

Doing What Disciples Do

John 15:12-17

The new pastor of a congregation preached his first sermon from the text, “Love one another.” The people were pleased. The next Sunday the pastor preached the exact same sermon from the exact same text, “Love one another.” The people were surprised. When the pastor preached the same sermon the third week from the same text, the people were angry. The Staff Parish Relations chairperson confronted the new pastor with the obvious question, “Why do you preach the same sermon every week?” The pastor replied, “When the congregation learns to practice this one, I’ll write a new one.”

Discipleship in a single word is love. By the waters of baptism, we are claimed as children of God and cleansed of our sin. By the rivers of life, we are called to be faithful disciples and challenged to love one another.

“A new commandment I give you,” says Jesus, “Love one another as I have loved you.” What do disciples do? They love one another.

To abide is to remain. We learn to love one another because we first have been loved by God. Love is an experience before it is an expression. One reason we are such feeble lovers of others is because we have yet to really grasp or experience the depth of God’s love for us. If we are going to love one another, the first thing we need to do is to abide in God’s love.

Abide in love. How can we do that? We get in touch with God’s love through worship. If worship were a matter of music, we could attend a concert. If worship were a matter of entertainment, we could go to a movie. If worship were a matter of excitement, we could go to a ball game. If worship were a matter of rest, we could stay home and sleep. But worship is a meeting with God. It is the place where God and people get together. The longer I lead worship, the more I am convinced that if I am going to be a faithful disciple, I must find ways and means to be consistent and persistent at worship. You cannot be a vital Christian if you do not find ways to be involved in worship. Worship is the heartbeat of faithful discipleship.

It was the middle of the day when Jesus met her at the well. She came after others had gone to avoid the embarrassment that seemed so strong. In a casual conversation that shattered the conventions of the day, they discussed the nature of worship. Where do you worship? How do you worship? What method and means of worship do you use? And they talked about her life. They talked about the intimate things of life as they cut across the culture of the day. Then Jesus said something to her that changed her life, “You drink of this water from this well and you will be thirsty again. But I want to give you water that is living water. It will be a well of water springing up from inside of you and you will never ever be thirsty again.” That is what worship does for us. It gives us a spring of living water welling up inside our souls. Worship is an integral part of our discipleship.

Prayer is important in our discipleship. It really does not change many things, but it changes us dramatically. Bobby was a regular guy who went to work and supported his family. One day Bobby started slipping into the church sanctuary on his way home from work and spending some time in prayer. Trying to be more helpful than he needed to be, a pastor approached Bobby and asked if he could assist. “No,” said Bobby shyly, “I just like to come here where it is quiet to pray.” “And what do you say in your prayers?”

inquired the pastor, who often failed to pray himself. “Not much,” said Bobby. “I just come in here and get quiet; clear my mind of the cares of the day. Then I say, ‘Hi, God, this is Bobby.’” “What happens then?” asked the pastor. “Not a whole lot,” says Bobby. “I just stay put until I hear a voice in my heart say, ‘Hi, Bobby, this is God!’ Then I know everything is going to be all right and I go on home.” The purpose of prayer is to be in the presence of God and to linger there long enough to know that we are loved. The longer I pray the less I ask and the more I listen.

What is okay at five is not okay at fifty. Faith that reduces God to Santa Claus and love that always seeks to get, is immature, at best, and unbearable, at its worst.

Paul said, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put away childish things.” Have you? Have I?

Abide in love. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. When we abide in love, we are empowered to act in love. Love is an action verb. It calls us to do things. Disciples do certain kinds of things because God loves them, and we are called to love one another. Disciples do many things and here are a few,

DISCIPLES PLAY FAIRLY. When it comes to this game of life, we choose to play it fairly. We live The Golden Rule—Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Love needs fairness the way a river needs a bank, or a body needs a backbone. Love is soft unless there is fairness in it to give structure and keep it straight. Christian people should play the game of life fairly. Fair people are even-handed, square-dealers, speak the truth in love, honor their commitments with a handshake. Love is not so much a feeling or a falling as it is a disposition and a determination to be a certain kind of person, a fair person.

DISCIPLES DARE TO FORGIVE. Forgiveness is the oil that lubricates the human machine. Without it, all of life becomes hot and squeaky. Forgiveness is never easy, and it is not excusing, but it is essential if you are to keep from dying a bitter person. Disciples forgive because forgiveness fits faulty people. Jesus forgives us and so we forgive. Forgiveness sets us free. The person feeling free is the one doing the forgiving.

DISCIPLES SEEK TO SERVE. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he gathered his disciples in an upper room. James and John were jockeying for position. Judas was cashing in while Peter was boasting. In the rush to get everything ready, a standard custom was omitted. There was no servant to wash their feet. That night Jesus showed them the full extent of his love. He got up from the meal, wrapped a towel around his waist, filled a basin with water and began to wash the disciples’ feet. While Peter wanted to argue and the others were filled with awe, Jesus said, “I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, so you should also wash one another’s feet.” Love never stands taller than when it stoops to serve.

What do disciples do? They play fair in this thing called life. They learn to forgive, even as they have been forgiven. They stoop to serve the people around them. That is what disciples do.

Whose feet are you symbolically called to wash this week? Whom do you need to forgive? In the big game of life, do you always play fair?

They will know we are Christians by our love.