

March 21, 2010

1John 3:11-18

### Called to Follow: Service in the Church and Beyond

Well this is it. This morning we will conclude our Lenten Series on Discipleship and the Disciplines that form us – equip us – as followers of Jesus.

- During these last 6 weeks we have heard Jesus call to come and follow.
- We have been invited to recommit ourselves to this journey of following.
- We have been reminded that the journey of discipleship (following) isn't about us or about Jesus – but it is about being equipped so that we might be the church of Jesus Christ in the world.
- We have talked about the disciplines that we are called to engage in so that we might be equipped.

What are those disciplines? (You tell me this morning.)

- Commitment to Community
  - Weekly Worship
  - Daily Prayer
  - Regular Bible Study
  - Generous Giving
  - Service in the church and beyond.
- This morning we will be looking at service in the church and beyond.

**Prayer – Read Scripture.**

As Christian Community we are called to be different – radically different. Not in an arrogant (I’m better than you) kind of way. Not in a self-righteous (I’m right and your wrong) kind of way. Instead we are to be different in a selfless kind of way: abounding in mercy, generous in kindness, humble in service, a voice for the voiceless, and hope for the hopeless.

As Christian Community we are to be molded – shaped – by the person of Christ and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

As Christian Community we are to be known as different – radically different – people who are marked by our ‘love for one another’.

*For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...*

The writer of 1<sup>st</sup> John writes to a Christian Community that is just beginning to find its way out of its Jewish roots. This is a community that is attempting to more fully understand who Christ is – who we are (you and me and all of humanity) and how it is that disciples – those who follow Christ – are to live.

- Jesus is human – seeable – hearable – touchable – and he is the Son of God.
- Jesus is the one who frees us from our sin – brings us from darkness to light – frees us from the bondage of the past – so that we might live into the newness of the life he

brings – as people who are changed and changing. So that we might be free to love and be loved.

- Jesus is the one who shows us the love God – *‘not in word or speech’* (I love you) but *‘in truth and action’* – *‘We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us...’*
- Jesus is the one who calls us to be radically different – people (Christian Community) who have been changed and are being changed by our encounter with the radical love of God – We are to be people known throughout our communities and throughout the world by our love.

When I was in St Louis – there was this couple – Grady and Doris Balthrop. Best I remember Grady worked for Southwestern Bell in a job that had him and his family moving from this place to that place quiet frequently. So when it came time to retire Grady and Doris were pleased to be able to move to St Louis where they could be close to their two daughters and their grandchildren.

When I met Grady and Doris they were in their mid 70s. Grady was still very active and so was Doris in spite of having some health problems. Both had been active in the life of many churches as they moved around the country – they were there for Worship and Bible Studies each week. They were there to help out with workdays and VBS activities.

But what was most amazing (at least to me) was that in my 5 years of being the Minister of Youth and Christian Ed at Southminster Presbyterian Church they went on almost every youth retreat and mission trip that we had. They slept on bunk beds and on floors. They ate what the

kids had cooked and at McDonalds too. They played all the silly games and took their turns leading devotions. They worked as hard as anybody.

- They did trust falls at Camp Lakewood and played the night time version capture the flag at Camp Trinity.
- They helped roof a home and host a VBS in Oljato Utah.
- They took part in a food fight at Truman Lake Campground.
- They went to Indianola Iowa to be a 'buddy' to a mentally and physically disabled person at Camp Wesley Woods.

You get the picture.

But it wasn't their going that was the big thing. It was what they did – how they were – with the youth and with us adults. They 'loved us all'. I can remember Grady sleeping on the floor – lying in the red dust that was everywhere in Kayenta, Arizona – just talking with the boys – them being free to ask whatever was on their mind – and Grady taking seriously whatever they asked.

I can remember Doris – rubbing the feet of the girls – it seemed she was always rubbing one or the others feet – and while she rubbed – she would talk to them – love talk – 'you are beautiful' – 'I am so proud of you' – 'oh honey, it will be ok...'

