

Disciple Distinctives

October 2, 2016

Luke 10:25-42

It's a beautiful day isn't it? Kind of makes me feel like singing some more. Perhaps something like..... (Scott moves down to the main floor and sings the following song)

Won't You Be My Neighbor

By Fred Rogers

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,
A beautiful day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood,
A neighborly day for a beauty.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

I've always wanted to have a neighbor just like you.
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.

So, let's make the most of this beautiful day.
Since we're together we might as well say:
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor?
Won't you please, (Sections 1, 2 & 3)
Won't you please? (Sections 4, 5 & 6)
Please won't you be my neighbor?

Good morning neighbors!

Now I made this "joyful noise" this morning for a couple of reasons. I needed to break the ice, so to speak, as I'm a bit nervous here and also because I have to tell you about a story I came across two weeks ago. I desperately needed to hear this, as I was feeling a bit feeble and quite anxious as this day slowly but surely crept closer and closer.

It's a story about Fred Rogers (of Mr. Rogers fame) as he recalled an experience he had when attending seminary. Yes, Mr. Rogers was a theologian! He had as a goal in seminary to hear a variety of preachers, so for a time each Sunday he visited different churches. One particular week he experienced "the most poorly crafted sermon [he] had ever heard." A friend had accompanied him and when he turned to her, he found her in tears. She said, "It was exactly what I needed to hear."

Rogers then told his audience, "That's when I realized that the space between someone doing the best he or she can, and someone in need is holy ground. The Holy Spirit had transformed that feeble sermon for her—and as it turned out, for me too."

Let's ask God right now to speak to our hearts this morning.

Holy Father, it is a good morning to be in this neighborhood with your people. We invite you to teach us your truth. We ask that your Holy Spirit would enable our vision to be a little brighter and deeper, our hearts and minds a little more open and receptive, and our feet a little more steady and ready for the journey you have set before us--your followers here in this grace community. We offer you all our praise, and seek to worship you in every thought, in every word, and in every deed. Amen.

What do you want to be?

Have you ever in your life been asked what it is you want to be, particularly in the context of “when you grow up”? Mr. Rogers used to ask kids that question on his show all the time. Parents, relatives and teachers will often ask young’uns that very question. Perhaps even as an older than average kid, you’ve been asked this very question – several times! Have you been there? Can anyone relate?

Today it is my turn to ask each of you that age old question: what is it, really, that you want to be-- when you grow up? And let’s change the last part to read, “as you are growing up.” That sounds so much better to me! So the question becomes, what do you and I want to be as we grow up?

Now despite all our differing ages, personalities and gifts, there is only one correct answer to my question. Let me rephrase it to give you a little different perspective, so you know where I’m going: what do you think **Jesus** wants us to be as we are growing up?

If you have your handy dandy sermon notes, you should be able to ace this pop quiz this morning. Just a little hint, it’s the first big bold word on the top of the page! So here’s your question and I really would appreciate a loud response here:

Are you ready? What is it you and I want to be as we grow up?

A DISCIPLE!

Yes! Hallelujah, my job is done, you can all go home. Except..... we need to consider a couple of questions. The first is this, just what is a disciple? A disciple is defined as a learner, a pupil, one who comes to be taught, a follower. But this is not just any old student or learner. Listen to this quote I came across.

“The relationship between the disciple and his teacher is not merely that of a student listening to a lecturer, or a passively interested listener. A disciple listens with attention and intention. He drinks in every word of his teacher, marking every inflection of voice with an intense desire to apply what has been learned.”

This is rather personal, intense and purposeful. See what you just signed up for as a disciple!

Well that’s answers the first question; there is another we need to consider, what makes a disciple distinctive?

I’m so glad you asked that question. This question is going to take a little more work, as we look at three stories from Luke’s narrative that will help us identify three ways in which disciples of Jesus are distinctive. You know, each point is a message in itself. But I only have this Sunday to bring what really should be 3 sermons! So, during this journey I intend to paint broad strokes, making several observations and suggestions as we go. Please use your handy dandy sermon notes to fill in the blanks, so you can take home ideas to chew on during the week. See what your “painting” may look like by next Sunday!

