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The Revolutionary Disciple: Obedient Matthew 7:15-29

Last week in worship I introduced my mother-in-law and her four friends who were up here on an adventure. My wife, Cyndi, took them to the coast and, as part of their adventure; they went driving on the beach in their rental car. Suddenly, the driver, Mickey, screamed, "Donut!!!" cranked the wheel, gunned it and started cutting donuts on the beach! After a few revolutions, she came to her senses, straightened out and resumed course... and then she did it again. Three times! A carload of eighty year olds whooping and hollering along with my wife who could not believe her eyes! It was very exciting and very surprising. Well, we are about to crank the wheel and gun it as a church. We are entering a season that is going to be very exciting, very surprising... and for some, a little scary. But it will be awesome.

We started last week at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. After thirty years in the carpenter shop, he burst on the scene with two commands. Do you remember? Mt. 4: 17: "Repent... for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" Repent. Turn around! Stop walking that direction and turn around! That is the start of Christian faith. Many of you, if you were honest, would admit that you are walking your own way. You behave, speak, treat people, spend your money, use your time in the way you want to... your way. To those who think they are the bosses of their own lives, Jesus says, "You are walking the wrong way. Stop! For your own sake, stop walking that way and turn around."

Why? Because, the Kingdom of Heaven is near! Your way misses the best of life! The Kingdom of Heaven is near—so close—and it wants to break through! One of the churches I wanted to see in Paris this summer was Sainte Chapelle. Sainte Chapelle is famous the most glorious stained glass windows in the world. One evening, after returning from an exhausting walk, I reviewed our day's explorations on a map and discovered we had been right next to Sainte Chapelle! If we had only turned left instead of right, we were one block away. That close... but we didn't realize what was waiting for us in the other direction, so we missed out!

Too many of us do not really understand the glorious life that waits for us right now in the other direction. The Kingdom of Heaven is near. You think it's far away... up there... a reward for dying, but Jesus says, "No, it is here! You are this close. Just turn around and you will see it!" How desperately some of us need to

take our eyes off of this world, turn around and discover God's real life breaking through! Could that be you?

But if we repent—turn around—then where do we walk? How do we know where that oh-so-close Kingdom can be found? Verse 19. "Come, follow me," Jesus says. How helpful it would have been in Paris if I had a guide who said, "Follow me!" That is Jesus' invitation to us in life. "Follow me!" As I shared last week, my sabbatical was a time of repentance. I intended to use the time for reading and planning. But what God really wanted to do was shake me up about my own discipleship. He convicted me of what a pagan traveler I am; how, when I am on the road, the worst comes out! I can be selfish and surly, offering little evidence that I am, in fact, a follower of Jesus. It cut me to the quick when God revealed my hypocrisy in dealing with airlines or hotels or crowds... or anything else that irritated or inconvenienced me. I was convicted!

So I spent my sabbatical trying to follow Jesus more closely. Trying to muse upon the Lord throughout the day; memorizing and reciting his word in my heart. Trying to see the crowds as He saw them, not as competitors, but as those for whom He died. It transformed my summer. It has continued to transform my discipleship.

"Repent... and follow me!" That's how Jesus started his earthly ministry. Then we jumped to Matthew 28 to hear how he ended it. His parting shot to his followers, what we call the Great Commission, was this: "Go and Make Disciples." "Now that you have followed me and seen what it means to live in a Kingdom way... go and make more disciples of me." This is significant. Jesus could have defined discipleship only in terms of following him. His Great Commission might have been: "You keep following in my ways until I return for you." But that's not what he said. He said, "Now that you know what it means to be my disciple... I want you to go and teach others to follow me. It's not just about you... it's about the whole world I love and came to redeem. Spread the word. Make more disciples."

The definition of discipleship, then, must be about more than just following Jesus. It is also about replicating yourself; making other disciples... spiritual children and grandchildren. Discipleship is not just "Repent and follow..." it is "Repent, follow, Go and Make!" The first half—following Jesus faithfully—is essential to discipleship. But the second half—helping others follow him—is also essential. If you have only the first half—repent and follow—you have half-baked disciples. It is that second part—go and make—that completes the discipleship circle.

