looked at setting the plane down on the highway but that risked LOTS of lives. The only spot was in the Hudson River, going south in the direction of the current so the plane just might float long enough to get folks out.

So he had to do it just right, hard bank turn left, make sure vents and the valves in the plane were sealed for water landing so it wouldn't sink too fast. Had to keep the nose down for speed, but not too far down so that the plane landed flat on water. Keep wings level, while making a hard turn, then land perfectly flat. Amazingly, he did it. God's grace to be sure.<sup>1</sup>

But what got me thinking is that Sully was not born knowing how to do this. This was not something that was natural to him. This took a tremendous amount of skill that was formed, produced in him so that he acted in a way that saved lives. He was disciplined, intentionally and purposely trained and formed, to be a pilot who could react how he did in that moment. There was a clear pathway of development that made Sully the kind of Sully equipped to save lives. The same thing is true of us as disciples of Jesus.

As a disciple, the Spirit of God is shaping you to look less like your old self, and more like Jesus. He has put the old you to death on the cross, and his own life is within you by faith so that he shapes you. Jesus's prayer for you in John 17 is basically that his life is being planted within you, that your life is transformed to be more like his. Is it happening? Would your closest friend say you look more like Jesus today than 5 years ago? 1 year ago?

But there is the thing. There is a mechanism for that to happen. It is discipleship—purposeful, intentional discipleship, and it involves relationships with other believers. He does it by the power of his Word in relationship with other people.

### 3. Following Jesus involves other people.

Some sports are individual sports: bowling, running, golf to some degree, even tennis. Others are team sports, you must be on a team to compete. Discipleship is a team sport—you must engage with other believers in order to grow in Christ. Spiritual Growth requires relationships with others. Let me say it this way: Fellowship is a driver for followership.

Look at v. 16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Being a disciple means putting yourself into a place of having other people teach and admonish you in the truth of the Word of God. That means relationships. It means community, filled with humility. Being formed as a disciple will include relationships of trust where people know you well enough to apply God's truth not to general principle, but directly to your life. So small groups, SS, C-groups, being mentored life on life by another believer. It is purposeful and intentional. It is about forming you to know and follow Jesus more intently. Do you have that kind of relationship? One where there is enough trust to confess your need and sin and invite accountability for growth? Where someone can humbly point out what they see in you or me? Or are you trying to do this disciple thing with just you and Jesus?

But it also involves worship. V. 16, teaching and admonishing singing hymns, spiritual songs...in other words, in worship, the gathered corporate worship of the church. It is in this place, gathered as God's people, where we hear the gospel that we are formed as disciples. Let me say it clearly: worship attendance is absolutely vital for your growth as a follower of Jesus.

Let me say something else. Sometimes we believe that we can form a life-long follower of Christ by saying we have worship, or discipleship, pick one. That's not God's plan. Both are needed. Worship and intentional discipleship ministries are absolutely vital.

Parents, we've cited this statistic before, but upwards of 70 % of our students have not been regularly involved in worship. Kids go to SS and parents to worship. But adults, you need SS or some intentional formation in your life, and your kids need to be formed in worship. Both are vital! To grow life-long disciples, set yourself under both, because both are tools to form Jesus in you.

Any Star Trek fans out there? I love it. One of the rules in Star Trek is called the Prime Directive, that is, the Star Trek crew are not supposed to interfere with a civilization in its development of technology. Sharing advanced technology, it

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<sup>1</sup> Illustration adapted from N.T. Wright, *After You Believe* (New York: Harper One, 2010), p. 20.

was supposed, would shape the way this alien civilization would develop on its own. So, many times, the Star Trek crew would try to remain hidden or allow things to happen so as not to affect the natural development of an alien civilization.

Why tell you this? For the half of you who care nothing about Star Trek? Because discipleship is all about destroying Star Trek's prime directive. Jesus invaded our world and absolutely intends to disrupt the natural progression of events because nature without God's grace leads to death.

He claimed our lives and is forming us as his participants in remaking the world. We are disciplined, formed to live today as the world one day shall be when he returns. That growth, learning how to do that involves discipleship, formation and we need each other.