1. Radical Compassion

In the first account read this morning, we heard the very familiar and well-loved parable of The Good Samaritan. It is here that we find our first disciple distinctive:

1. A disciple is distinctive in his/her radical compassion for humanity.

Let’s make three observations from this account that will help our thinking here.

First, our radical compassion for humanity overflows out of our love for God!

Look at how the expert in the law starts to answer his own question about inheriting eternal life: Love the Lord your God how? with **all** your heart; with **all** your soul; with **all** your strength, with **all** your mind. Get the vertical picture of our total love for God here? That all encompassing love flowing up to

God, naturally overflows out to those around us as well. Loving the Father has a direct impact on how a disciple compassionately interacts with his/her world.

Second, our radical compassion for humanity is part of God's command to love your neighbor as yourself.

This seems simple, right? Straightforward. And yet—the “expert” in our story has a question—“Well, gee whiz Jesus, just who is my neighbor?” You see, for this man in his time, in his culture, his neighbor was a fellow Jew, a fellow Israelite. That's the extent of who his neighbors were. Yet in Jesus' parable the supposed “good guys,” the people that would supposedly bring a sense of hope, those he considered neighbors, failed to be neighbors, while the “bad guy” became the hero of the story. This is an unexpected and radical turn of events. Who is my neighbor? The expert in the law, who can't even bear to say the word “Samaritan,” answers his own question: “the one who had mercy on him.”

We too can get caught like this man, can we not? It's easier to associate with people we are familiar and comfortable with. It's certainly less scary to stay within my comfort zone. But listen to your Lord as He tells this expert and us as well, “*Go and do likewise.*” A disciple's neighbor is anyone he /she comes into contact with each day.

And last, our radical compassion for humanity is only possible because of God's love for you and me.

I think this is easy to overlook here in this passage because it's really not said, but the implication is there. Love for God and compassion for our neighbor just isn't possible without God's love. John in his first letter put it so well and so succinctly: “*We love because he first loved us.*” 1 John 4:19

If you and I have tasted God's mercy and grace through His incomparable great love, we need to see our neighbor with the same love and compassion as does our heavenly Father.

Our love for God, a command from God and the love of God himself all compel us as disciples of our Lord Jesus. You and I, dear friends, are to be distinctive in our radical compassion for all those made in God's image!

2. Radical Commitment

As Luke's narrative continues to unfold with the account of Martha & her sister Mary, we see a second disciple distinctive.

2. A disciple is distinctive in his/her radical commitment to his/her Lord & Master.

Such a short account, yet with so much drama and cultural tension, much like we experience today in our homes, in our churches, country and world. I love this story! It's so real life isn't it? I grew up with three sisters! Plenty of drama and tension there! 😊

There are three observations I would like us to pay attention to in this account. The first is this: **radical commitment to Jesus is not for one gender or the other, nor is it age specific.**

This account of Martha and Mary does not really shock us in our culture today, but in the first century context, for two women to dominate the story would have been shocking! Men at that time, unfortunately, often dismissed women as marginal. It was also unheard of to have a woman sit at a teacher's feet. The first century question would be raised, why would a teacher spend time teaching women?

While the focus of this account is not about women, it is about discipleship, isn't it good to know that being a disciple of Jesus is not dependent upon gender or age? Neither is an issue for following Jesus. Jesus calls us all to come and follow Him.

The second observation is this: **Distractions are roadblocks to a radical commitment to Jesus.**

Luke tells us that Martha was distracted by all the preparations that needed to be made. There were lots of mouths to feed, a house to clean, hospitality to perform, all good things. What was wrong here?

Look at Jesus' response in verse 41 of chapter 10: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and anxious about many things." Martha was distracted, not by her activities, but by her attitude about what was going on.

Clearing those distracting roadblocks will enhance our ability to commit to Jesus as he wants us to. These roadblocks come in the form of many good activities in our lives. Activities like gardening (I'll pick on myself here), sports, music, hunting, Pinterest, politics and on and on--you fill in the blank with all your good activities. The point is, watch your attitudes so you don't become distracted from committing radically to the one who radically committed everything for you!

