

SERMON – 1<sup>ST</sup> LENT

MATTHEW 28:16-20 AND PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

MARCH 1, 2020

“LIFE TO LIFE DISCIPLESHIP”

Our subject for this and the next few Sundays is discipleship. Next week you’ll hear about it from the perspective of a group called the Navigators – a 90 year old Christian organization I’ve been working with for the last year which is a recognized innovator and leader in what they call “*Life to Life Discipleship*.” My Navigator “coach” Pastor Erick Adams will preach next week. We’ll begin today discussing a Lutheran perspective of discipleship and introduce a tool we might use to form a “Discipleship Culture” in our congregation.

Notice I said “a” Lutheran perspective – I dare not claim there exists “the” Lutheran perspective. Such is our tradition – strong on the essentials of the faith but a bit freer on the particulars of how to live and share it. In recent weeks I’ve gotten requests to preach on this subject through questions like “*what is the Great Commission and do we accomplish it through ourselves and our congregation*” as well as “*what are some practical ways we can spread Christ’s message*.” As we like to say around here - “*you asked and we listened!*”

All four of our texts today provide a perspective on discipleship. I’m going to start with Psalm 119 because in Lutheran catechetical style it asks a question and provides an answer – “*How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.*” Psalm 119 is then off to the races describing how important devotion to God’s word is. It’s crescendo on this score is its famous verse - “*thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.*” Most of the Psalms are dedicated to recalling the mighty acts of God, but Psalm 119 is all about devotion to God’s word – its directives and its promises. *How can a (person) keep his way pure* – the answer is God through knowledge and observance of his words.

Matthew 28, for you who asked, contains “the Great Commission.” For a bit more perspective on this, I refer you to a sermon I delivered back in April of 2018, copies of which I’ve put in the entry. The Great Commission applies to everyone, though as I said in my earlier message, it’s more the “local” version of the GC that applies to us and our congregations. I say that because when our Lord said “go” we take it to mean “someplace else.” Our congregation’s emphasis in our Mission of the Month is “overseas missions” so I want to affirm that the imperative to “go” applies to us, and to the questioner who asked how we accomplish the GC through our congregation, the work the Federwitz family does on our behalf is a great place to start!

But when our Lord gathered his followers (disciples) to himself on a mountain in Galilee, from where one could see “other nations”, our Lord was speaking of how those followers were to do what he did. In Jesus day folks who studied under rabbis like Jesus were really “apprentices” as much as bookworm students. They learned by doing what the rabbi did as well as what he said. “*How can a young man keep his way pure*” was and is still a disciple’s question.

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And a discipler's answer is "*by living according to (God's) word.*" That is where our three-year partnership with the Navigators comes in – not that they have disciples in their churches and we don't – I don't mean anything of the sort. But they do have a method, an "apprenticeship" understanding that has biblical roots and melds well in our Lutheran tradition. We teach that discipleship begins in baptism and is nourished in an absolutely indispensable way through the ministry of word and sacrament we call "worship."

But when Jesus said to his disciples after he was raised he would be "*going ahead of them to Galilee*" our Lord was referring to the place where he initiated his serious ministry years before – where he began to preach about the kingdom of God and its peculiar and demanding ways of living, and as a result began to get criticized even when he did good. God raised Jesus as validation of all that he did and said – in so many words saying "*I want this sort of thing to continue*" – then our Lord gathered his followers and said – 'ok, now it's your turn.'

Our Lord's death and resurrection is the origin of discipleship – and his "going to Galilee" is the call to follow him even if it's hard, even if it gets you criticized, even if and most especially if it forms in you new habits and ideals. The promise of the Great Commission is as great as the content of the work – if we do what Jesus did, we'll see him. '*How does a person keep his way pure*' – how does a person "do Jesus"? The pattern we're suggesting, which I'm introducing to a few leaders now and will offer to the wider congregation in the fall, is what the folks with the Navigators calls "The Discipleship Wheel." It's a visual tool, nothing more, but it illustrates what discipleship is about, by showing what disciples do. Next time Pastor Adams will speak more on this – out the experience and description of what these disciples started to do as recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

Christ is the center. Always. We're Lutherans after all – and we begin with 'Christ alone'. From Christ all activity of the disciple springs. We don't speak of '*coming to him*' in our tradition like folks in Pastor Adam's tradition do, but we agree that Jesus is the hub – from which and around which all revolves. The Christian living in obedience to his Great Commission – Psalm 119's "*living according to your word*", is the rim, where life and faith touch, where if you will "the rubber hits the road." What arises from Jesus and returns to Jesus are the spokes – Word and Prayer being the vertical dimension of our relationship to God, "*keeping us in his word*". The horizontal spokes are fellowship and witnessing – sharing the faith empowered when we share life with one another in worship and Christian relationships.

We'll say more next time. I close with discipleship according to the Apostle Paul, who in our lesson from Philippians 2:12-13 says "*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his purpose.*" Working it out means – put it to use, put it in play, where you can put it on display. And if someone for whatever reason doesn't know the Jesus you do, they might as they get to know you. And that would be absolutely...great!