

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
July 8, 2007

Joys of Discipleship

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Gospel which was read earlier.

Hear again the words of the prophet, Isaiah. *“Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream.... As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants...”*

Any Jew who, during the time of Jesus, would have heard these words would have thought that good was in store for them. Maybe good was in store for them. However, bad could have been in store also.

All of us experience ups and downs, hills and valleys, joys and frustrations in our day-to-day lives. Now put on top of that our discipleship for Christ. If we were having a bad day before, now imagine that day AND trying to be a disciple of Jesus. In today's Gospel reading, our Lord Jesus not only realistically recognizes this state of affairs, but, above all, encourages us with the good news that joy will have the last word in our discipleship. Jesus assures us today that the hardships and joys of discipleship for Christ climax in the ultimate joy: our names written in heaven.

Hardships follow us wherever we go, whatever we do. There is no way to avoid them. We lose our job. We have more bills than we do income to pay them. Our home or vehicle needs major repair and upkeep. These are just examples of some of the

hardships which we face in our personal lives. We are also likely to experience hardships in our discipleship for Christ as well.

Jesus describes some of these hardships in the verses of last week's Gospel. Like Jesus, we may have nowhere to lay our head. A perfect example of that is my wife's uncle. He's an LCMS pastor and was a missionary to Venezuela where he served there for almost 20 years. During that time, he and his wife did much in the churches there. He brought Christ to a people who had heard little or nothing about Christ or had a skewed idea of who Christ is. About 6 years ago, he and his family had to leave Venezuela due to a recall of missionaries. He found himself, a disciple of Christ, now with nowhere to lay his head. God has since called him and his family to be missionaries to the people of Panama, to continue to be disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Following on the heels of last week's Gospel reading, Jesus sent disciples ahead of Him to various places which He would be visiting. Jesus speaks words to those He sent out which are disheartening to those who hear it: "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*" Here is a problem. The Gospel message needs to be spread, but where are the people to do it? Christ's sending of the seventy-two was two-fold: first, to make ready the way of our Lord to the various places where they were sent. The second was to look for those who would spread the Gospel. Surely, somewhere in the various places where the seventy-two went, they would find at least one person to become a disciple of Jesus, that is, to share the good news of who Jesus is and what it is that He has come here to do. Our text doesn't say if they found any to become disciples, but we get a glimpse of the world in which they were sent out into: "*lambs in the midst of wolves.*"

We find ourselves today “*lambs in the midst of wolves.*” By nature the unbelievers to whom they will go are enemies who want to destroy them, yes, like savage animals who want to devour them. The people of this world do not love Christ or His Gospel. Many consider the message of the cross of Christ to be “foolishness” and “a stumbling-block.” For Jesus’ sake His messengers can expect to be hated by unbelievers. But Jesus, who does the sending, promises to be with them always.

There is a great need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our world, yet we find a world that doesn’t want to hear about Jesus or worse yet, doesn’t **need** to hear about Jesus. We may find those who say that they already know about Jesus. But if you ask them who Jesus is, they might tell you that they are a sinner and what sin they do commit is ok, because they know that Jesus has forgiven them. In short, they treat Jesus as their license to sin. Jesus is not our license to sin. To use that logic, it would be okay if I were to go out and kill someone because, even though it’s a sin, I know that Jesus has forgiven me of that sin. On the contrary, **Jesus is our license to forgive.** Jesus did indeed forgive us all of our sins. However, that does not give us free reign to commit sins when we know they are very much a sin.

As disciples of Christ, there will be times where our witness of the Gospel will be rejected. It happened to Jesus, it happened to the disciples, and it will happen to us as well. That is something to be expected. However, that should never dissuade you from preaching the Gospel. Imagine if Jesus would have given up the first time the people attempted to stone Him. Imagine if the disciples would have given up the first time they were threatened with persecution for their beliefs. Jesus tells His disciples that when they are rejected, they are to wipe the dust off of their feet, that is, to write them off. But, they

are to also declare to them that “*the kingdom of God has come near.*” The Gospel has been spread to them, whether they want to accept it or not.

Just as there will be times of hardships, there will also be times of joys in our discipleship for Christ.

Each time that a child or adult is brought to the font of Holy Baptism **as will happen/has happened** this morning is a time for rejoicing. It is a joy and a privilege to experience the acceptance of our Gospel witness, not as someone who has **decided** to follow Jesus, but one who has been **called** by the Holy Spirit to faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What a joy it is to be able to preach the good news of the kingdom of God! This good news of the kingdom of God is what it’s all about. It’s not about the fancy homes or cars. It’s not about how much money you grossed last year. It’s about the kingdom of God, what it is that God has done for you through Christ Jesus. When we preach the good news of God or tell others of Christ, we stand in the place of Christ. We can actually be regarded as His representatives.

It is the same as when the president of the United States sends out an ambassador, that person represents the President of our country wherever he or she goes. When the ambassadors of Christ are heard, Christ Himself is heard, and when they are despised and slighted, Jesus Christ and God the Father are despised and slighted. That is the message which Luke records in our text: “*The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*”

For the seventy-two who went out, it wasn’t all cheery times on the road. There were towns where they entered where they were rejected. For us, it won’t always be

cheery times when we tell others about Jesus Christ. But our joy is not in whether or not we were successful in spreading the Gospel. Our joy lies in the fact that our names are written in heaven. We are saved because of what Christ has done for us. Because of His life, death, and resurrection, we have been called to be His own. God has called us by name to be His own at our baptism. In Holy Baptism, we received Christ's name. Because of what Christ has done for us and to us, our names have been written in the book of eternal life. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus until life everlasting, amen.