A faithful definition of disciple, then, must include both. Follow Christ and help others to follow Christ. Listen to Paul's definition in I Corinthians 11:1. "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." Wow, would you feel comfortable saying that? "Imitate me?" Only if you could say the second part: "...as I imitate Christ." When I am imitating Christ—when I am following, practicing, copying the way Jesus lived—then it is OK to say, "See what I'm doing? Do that, too." That's what real disciple-

making is. Not just pouring the Bible into someone's head but also living in such a way that your words and your deeds align. Remember our memory verse? Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

"Imitate me as I imitate Christ?" It is a gutsy thing to say, but it is also clarifying. Dare I say it? Well it is the totality of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus... to imitate Christ in every way and then to invite others to follow your lead. We are going to adopt this as our working definition of disciple. "A disciple is someone who dares to say, 'Imitate me as I imitate Christ.'" Our longing is that every person in this church will adopt this daunting definition of discipleship for themselves, realizing that only by the Holy Spirit can we possibly fulfill such a commitment. "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

Now some who hear this will say, "I'm not interested... sounds too hard, too intimidating. I like my Christianity in its little corner of my world." To you, this will seem radical, revolutionary, and you'll take a pass. And that's too bad, because you are going to miss out on what it's like for the Kingdom of Heaven to break into your life and into the lives of others. But many of us will be thrilled to accept this audacious challenge. To learn what it means to live like Christ, by His Holy Spirit, and then invite others to do the same. There is no other way to live that offers real joy, peace, contentment and significance than that of a true disciple of Jesus. "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

If you're game—if you are willing to cut a few donuts on the beach of your life—then here's the plan. For the next year, we are going to focus on what it means to Imitate Christ; what it means to really live as if the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Our starting point will be the Sermon on the Mount. Then next year, we will turn our attention to the second half of that definition: Imitate me. How do I invite others to join me in a Christ-imitating life? This plan will bring the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry together. "Repent, turn and follow" will be joined to "Go and make." And when that happens—when we have completed that discipleship circle—we will be astounded at the way the Kingdom of Heaven breaks out among us.

So we begin the greatest sermon ever preached... the Sermon on the Mount. And I'm going to start at the end, because that's where Jesus underscores how important this is. If we understand what is at stake when we study the Sermon on the Mount, we will take it more seriously. And here's the question I want you to grapple with as you listen to this reading: What did Jesus expect us to do with these teachings?

Matthew 7:21-29:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name,

and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching,²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

We were standing in the rental car return line at Heathrow Airport in London last month when suddenly, I heard, “Mark Toone?” I knew the voice immediately; it was my friend Scott, from Kent, in the rental car right behind us! What are the odds? Completely out of context, but the moment I heard his voice, it was familiar to me. It rang true. I wonder, when you hear the following words, even out of context, do they ring true? Do you recognize them? “You are the light of the world... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... Do not worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will worry about itself... ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you... if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him your left as well... where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... Judge not lest ye be judged... take the log out of your own eye... do unto others as you would have them do unto you...”

Sound familiar? Of course they do. They are treasures! But let me ask my question again: What do you think Jesus expects us to do with these teachings? Admire them for their timeless beauty? Pick and choose the ones we like? (Do unto others, judge not lest ye be judged... we’ll keep those. Love your enemies, don’t get divorced... those we’ll ignore.) What do you think Jesus expected of his disciples after he delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

He tells us. He tells us what he expects his disciples to do with them in Matthew 7:24: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice...” Wait a second. You mean, we’re actually supposed to do this stuff? Jesus expects us to actually live the Sermon on the Mount? He expects us to obey him? Yes. He does. He says it even more clearly and starkly in verse 21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Take a hard look at that sentence. Just because you say that Jesus is your Lord doesn’t mean you are going to heaven... only those who actually do the will of the Father. This is disturbing, especially for evangelical types like us. After all, isn’t one of our core teachings that we cannot work our way into heaven; that it’s not about being good enough to earn God’s forgiveness? That it’s all about grace? Yes,

that is true. Our salvation is all about God's grace shown to us in Christ. We come to him in our sin, and Jesus says, "I welcome you; I'll redeem you; I'll clean you up, I'll take you to heaven." That is the wondrous grace of His gospel.

