**September 10, 2023 Acts 2:44-47**

***Why is Discipleship so Difficult?***

**Scripture:** *Acts 2:44-47 NRSV*

*(44)All who believed were together and had all things in common; (45)they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. (46)Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, (47)praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

**Notes:**

1. Principle No. 1: *Always remember to maintain the* ***priority*** *between your primary and secondary cultures*.
   1. Our Christian community of faith, is our ***primary*** *culture*;
   2. ***Enculturation*** happens as we learn to live, talk, and think like Christians.
   3. ***Acculturation*** learning to see the world in which we live
   4. It makes us ***aware*** of the sin and temptation
   5. It teaches how to ***deal*** with these temptations and the sin.
2. Principle No. 2: *We must constantly remind ourselves**that our true* ***citizenship*** *is in heaven.*
   1. Philippians 3:20 NRSV *But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*
   2. ***Our*** name is written in the “Lamb’s book of life”.
   3. We live, work, and play as ***citizens*** of this earth.
      1. *For this world in its present form is passing away*” (1 Cor. 7:31).
      2. William Willimon states *“The church was called to be a colony, an alternative community, a sign, a signal to the world that Christ had made possible a way of life together unlike anything the world had seen.”*
3. Principle No. 3: *Live as a* ***counterculture****.* 
   1. We must be in the world but not of it (John 17:16-18).
   2. Life cannot be ***complete*** and ***fulfilling*** without God and his plan.
   3. *Revelation 2:8-11 MSG Write this to Smyrna, to the Angel of the church. The Beginning and Ending, the First and Final One, the Once Dead and Then Come Alive, speaks: (9)"I can see your pain and poverty--constant pain, dire poverty--but I also see your wealth. And I hear the lie in the claims of those who pretend to be good Jews, who in fact belong to Satan's crowd. (10)"Fear nothing in the things you're about to suffer--but stay on guard! Fear nothing! The Devil is about to throw you in jail for a time of testing--ten days. It won't last forever. "Don't quit, even if it costs you your life. Stay there believing. I have a Life-Crown sized and ready for you. (11)"Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. Christ-conquerors are safe from Devil-death."*
4. We must pass our ***faith*** to the next generation.
   1. You have been invited to ***teach*** what you’ve been taught.
   2. We have been given the task of ***discipleship***.
   3. ***Demonstrate*** your love for Jesus.

**Script:**

I hear people saying quite a bit, “don’t you wish for the good ole days?” And as I look back over the years of my life, I realize that many of the things we hope for are just our minds idealizing the way things used to be. I remember visiting with my great grandmother on her farm in Friends Cove. We would get up at dawn and go to bed before the chickens, I didn’t like that. They would get up early to milk the cows before dawn and then eat breakfast afterwards; after breakfast, they would go out and complete the chores for the day. Usually when I was there, it was the weeks after the fair, there would be hay to mow, then it would be baled and stacked in the barn. The silos would need to be filled so there was plenty of food for the cows over the winter months, and then there were the tasks of feeding the cows, feeding the pigs, feeding the chickens and collecting their eggs. Not to mention chopping firewood for the winter months, maintaining and repairing the various pieces of equipment needed to run the farm as well as maintenance to the buildings. These were the tasks for the men. As a child I was never allowed to work in the fields with the men, I was too young. Instead, I would be left to help the women in the tasks they had to complete. The women would be doing more of what is considered household chores. Every Monday was a washing day. All the laundry that was dirtied the week before was washed on Monday. Other chores included tending the garden, if produce from the garden was coming ripe, then canning corn and preserving a variety of garden foods for the winter months; none of these chores, while useful, did I find fun. Occasionally I could sneak off and run through the fields exploring; or I could sneak off to the pasture and play some baseball, by myself.

I don’t know about you, but were the good ole days really any better. We look back over the years and we idealize the way things used to be. But in reality, the work was just as hard if not harder. The stress on a person was always there. Financially, the cost of living was lower, but we made less money as well. The difference today from years past is the type of work we do, the source of our stress, and where our funds come from. We still live paycheck to paycheck. We still find ourselves feeling oppressed and even depressed, and we still struggle to make ends meet and earn our keep.

We live in a busy world. Everyone is on the go from early morning to late evening. Children have sporting events from one end of town to the other. Keeping up with daily responsibilities both at home and at work is a full-time job. Not to mention, those children in sporting events and other activities that need to be taxied from one end of town to the other. Add to that Sam Barber’s reference in chapter 4 that we are living in a post-Christian age characterized by secularization, privatization, and pluralization. We don't live in our grandparent’s world any longer where everybody’s Sunday started with church with a big family meal and discussion around the table, to follow. It is no wonder that discipleship is so hard. SO today we are going to look at the question why is discipleship so difficult. Join me in the reading of our sermon passage today found in Acts 2:44-47.