This leads me to my third observation regarding Mary's activity in this account: **Getting our priorities right makes all the difference to achieving a radical commitment to Jesus.**

Jesus doesn't condemn Martha's activity, but he does commend Mary's: "*few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen that which is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" Mary has her priorities in order. What she is doing will last--it will remain with her. Mary is a good example for us all. Let's take time to relate to Jesus, to sit at his feet and devour his teaching. There is no more important meal. Getting our priorities right makes all the difference.

Being a disciple of Jesus is for everyone; watch out for distractions; and make sure your priorities are right. Not very radical ideas, but these practical suggestions will make a radical difference in your commitment to Jesus.

3. Radical Connection

A disciple is distinctive in his/her radical **compassion** for all people made in God's image. A disciple is distinctive in his/her radical **commitment** to Jesus.

For our final disciple distinctive this morning, let's look at the passage that immediately follows our previous story, Luke 11:1-4.

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

In this third account Luke shows us that,

3. A disciple is distinctive in his/her radical connection to the Father.

Look at the setting of this account. Jesus has just finished praying, and this prompts a request from one of his disciples. I have to believe it's Andrew, a former disciple of John the Baptist, though I can not prove it nor is it important. What is important here is that these disciples have been with Jesus for quite a while now. They want to know how to pray to mark the distinctiveness of their new identity as followers of Jesus. What Jesus gives them is a radical prayer we often call the Lord's Prayer. But in this context, perhaps it would be better to think of it as the disciples' prayer. This is your prayer; this is our prayer!

The prayer has a structure: one address, two statements and three requests. Within this structure let's highlight three aspects about this radical connection to God.

First, a radical connection produces an intimate relationship with God.

Addressing God as Father gives us a sense of closeness and ready access. We are part of a family structure like no other. The perfect Father, always ready, always available for his children. Try to

imagine a father a trillion times better than anything you've ever experienced. What a picture of possibilities, a picture of intimacy!

Second, a radical connection also creates a submissive attitude before God.

The two statements given, "*hallowed be your name and your kingdom come,*" speak of respect and authority. Our main focus and concern is about God. He is holy! He is unique, he is set apart. There is no one like him, and no one has the authority he possesses. One commentator called this section the prayer's heartbeat. I like that a lot! I like it because having a submissive attitude before God is really key to our radical connection.

Lastly, a radical connection expresses a dependent approach to God.

We live in a culture of two year olds! What I mean by that is we are so stubbornly independent. "I can do it all by myself." Sound familiar? We are also called a DIY society – do it yourself. It can be really hard for many of us to be dependent upon anyone and unfortunately that can spill over into our relationship with God too. We sure do need help in this area. If nothing else I sure know I do.

As a disciple, Jesus is teaching us to ask the Father for help, to be dependent upon him needs. God knows what we want and what we need. Depend on the Father to provide by being radically connected and letting him hear from you. Lean on him!

Jesus mentions three particular needs all disciples require. There's the need to ask for our daily bread, pertaining to our physical needs for survival. There's the need to ask for forgiveness of sins, speaking of our spiritual needs. Jesus also adds the thought here that our request or ability to approach with such a request is tied to our ability or inability to forgive others in our lives. Do you and I show the same mercy to others that we have been shown. Goes way back to our first point about neighbors doesn't it. Can we really ask of God what we are not willing to do for others?

And finally, Jesus say ask the Father to keep your feet from straying, to protect you from evil. He wants to lead and protect us so that we might avoid sin.

Keys to a radical connection with God: (1) understand the intimate relationship you have with Him. He's your Father. (2) Be submissive to him for there is no one like him, and no one has the authority he possesses. It is the heartbeat of this radical connection. And (3) make your request known about you physical needs and your spiritual needs, letting Him lead and protect you.

Conclusion

Today I've painted a broad picture of some disciple distinctives that I believe should be evident in our lives, if we are truly called to be disciples of our Lord, our Master and our Savior Jesus. Are you and I distinctive disciples? Are you and I radically compassionate to our neighbor, are you and I radically committed to our Lord, and are you and I radically connected to our Father?

So what do you want to be as you grow up? I know what I want to be, how about you?

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on October 2, 2016 by Scott Engelstad.