But it is a grace that dare not be presumed upon! And we American evangelicals presume upon God's grace. We have to come believe and act as if all we must do is say 'the prayer'—ask Jesus to be our savior—and then, we are a shoe-in for heaven. Then, we can go about living our lives any old way we want to. Dallas Willard, one of my favorite writers, describes it as Bar Code Christianity. You get your bar code slapped on your forehead when you accept Jesus and, as long as you get scanned at the Pearly Gates, you're in. It doesn't matter whether the disciple looks anything like his Master, if you've got the bar code you're in. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hung by the Nazis for his faith, had a name for this: "cheap grace." And more importantly, Jesus condemns this as spiritual delusion. Who gets into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus asks? The one who does the will of My Father, whose life is built upon the rock of Me, who hears My words and puts them into practice. That's who!

I don't want to confuse you. I spent the entire book of Galatians trying to dispel the myth of American Christianity that says, "If I try harder to be good—if I'm at least better than the guy next to me—then I can earn my way into heaven." No, our salvation is not something we earn, but our salvation leads to obedience. We are saved because we trust Jesus and invite his Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out, but then we are called to participate with the Holy Spirit in that work. Our efforts do not save us, but if we are no different from the world we turned away from—if we do not look more and more like the Jesus we claim to follow—then it casts doubt on whether Jesus really is the Lord of our lives.

And make no mistake about it. There is no such thing as having Jesus as our savior but not our Lord. Some people say, "Yes, I asked him into my life as savior, but I'm still working on the Lord thing." Of course, all of us are working on the Lord thing, if by that you mean there are things in your life not yet completely surrendered to Christ... like the way I behave when I travel. But "Lord" and "Savior" are not separable terms. It is precisely Christ, the Lord who is able to be, for us, Christ our Savior. We cannot have a Savior who is not our Lord. No Lord... no Savior!

How, then, do we know if Christ is Lord... our Master... our Boss? How do you ever know whether someone is your boss? By whether or not you do what he says! Jesus could not have put it more clearly than in Luke 6:46, one of my favorite, most awful, convicting verses: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?"

So here is the starting point for our journey into deeper discipleship: obedience. These words of Jesus, these words we will study in weeks to come, aren't just to admire or ponder. They are to obey! You cannot claim Christ as your Lord if you

do not obey him! Or, to come back to our definition of disciple, we must imitate Christ. What he says, we say. What he does, we do. Not perfectly. Not every time. But when we fail, we fall before him, beg his forgiveness, and once again are flooded with his grace. Once again, he sets us on our feet and says, "I do forgive you. Try again."

This is the question that must guide us in the weeks to come as we study the Sermon on the Mount: Am I willing to bow my knee before Jesus in everything? Hard as it is, whatever it may be, am I willing, to obey him? If you say, "Yes, I am willing, God help me!" then you are a disciple of Jesus. If you say, "No, I am not willing... I like going my way" then, sadly, you are not yet a disciple of Jesus... whether or not you claim to be. "Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Do you remember the definition of disciple that Pastor Mark offered? (Someone who dares to say, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ.") Do you think that is a good definition? Why or why not?
2. If you are a disciple of Jesus, who "made" you? How did it happen? Do you have anyone you could point to who is your spiritual child? Why or why not?
3. The Sermon on the Mount is famous and beautiful. But is Jesus serious? Does he really intend that we would live that way now? Why or why not?
4. We emphasize repeatedly that we are saved by God's grace; that we are not saved by trying to be good. And yet, Jesus makes it very clear in 7:24 and ff., that he expects us to put his words into practice. Does being a disciple of Jesus require that we obey him or not?