But this wasn't just about them – it was about all of us – they were teaching us to be a community – a community of people – who had centered our lives around Jesus Christ – and were known by the way that we 'loved one another'.

*'Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and in action.'*

It seems to me – that the world we live in knows only too much of a kind of love – that only seeks to serve itself. You understand what I mean by that? I mean that kind of love that demands from us – affection and devotion – the kind of love that is wrapped up in selfishness.

The kind of love that asks something from us .... ‘If you love me – then you would....’

The kind of love we are called to is the self-giving kind of love – that is defined not by what it asks – but by what it gives. – The kind of love we are called to is the kind of love that we see in Jesus.

God’s love is revealed among us in this way: (the writer of 1<sup>st</sup> John says) God sent his only Son into the world so that we might love through him. In this love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning (rescuing and redeeming) sacrifice for our sins.

We who call ourselves ‘followers of Jesus Christ’ are to wear the mark of Christ on us. We are to be different – not arrogant in our difference – but different in the way that we will love others – in generosity – in mercy – washing feet – holding hands – opening doors – serving – serving others from love and with love.

This journey of discipleship – is a journey of equipping ourselves – as the church of Jesus Christ to be the church – so that we can ‘love’ the communities in which we live – those with whom we work – or go to school. It is about us knowing the person of Jesus Christ – through our worship, our prayer lives, our Bible Study – so that we can demonstrate the love – demonstrate through generous giving and through service – the love that is God to one another.

I don't know what a community that is able to serve in 'love' completely might look like. But, this morning, let me take a stab at naming two things that will be at the heart of this service:

- **Hospitality / Welcoming** – This community will be genuinely welcoming. We anticipate meeting and greeting new people not only here at church but where ever we are. To be hospitable is to look through the eyes of another – to see to their comfort – not necessarily ours. It is in some cases to anticipate needs – like the need for some direction or the need for something to eat or drink.

To be hospitable is not to see another as someone to be converted or to be a new member – but to see them as a gift of God – to be celebrate and enjoyed. To be hospitable is to greet cheerfully – listen carefully – putting another's need before our own.

This community will be hospitable by offering its best to others. This best is both simple and significant.

Most of us know about Bernice Smith's homemade chicken and noodles. This is nothing fancy – but it is significant in that she makes the noodles from scratch – she brings together the chicken and the broth with love. Many of you have been hospitable by bringing treats for fellowship – or taking desserts to the Meet and Eat.

Hospitality is the generous sharing of ourselves.

*'let us love, not in word or speech but in truth and action...'*

- **Hands-on service** – I don't know if we can demonstrate love without rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty. A community that seeks to love in service will be involved – hands on – at church and in the larger community.

After a particular ice storm this last winter – a man who has many other things on this plate – was up here at church scrapping and shoveling away the ice. Why, for you – so you could come – so you wouldn't need to be afraid of falling.

Last week – some of you helped with Meet and Eat down at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian. I understand that they were serving about 175 a day last week. Others of you were involved in helping Marion Cares with their lunch program while the schools were on their break. Others of you were sowing quilts to give to those who will be graduating from high school. Others of you were fixing a baptismal, putting together shelves, working on web-sites, caring for children and youth. Others of you were doing things for friends, neighbors, or others – that I don't know about and probably won't know about.

*'Let us love, not in word or speech but in truth and action...'*

This journey of discipleship calls us to follow Jesus so that we might be the witness to God's transforming love – in the communities in which we live, the places which we work, the schools we attend – in our homes and with our neighbors.

This journey calls us to disciplines – disciplines that form us as people who know – in our heads and in our hearts – about the love of God in Jesus – and because of that we are people who are shaped by that love to live as community that is radically different – community that is abundant in mercy, generous in hospitality, willing to serve, and gracious in love ----- all because our God is all those things to us.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.