

THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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Discipline.

What notions come into our minds when I say that word?

Mostly, it's about giving up things we like or our comfortable with, like french fries

Or doing things we'd rather not do, like exercising.

The word "disciple" has a slightly different connotation.

It's about someone who is devoted to someone or something
and follows them, does what their leader teaches.

Disciples of Jesus learn about the Reign of God.

Disciples of Dirt learn about mountain biking in Oregon.¹

Whether we realize it or not, we're all disciples of someone or something.

For most Americans, our disciplines are centered mostly around . . . ourselves:

What we like, who we like, what we approve of,

and what we don't like and don't approve of.

How did we develop those likes and dislikes? We were taught them.

We are taught some things formally, in something like school or church.

But the vast majority of what we learn we simply absorb

from what we are exposed to, day in and day out

in our families, our cultures, our entertainment, our routine existence.

There are a gazillion different constellations of disciplines,

but the one thing we all have in common

is that once our likes, dislikes, approvals, and disapprovals are in place,

we won't examine them unless something in our context changes:

like when something goes terribly wrong and they don't work anymore;

or an insight suddenly erupts into our minds;

or an experience upends our convictions;

or an invitation or a demand from someone we trust requires us to rethink things.

All of our lessons today are about examining who and what we follow.

They are all about being a disciple: about discipline, discipling,

choosing who and what we learn from about how to live.

When we began our worship service, we proclaimed we are Easter People.

Easter People follow a Risen Lord, the One who gives eternal life.

Much of contemporary Christianity has become fixated

where we go when we die and has completely muddled up "life after death" and "eternal life."

Life after death is just that, and as Easter people,

we affirm with all our hearts that God's has that part under control

and manages it just fine without our input or help.

Humanity didn't resurrect Jesus through our beliefs; humanity killed Jesus!

It was the love of the Father and the Spirit for the Son

that resurrected him to new life after death.

¹ <https://www.mtbproject.com/club/31727/disciples-of-dirt-dod>

Today's Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

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Eternal life is something much, much bigger than just life after death.

Eternal life is the life of the One God who is beyond time and place,
a life that pervades all times and all places, including right here and right now.

Eternal life is life lived within the Reign of God,
in the presence of, and aligned with, the purposes, the joy, the creativity,
and the passion of the One God who was and is and every shall be.

When Jesus talks about eternal life, he is not pointing to life after death.

He is inviting us to live life in such a way that the kingdom of heaven
comes near to us and to everyone around us NOW.

That doesn't mean that the "decision for Christ" demanded by Contemporary Christianity is wrong!

Choosing to live eternal life, the life of the Eternal One
is just as much about making a decision for Christ as any Baptist altar call.

This decision is not about praying a special prayer, believing certain doctrines,
or even having a particular experience of being saved, though if you do it can be a beautiful thing.

Especially, a genuine decision for Christ simply can't motivated by threats:
you HAVE to be a Christian, or else face perpetual flames in hell.

That kind of decision isn't as much about Christ
as it is about us making a decision to save our own sorry behinds.

The motive behind following Jesus' way of living life now, eternal life,
is to live life fully and abundantly before we die,

So, it's not so much that we HAVE to be a Christian as we GET to be one.

A genuine decision for Christ is about choosing whose disciple we will be.

For a disciple of the World, being rich and wealthy is the big goal,
and we do whatever we have to do to die with the most toys and win.

The consequence of this choice, according to the Revelation to John,
is that disciples of the World make themselves and EVERYONE around them
miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked.

For a disciple of the Christ, eternal life is the big goal,
and we do whatever we have to do to bring a slice of the Reign of God into the world;
when we do that, we and EVERYONE around us experiences full, abundant and eternal life.

The lesson also warns us that straddling the fence won't work.

Being disciples of the World on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays,
and of the Christ on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays,
with Saturday as a day for household chores

makes us lukewarm, tepid, and tasteless. Blah. Blech!

The discipleship that brings eternal life right here and right now
means to listen to the voice of Jesus, follow him, learn from him,
to love as he commanded us to, and to live as he lived every moment of the day.

Because it's Mothers Day, and I'm a mom, this idea that we are taught how live hits close to home,
because kids how to live by absorbing what parents teach day in and day out,
whether we parents realize what's happening or not.

I hope you won't think I'm bragging, but I want to read portions of an essay
that our daughter, Sarah, wrote back in college for a French class.

She was to write an essay about her family (in French, of course).

As a Mothers Day present back in about 2003, she sent it to me.

First, in French, which was a problem as I don't know French.

So, she translated it and sent it again.

Much of what she talks about in the essay took place long before I was in seminary.

The title of her essay is *Our Revolution*. Here are a few portions I'll share:

Jesus Christ lived in my home. I'm not talking about the icon. . . . The Christ living with me was a revolutionary. He sat with my family around our dining room table and he told us, "Feed your brothers and your sisters who go hungry," so we used that table as a meeting place for scheduling the hours we would work at the soup kitchen. Jesus talked vividly of magnificent flowers of all types, of the purity of streams and of the importance of nature so my family sat with others around our table to form a recycling committee. At that dining room table, we promoted the peaceful revolution of Jesus Christ. . . .

