

Called to Follow: Regular Bible Study

The journey of discipleship – this life of following Jesus – is not about us. It is not about our spiritual edification (good feelings), or about us receiving special blessings or favor. We have already received all we need in Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is not about Jesus either. It is not about Jesus somehow needing us – needing our adoration – needing our acclamations. (*In fact Jesus tells the Pharisees that if he were to stop his followers from shouting out their praise – that the stones would pick up the loud refrain of praise.*) (Luke 19:40)

Instead this journey is about the larger community – the community in which we live – the community in which we work – the community in which we go to school.

Remember where we started this journey – that Sunday before Lent began. Remember hearing the story of Jesus calling those first disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John and inviting them – to come and follow him. Why? *‘I will make you fishers of men...’* That’s why Jesus says.

So this Lenten journey has been for us a time of looking at the disciplines that equip us to be the church of Jesus Christ in the world. These disciplines are:

- Commitment to Community

- Weekly Worship
- Daily Prayer (thanks to those who committed to daily prayer last week – you have another week and know that as you pray I am praying for you.)
- Regular Bible Study
- Generous Giving
- Service in the church and beyond

This morning we are going to look at regular Bible Study – and how it might equip us to be the church of Jesus Christ in the midst of this community.

Read Scripture

The journey of discipleship is not an anti-intellectual endeavor. This is not a journey that is based simply on our ‘feelings’, our ‘wants’, or our ‘needs’. If our relationship with Jesus is all about ‘emotion’ we are missing the certainty of ‘knowing’ the character in whom we are called to trust.

The same is true the other way as well. If our relationship with Jesus is all about knowing – then we are missing the intimacy – of this relationship.

There is a balance here.

I can remember hearing a story as a child of a man who was a weight lifter – he became so muscle bound that he could not lift his hands over his head to comb his hair. Muscle is good but so is being able to comb your hair.

Following Jesus requires us *to both know and to love him*.

If the discipline of daily prayer helps us to build the relational language we need to love Jesus more and more – regular Bible Study helps us to know – to know the person of Jesus – it helps us to know who God is – and how we are to live in response to this God –Father, Son and Spirit – so we might know this Triune God we are to love.

It seems to me – and maybe to you – that John does a good job – of melding the two – the knowing and the loving – as he tells the story of Jesus. John’s gospel doesn’t invite us to *‘know the truth concerning the things’* as Luke’s gospel does. Instead John invites us to know the one who is the *‘way, the truth and the life’* – Jesus – the person – and John wants us to know the person – in order that we might believe.

Believe what – believe that Jesus is the Son of God – the one who has come to show us the fullness of God – the one come to remind us of how to live as God affected people.

John invites us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God – the Messiah – the one who has come to save us – and he invites us to believe – in a way – that converts what we know – into certainty – into complete trust – of the person – Jesus – who we have been called to follow.

In our reading for this morning we see this interesting exchange between Jesus and these 'Jews who believe in him'. In referring in general to the 'Jews' John is no doubt referring to those who practice the Jewish faith. More specifically, though, John seems to be referring to those Jews who live in Judea (or the southern part of the nation of Israel). (see Jn. 7:1)

Even more specifically these 'Jews who believe in him' appear to be a group of Jewish people who have been listening to Jesus as he has taught at the Temple in Jerusalem (8:20).

Jesus has been explaining to them what it means to live as God's people – to live in obedience to God's instruction. (7:17,19) He has been teaching them about his relationship with the Father. (Throughout chapters 7 and 8) He has been inviting them to believe that he is indeed the Son of God – the promised one – who has come to save them.

And it seems that there are those who believe (7:31; 8:30) – whether they believe that Jesus is a prophet of God, a gifted Rabbi (teacher), or that he is truly the Savior they have hoped for – is hard for me to discern – at least in my reading of this part of the Gospel. What they believe about Jesus is in question because (at least in my mind) of the tension we see and even feel as we move through this morning's text.

'you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.' Jesus says.

'what do you mean set us free – have always been free – never slaves -- we are Abraham's children – children of God's promise.' They reply.

'you are sinners – this is what makes you slaves.' – *And as long as you are slaves you can be sold as property – disposed of – at any time. – you have no permanent place in the family.* Jesus says.

'in fact even as you are descendants of Abraham – you look for an opportunity to kill me' – me – the Son – the one who sets you free – and gives you a place in the family.' Jesus says to these Jews who believe in him.

There seems to be, on the part of these Jewish believers, this sense of privilege – a kind of entitlement – that comes with claiming yourself – as a 'descendant of Abraham'. We are already 'free' – we have already 'arrived' – job over – mission accomplished for them.

And maybe this is not so different from us – when we claim to be 'children of God' – 'heirs of salvation' – we are disciples – disciples who believe in him.

We are not so different when we point to our membership – 'I am a member of Echo Hill Presbyterian Church. I already have my card punched – I'm in and I'm done. O sure I keep up the appearances of piety – but that is all they are – appearances – for I am a Child of God.

But this isn't about us – this is about 'them' – Jewish believers – Descendants of Abraham. So we push it away – keep it at a safe distance – but the reality is that in this passage Jesus

challenges their assumptions and ours about who he is and what it means to believe in him – to be disciples – committed to following him.

Jesus said *“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples...”*

“If you continue in my word...”

John is a master at mixing the language of knowing and the language of relationship. He begins his gospel this way.

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. – He (the Word) was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being....And the Word became flesh and lived among us....’ (Jn 1:1-3,14)

Jesus is the Word – the eternal Word. Is Jesus speaking of himself here?

“If you continue in my word...”

Word – is synonymous with ‘the Bible’. Each week – I read scripture and as I finish I say, *‘This is the Word of God.’* To which you reply. *‘Thanks be to God.’* Scripture is *‘God breathed,’* the writer of Timothy tells us, *‘useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in right living – so that everyone who belongs to God might be equipped for every good work.’* (2Tim 3:16)

In scripture we find God speaking to us – telling us the story of who he is – who we are in relationship to him – and how we should live in response to the story – to the Word – the eternal Word of Jesus Christ.

Regular Bible study equips us to know the person – God – Triune – Father, Son and Spirit. It helps us to know the character of this triune God – the one who is abundant in mercy – immoveable in love – the giver of life – life that is good – at the beginning good.

Regular Bible study – equips us to love the person – God – Triune – Father, Son and Spirit. – As we come to know we come to love more deeply this ‘one who sets us free’ from sin and allows us to be loved and to love.

Regular Bible study equips us to tell the story – the story of acceptance – the story of mercy – the story of grace – the story of steadfast love – the story of Jesus – the story of us following Jesus as disciples.

I would like you to commit yourself to regular Bible Study. I would like you to commit to being a part of a Bible Study – maybe it is here at church – maybe it is at someone’s home – maybe it is at another church. I invite you to begin to study Bible regularly by committing in the next 3 months to being a part of a small group who will study Bible.

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