

Sunday Sermon 082723 Numbers 14:1-10, Matthew 28:16-20

“Not a Member, but a Disciple”

In May 1991, the World Methodist Evangelism Conference was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. Reverend Dick Willis, the senior pastor of Christ UMC in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, attended the conference.

Prior to attending the conference, Pastor Willis had been experiencing severe hardship for the past four years due to the effects of a church split that happened during the appointment of the former pastor. Pastor Willis used so much effort to satisfy the church members and meet their needs. But the result of four years of hard work was hopeless. He became burned out. In fact, attending the conference was against his own will, and he was reluctant to be there. However, through the conference experience, Pastor Willis became a different person.

When he arrived at the airport, there had been bombings in Johannesburg. Of course, he was scared. Nothing like this has ever happened in Fort Lauderdale. However, he was immediately struck by the other attendees' obvious joy. There were a total of two hundred people at the event. Among those who attended, almost all of them came from Central or Southern Africa.

Most were very poor and suffered great hardship. His own struggles seemed to pale in comparison to the struggles of the other attendees. He asked himself, "How could these people living under such difficult and violent conditions have such joy?" Pastor Willis said, "I began to discover that joy was a product of walking with God, no matter what your external circumstances."

After returning home to Florida, he was no longer afflicted with church problems. Since he was now sure that joy was found in walking with God and learning to be obedient to Him, Pastor Willis wanted to learn to trust God with all of his life. So, he began to pray each day for God to help him and Christ UMC be a part of God's blessing.

According to his testimony, Pastor Willis cannot pinpoint the specific moment during his trip to South Africa when he experienced rebirth, but rebirth is indeed what happened. What he knew with certainty was that he experienced a joy that, since his time in South Africa, has never dissipated. In order to continue to experience the fruit of that joy, Pastor Willis and the entire congregation trained themselves through earnest prayer and stricter obedience to God.

Consequently, the many problems he had gone through became the foundation of healing and revival through the rebirthing experience. As a result, the church became healthy and began to grow rapidly. The church members realized the mission of discipleship while serving their church and society. The power and joy of the Holy Spirit flowed into their lives of faith.

Likewise, we find that prior to revival, there was always a realization of discipleship in the church. Therefore, the question we should ask is not, "How can revival happen in the church?" Rather, "Are we living as disciples of Jesus Christ now?"

1. Let's examine the discipleship that is displayed by the Israelite spies in the story of exploring the land of Canaan. A disciple's main interest is not in his or her circumstances but rather in the promise that God gives to him or her.

I'd like to pose this question to you all: "If you were there with the Israelites in the midst of that situation, would you choose to follow the opinion of the ten spies who did not want to go to Canaan or follow the Lord's plan and go to Canaan?" Thinking about it right now, I would like to think that I would answer with a big, "I'll go to Canaan! Let's do this!" But let's be honest. I would probably be conscious of the thousands of Israelites watching and opposing me. It makes me nervous just to think of all of those people who would want to stone me.

Here, the Lord had already decided He was going to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites. So, the purpose for which He sent the people to explore Canaan was actually to give them a vision of faith. Contrary to that purpose, though, ten out of the twelve

explorers were gripped by fear and despair over the strong Canaanites who resided in Canaan.

A disciple is a person who follows and carries out the teacher's will. Disciples are not concerned with whether the will of their teacher coincides with their own. Disciples are only concerned with strict obedience to their teacher.

The twelve spies sent to explore Canaan were the delegates of the twelve tribes. They represented the whole nation of Israel. The problem was that they did not fulfill their role as disciples of God and Moses.

The Lord wanted the twelve men, along with Moses, to wholeheartedly follow His will by exploring the Promised Land. On the contrary, they returned with complete disappointment. They did not have the obedient hearts of disciples but instead the hearts of slaves who did not know the heart of their master.

#Horse Hoofs

There once was a blacksmith who was going on a business trip. Before leaving, the blacksmith handed his apprentice a model of a horseshoe and ordered him to make 200 horseshoes. With sweat soaking his clothes, the apprentice worked tirelessly, not even taking a single break. Finally, the apprentice finished making 200 horseshoes before the blacksmith's return. The blacksmith came back two days later. The apprentice proudly puffed up his chest and showed the blacksmith all the horseshoes. There were exactly 200.

The blacksmith opened his mouth to shower the apprentice with praise when suddenly his face went pale. The sizes of all 200 horseshoes were different from each other. Instead of using the original model horseshoe that the blacksmith gave him, the apprentice used the horseshoe that he had just made before as a template to make the next horseshoe. This resulted in the horseshoes being different sizes from each other.

This is an illustration of discipleship and the attitude that a disciple of the Lord needs to have. Unlike the apprentice who made the

horseshoes his own way, as disciples, we need to obey and adhere to God's commands and match His will with ours.

II. Let's consider the discipleship illustrated in the story of Jesus' ascension. Disciples do not serve God by their own ability but rather by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Specifically, in verses 18–20, Jesus introduces himself as the absolute authority of the universe. He commanded the disciples to go to the people everywhere and make them all His disciples. He told them to baptize the people in the name of the Lord, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus also instructed the disciples to teach the people to obey everything He had commanded them. In other words, "what was given to the disciples needed to be achieved by the people."

Although Jesus' commission may be heavy, His promise to us and His protection are far more powerful. A true disciple is one who obeys the absolute power and authority of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, there are two particular matters that arise in discipleship: the commission and the privilege of being a disciple.

The commission Jesus commanded for His disciples on Earth is a tremendous one. It is a commission that is to be carried out "To all people, everywhere." Although Jesus never gave His disciples any substantial or tangible assets for their obedience, He gave them the promise to be with them always and also the authority of God the Father.

Those who believe this promise gain the privilege of God's authority. That authority is given through the Holy Spirit. Despite being a "spirit," the Holy Spirit is a being of personality. We deal with the Holy Spirit like we do with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is God, but who works in spirit form.

Therefore, we must obey the Holy Spirit as we do to God. The ultimate goal of a disciple is to bring satisfaction to God. The Holy Spirit changes us, as He promised in the Scriptures, in order for us to achieve the ultimate. As your pastor, of course, I hope that all of you are faithful church members. But more importantly, I earnestly

challenge you to transform and grow as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Acts 5:41, the Scripture says, "As the apostles left that Council, they were happy, because God had considered them worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of Jesus." It is not easy to understand what the disciples meant by being "worthy to suffer disgrace." Not just anyone can suffer disgrace for the sake of Jesus. Only those who are truly *worthy* can suffer disgrace for Jesus.

Have you ever suffered disgrace for the sake of the church and the Good News of Jesus? When would suffering disgrace ever result in happiness? It will be when we receive the prize of heaven and our reward for our faith.

A disciple cannot be created by oneself; instead, a disciple needs to be born through the Holy Spirit. Exploring the land of Canaan or carrying out the great commission of Jesus Christ would only be possible if we died to ourselves, were reborn by the Holy Spirit, and wholly relied on Him.

Then would we need to go to the Upper Room, which belonged to the disciple, Mark? Would we need to go to the World Methodist Evangelism Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa? No. The joy that discipleship and obeying the Lord brings can be realized and experienced right here in our WCUMC and in our present lives by relying on the Holy Spirit. Amen.

****Reflect and Apply for Today's Sermon:**

1. What fundamental difference do you see between church membership and the discipleship of Jesus?
2. What changes would you like to make in terms of your faith in order to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
3. Have you ever been insulted because of the name of Jesus or the church? How did you deal with the situation then? How did the Lord comfort you then?