

March 8, 2015 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND

TITLE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS? John 1:43; 21:19

Disciple. The word is used over 220 times in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the book of Acts. Obviously, this is an important word. What is a disciple? (Audience)

The word means *learner*. Fundamentally, a disciple is one who is learning. It follows that **if I am not learning, I am not a disciple**. Said another way, *If I am not willing to learn, I cannot be a disciple*.

So how is the word *disciple* used in the context of the Gospels and Acts? (Audience)
We speak of the process of someone growing as a Christian as discipleship, the process of becoming a disciple. We even have a ministry team focus we label as Discipleship.

Discipleship is not just what happens after one becomes a Christian. **Discipleship**, the process of becoming and being a disciple, **begins long before one says YES to Jesus**. But I am getting ahead of myself.

If a disciple is a learner, it is important to consider what one is learning or from whom one is learning. This morning I want to focus on the question, *What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?* I want to do so by doing an overview of the Gospel of John.

John begins the book by describing the Word, the Word that was in the beginning, with God, the Word that is God. This Word is the Maker, Life, Light shining in darkness, the One in the world in Whom when someone believes, that person is made one of God's children. The Word became flesh, dwelled in our midst, reveals the glory of God, is the One and Only from the Father, is full of grace and truth. We learn that the Word has a name: Jesus. He is the Christ (i.e. the Anointed One, Messiah). John the Baptist calls Him the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). Another time he calls Jesus, the Son of God (1:34).

All these words, phrases and descriptors are used of Jesus in the first 34 verses of John. John identifies Who Jesus is. What does all that have to do with being a disciple of Jesus? Read 1:35-43. Being a disciple flows out of Jesus' identity, Who Jesus is. There's a lot to chew on there, but that isn't where we are going today.

If we are going to understand what being a disciple of Jesus is, I believe it is helpful to listen to the words that Jesus uses, specifically, the verbs, the commands. So what are the verbs, the commands, Jesus uses?

We've just identified two. "*Come. Follow me.*" There are more.

To Nicodemus He says, "*Be born again.*" (3:7)

To the Samaritan woman He says, *“Go, call your husband.”* (4:17) To the paralyzed man by the pool whom He healed Jesus says, *“Stop sinning.”* (5:14) To the woman caught in adultery He says, *“Go, leave your life of sin.”* (8:11) **To be a disciple of Jesus involves, it appears for some at least, leaving something or leaving a lifestyle.**

After feeding the 5,000 He says to His disciples, *“Gather the leftovers; let nothing be wasted.”* (6:12)

To the same group after walking to them on the sea in the midst of the storm He says, *“It is I; don’t be afraid!”* (6:20)

The next day Jesus has a conversation with some who were part of the 5,000 who got a Happy Meal the day before. *“Do not work for food that spoils, but food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”* (6:27)

When Jesus references Himself as the bread of life, the conversation takes a turn that is offensive to many. Jesus confronts them. *“Stop grumbling among yourselves.”* (6:43)

Interestingly we find this comment. *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* John 6:66 This is not a reference to the 12, but to some who showed an initial interest in this Jesus. We would say they were considering being Jesus’ disciples for a time, but not true disciples, not wholehearted disciples. **Jesus says that their problem has to do with faith. They do not believe.**

Believing in Jesus (3:16), believing He is the One sent from the Father to give eternal life (6:29), believing He is the resurrection and the life (11:25), believing He is the light (12:36), believing He is preparing a place for His followers (14:1-2), is necessary. That kind of belief demonstrates a trust, a faith, in God, the opposite of letting our hearts be troubled (14:1). **To be Jesus’ disciple I must believe.**

That kind of belief means we **abide** in Him and His words (8:31; 15:4, 8, 9). We **keep** or obey His words (14:15, 21, 23; 15:10) and commands. **Belief does not make obedience optional; abiding and keeping flow out of believing.**

A disciple **testifies** to the work of the Spirit, the Father and the Son in him (15:27). A disciple is one who **loves** Jesus, who loves those Jesus loves, who loves others like Jesus loves with His love (13:34-35; 14:12, 17). Jesus says one of the ways we demonstrate that kind of love for Him is by serving each other. He told His disciples to **wash each other’s feet** (13:14).

Jesus tells Peter that loving Him is connected with **feeding and caring for His sheep** (21:15-17).

Are all of these verbs, these commands of Jesus, connected with being His disciple? I think **John is telling us what being a disciple of Jesus is by sharing the stories of Jesus' interaction with others.** Where each of us intersects with that story today may be different. It may be *"Leave your life of sin," "Gather the leftovers," "Believe," "Abide," "Love," "Wash feet."* These are action words, words that invite a response.

I think we **sometimes are guilty of equating being Jesus' disciple with learning verses, facts and formulas. Jesus paints a very different picture of discipleship.** His portrait of a disciple is not what we put in our heads, but what we let Him do with our hearts. It is not about what we know, but how we respond as a result of Who we know.

Being Jesus' disciple is not just about what I do, but what we do together. So what do we do? **We leave our life of sin and believe. Instead of fear we trust. We abide; we keep; we testify; we love; we wash and feed and care.**

But the **best description of being a disciple, a Jesus learner, is found in Jesus' command at the beginning and the end of John's gospel.** He invites Philip, *"Follow Me."* (1:43) He invites Simon Peter, after he denies Jesus three times, *"Follow Me."* (21:19) In between He says, *"Whoever serves me must follow me."* John 12:26. As His sheep we hear His voice and follow (10:27). We walk while we have the light (12:35).

"Follow Me," serves as the two bookends to John as well as the glue in the middle. **It is as we follow Jesus that we learn to be His disciples.**

So what have we learned? To be a disciple is to be a learner, a learner of Jesus. To learn from Jesus I must listen to Him. He says, *Follow Me.*

There is a problem. Jesus gave these commands when He was physically present 2,000 years ago. So where do I find Him? I suggest that He has already given us the answer when He said His giving of the Spirit was to guide into all truth. It is in living out those verbs, His simple commands, among each other, where we live and work and go to school, that **we** begin to learn. We see differently. We see where **He** is already working. We see Him.

Conclusion. **So that makes where I live and spend my time of great value, because that is where He has placed me.** He's already working there. That's where I am to follow Him. I don't need to go somewhere else, unless, of course, He directs me there. I follow Jesus where I already am.

The command is very simple; the application very hard if I insist on any other way. Jesus says, *"Follow Me."*

Questions: Where has Jesus placed me? Am I willing to be a learner, a disciple of Jesus? He says, *Follow Me.* To follow Him the action word that I need to hear and do is _____. (Pray)