

November 13, 2016



"DISCIPLE: Whole Hearted"

Fall Sanctuary Worship Sermon Series – No. 11

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Mark 12:28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him. "Which the first of all?" Jesus answered. "The first is 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is what Jesus tells those who want to know what faith is all about, what church is all about, what being a disciple is all about. It's his commandment to us to love whole-hearted, to live whole-hearted, to serve whole-hearted, and to give whole-hearted.

Through the Fall, we've been exploring together all that it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to be a follower of the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What it means to learn from him to live like him—to be a person who, through God's amazing grace, conforms his or her words and ways to the words and ways of Jesus. What it means to be his student, his witness, his servant, his advocate, his follower, his apprentice, his spokesperson, his ambassador, and his friend. And to ask what equips us, as people of faith, to persevere in, to witness to, to maintain God's radical hope through Jesus Christ...in a time such as this?

DISCIPLE—Take Faith Seriously, Pass It On, Resist Greed, Practice Generosity, Embrace the World, Make a Difference, Don't Judge, Take Faith Home, Take Faith Public, Affirm Hope, Give Thanks---summed up in today's theme: Disciple—Whole Hearted.

When John Wesley was once asked: "Who is a Methodist, according to your own account?" [Wesley responded:] "A Methodist is one who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;' one who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'"

Whole hearted! Loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength and our neighbor as ourself. This is a life-long journey, folks. It doesn't just come upon you, whole cloth, at your baptism or in prayer or on a mountain peak. It is a life-long journey of growing and seeking, and pleading and yearning. Sometimes we fall short. Sometimes we lose the way. Sometimes the darkness obscures the path. Sometimes the obstacles are great. But still we press on, for, as the prophet Jeremiah insists that God wants us to know this: "If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me." (Jer. 29:13)

This is the day of our annual church conference, a day to give an accounting of our faithfulness in ministry and mission in this year just past. And if I do say so myself, we have a great story to tell, of serving whole-heartedly, of witnessing and learning and worshipping and loving whole-heartedly. I encourage you to gather together after worship in Simkins Hall in The Shelby Center. Sit at table with one another, enjoy some delicious food and one another's company, and hear the stories of discipleship that are the life of this church family—belonging to one another, loving all God's children, and serving God in all we do.

And please buy some cupcakes because Cakes for a Cause this year goes to support our United Methodist eReader program that's dear to my heart. We take kindle-type pads and load them up with all the resources a seminarian needs and we send them to our seminaries across Africa so that students who don't have books, don't have libraries, don't have money for books, can learn all they need to know to be equipped to lead the church and transform the world. Thank you.

It's Church Conference Sunday and it's Consecration Sunday, the day we make our pledge to support all this great work in the year ahead. To live whole-hearted as a disciple of Christ Jesus is to align our giving with our highest priorities and most valued aspirations. It is to strive to attain the whole-hearted, selfless giving modeled by Jesus himself. It is to align our words and our ways with his words and his ways. It is to make sure that there is no disparity between our treasure and our heart.

As we come forward and place our pledge cards in this special box on this Consecration Sunday, we are striving for wholeness in our discipleship, so that our words and our thoughts, and our priorities, and the way we live our lives are all part of the whole-hearted discipleship to which we are called. As we pledge, we are directing our hearts towards God. We are celebrating the gift of generosity, the gift of the mission to which God calls us, the sanctification of our lives, the consecration of our whole hearts to a holy purpose.

Remember—when asked to tell the first commandment, Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." You shall love. This is a commandment, disciples, stated in the imperative. The demand is total. Jesus establishes love as the ground of Christian faith and life, love as the foundation of who we are and how we live as his disciples. Love. And commands us to love with our whole selves. And not just a little bit. Not just sometimes. Not just if we feel like it. Not just if it's convenient. Not just if it doesn't ask too much of us. Not just if it means just the people we like. NO—it's love as Jesus loved. Love as Jesus taught. Love as Jesus showed. Love as Jesus gave. Love as Jesus did. Love in word and speech. Love in deed and in truth. Whole hearted. Love poured out for all.

Are we willing to become a new generation of disciples through which God can do extraordinary things in our time?" Let us rise up and answer the call. The faith we share as disciples brings wholeness to our lives and transforming witness to our world. Nothing and no one is left out. Love whole-hearted. Give whole-hearted. Live whole-hearted.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Notes:

The DISCIPLE sermon series is drawn from the work of Martin Thielen in A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series. Compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

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