What dining room would be spacious enough to hold a table of such dreams of change and possibility? Actually, the room was hardly impressive; like the rest of the house, it had become slightly dilapidated after many years of familial use. The wallpaper, hung sixty years before we moved in, had become discolored; a once vibrant gold was now a shade of pale wheat. In certain spots, the paper had completely detached from the wall. The wood floor was scratched from numerous shoes that had danced across the room, from the dog who determinately chased the cat, from the chairs that had been pushed against the wall to make room for dear guests. The table itself was at the center of the chaos. . . . Our dining room could never win the grand prize from 'Architectural Digest,' but its spiritual beauty rivaled that of the Taj Mahal. . . .

And I knew then, as I know today, that the solution to inequality, to poverty, to the needs of the people, could not be found in the discourse of politicians and ideologues. The solution was found in the soup kitchens where students sacrificed their free time to serve a hot meal; it was found at the community center where anyone was welcome to learn about art and culture; it was found in my home where Jesus the revolutionary lived and ate at our dining room table.

At the time, I had no idea that she was noticing, absorbing, learning, but like all kids, she was.

Most of us are probably aware of a piece that Dorothy Law Nolte wrote in 1954 called *Children Learn What They Live*.

There's a so much truth in what she wrote, but instead of quoting her, I'm tipping my hat to her, and writing my own adaptation of it for us today to focus on discipleship.

Please look at your handouts and read with me.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

A child that lives with **hostility** learns **fear**.

A child that lives with **ridicule** learns **contempt**.

A child that lives with **criticism** learns **condemnation**.

A child that lives with **prejudice** learns **judgmentalism**.

A child that lives with **shame** learns **mockery**

A child that lives with **apathy** learns **callousness**.

A child that lives with **greed** learns **envy**.

A child that lives with all these lives in **anxiety**.

Perhaps some of grew up like this, or with some of it, anyway.

If we did, we can still choose to break the cycle

of those who are abused abusing those who come after. We just have to learn another way.

And, thanks be to God, some of us learned this other way in the first place:

A child that lives with **honesty** learns to **trust**.
 A child that lives with **encouragement** learns **joy**.
 A child that lives with **tolerance** learns **acceptance**.
 A child that lives with **diversity** learns **understanding**.
 A child that lives with **dignity** learns **respectfulness**.
 A child that lives with **mercy** learns **compassion**.
 A child that lives with **sharing** learns **abundance**.
 A child that lives with all these lives in **earnest**.

Disciples are people who live what they are taught,
 but who can also live another way by learning another way.
 Let's look first at what disciples of the world learn and live.

DISCIPLES LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE FOLLOWING THE WORLD:

When I am **hostile** to others, they **fear me**.
 When I **ridicule** others, they have **contempt** for me.
 When I **criticize** others, they **condemn** me.
 When I have **prejudice** for others, they **judge** me.
 When I **shame** others, they **mock** me.
 When I am **apathetic** of others, they are **callous** to me.
 When I am **greedy** around others, they are **stingy** with me.
and EVERYONE is miserable, pathetic, poor, blind and naked.

But we can break the cycle and follow the Good Shepherd who is knocking at our door
 and inviting us to learn from him another way, the way of the Reign of God:

WHEN I FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD:

When I am **honest** with others, we live with mutual **trust**.
 When I **encourage** others, we live with mutual **joy**.
 When I **tolerate** others, we live with mutual **acceptance**.
 When I embrace **diversity**, we live with mutual **understanding**.
 When I honor the **dignity** of others, we live with mutual **respect**.
 When I am **merciful** to others, we live in mutual **compassion**.
 When I **share** with others, we live in mutual **abundance** ***and EVERYONE has eternal life.***

As I said, God has life after death under control without any help from us.

Eternal life is bigger than that: it is the divine project of *tikkun olam*,
 the healing of the universe and coming of the new creation,

which is the source and substance of our hope in our Creating God.

How awesome that our God has come to us to invite us to be partners in this awesome work.

How will we answer the knock on the door?

COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God of peace, you brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep. By the blood of your eternal covenant, make us complete in everything good that we may do your will, and work among us all that is well-pleasing in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

PROVERBS 1:20-23

Wisdom shouts in the street; in the public square she raises her voice. Above the noisy crowd, she calls out. At the entrances of the city gates, she has her say: "How long will you clueless people love your naïveté, mockers hold their mocking dear, and fools hate knowledge? You should respond when I correct you. Look, I'll pour out my spirit on you. I'll reveal my words to you.

PSALM 95:1-7

Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have molded the dry land.

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the LORD our Maker.

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

REVELATION 3:14-22

"Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. After all, you say, 'I'm rich, and I've grown wealthy, and I don't need a thing.' You don't realize that you are miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked. My advice is that you buy gold from me that has been purified by fire so that you may be rich, and white clothing to wear so that your nakedness won't be shamefully exposed, and ointment to put on your eyes so that you may see. I correct and discipline those whom I love. So be earnest and change your hearts and lives. Look! I'm standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will have dinner with them, and they will have dinner with me. As for those who emerge victorious, I will allow them to sit with me on my throne, just as I emerged victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. If you can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

JOHN 10:22-30

The time came for the Festival of Dedication[a] in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple, walking in the covered porch named for Solomon. The Jewish opposition circled around him and asked, "How long will you test our patience? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I have told you, but you don't believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you don't believe because you don't belong to my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never die, and no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

SERMON HYMN: *Praise the Lord, Rise Up Rejoicing*

BLESSING: The God who is creating a new heaven and a new earth, who walks where least expected, who disturbs the comfortable and comforts the distressed, and whom death could not control, now sends you out to announce with your lives that the Lord is risen indeed. Go, you are blessed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.