*Acts 2:44-47 NRSV (44)All who believed were together and had all things in common; (45)they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. (46)Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, (47)praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Church history teaches many lessons about our faith and the church. One of those lessons is that from the days of the early church to today, the mission of God has always been one generation away from extinction. That is right, if one generation fails to engage in the mission of God, the mission suffers greatly and if allowed to continue could end the church as we know it. What is true today has always been true. That statistic underscores the importance of discipleship. Rather than complaining about the difficulties of living in a postmodern age, we gather to celebrate the ways in which God has always worked with his children to maintain a vital Christian witness and discipline for his kingdom. The Bible gives us an example of a church with a good discipleship plan; church history offers us three important principles for living in a post-Christian age, they are matters of Priority, Citizenship, and Culture. So let's take a look at these three priorities and what that means to each of us.

Principle No. 1: *Always remember to maintain the priority between your primary and secondary cultures*. Our Christian community of faith, this colony of heaven that we participate in, constitutes our *primary culture*; it is the ways in which we approach life and our attitudes towards it. The world in which we live gives us a *secondary culture*. Two important processes that maintain this priority are enculturation and acculturation.

*Enculturation* happens both formally and informally as we bring children and new Christians into the community of faith and disciple them. It is what we talk about when we dedicate our children into the church. They learn to live, talk, and think like Christians. They learn the terminology and actions that set us apart from the rest of society.

*Acculturation* happens as believers learn to accommodate themselves to their surrounding culture while maintaining their primary identity as members of the Christian community. It is learning to see the world in which we live as a place where we can survive and possibly even thrive. But it is also making us aware of the sin and temptation that lies beyond the church doors and the walls of our homes. It is teaching us how to deal with these temptations and the sin we encounter and still maintain our faith.

Christians can be enculturated into the Christian community and acculturated to function in the world without compromising the fundamentals of their faith. This happens successfully in our post-Christian society only when we make a conscious effort to distinguish between these two cultures and to set our priorities on the one we establish and see as our primary identity. Acts 2:44-47 offers an example of the way the early church put this principle into practice.

Principle No. 2: *We must constantly remind ourselves**that our true citizenship is in heaven.* We have dual citizenship (Phil. 3:20). We carry driver’s licenses identifying us as citizens of a certain state. But we also have our names written in the “Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 13:8), indicating our eternal life, which began the moment we accepted Christ as our Savior. B. We are citizens of earth and heaven at the same time.

We live, work, and play as citizens of this earth. We never lose sight of the fact that this world is not our final home; we keep a light touch on the things of this world. We may use the things of the world, but we should not become “engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). “The church was called to be a colony, an alternative community, a sign, a signal to the world that Christ had made possible a way of life together unlike anything the world had seen.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

Principle No. 3: *Live as a counterculture.* We cannot withdraw from society and adopt a monastic lifestyle; withdrawing removes our godly influence from the world. We cannot blend in so that we live and think like the world. Jesus said we must be in the world but not of it (John 17:16-18).

Jesus calls us to be salt, light, and yeast (Matt. 5:13-16; 13:33), and that requires us to challenge the incorrect beliefs and corrupt practices of our age. We cannot simply condemn culture; we have to offer a better way. Life cannot be complete and fulfilling without God and his plan. We model our talk in our personal lives, our homes, and our churches. We live life based on God’s truth and biblical principles. We show the world how a life, a family, and a group of people look and act when God works among them. We have a responsibility to help reconnect God and people in our secular society; that is what making Christlike disciples is all about!

Conclusion

The early church understood all three principles and lived them in daily life as evidenced in Acts 2:44-47. We find another example in the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11).

*Revelation 2:8-11 MSG Write this to Smyrna, to the Angel of the church. The Beginning and Ending, the First and Final One, the Once Dead and Then Come Alive, speaks: (9) "I can see your pain and poverty--constant pain, dire poverty--but I also see your wealth. And I hear the lie in the claims of those who pretend to be good Jews, who in fact belong to Satan's crowd. (10) "Fear nothing in the things you're about to suffer--but stay on guard! Fear nothing! The Devil is about to throw you in jail for a time of testing--ten days. It won't last forever. "Don't quit, even if it costs you your life. Stay there believing. I have a Life-Crown sized and ready for you. (11) "Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. Christ-conquerors are safe from Devil-death."*

Believers in that church illustrated living as Christians in a foreign land. We must pass our faith to the next generation through discipleship. The slogan “Jesus is Lord” is not just something we believe in our head. It defines who we are as the people of God. We are his family together. We are citizens of heaven living and working for him on this earth, busy making Christlike disciples in his name.

You have been invited to join this family, the family of God. You have been invited to surrender your will, and put first the will of God. You have been invited to learn at the Master’s feet and live a life reflecting His teachings. You have been given grace upon grace upon grace. You have been called to make disciples of all nations. This mission begins in your homes, continues as you walk out of the doors of these homes; and stretches as far as you may travel. You have been called to teach what you have been taught to those who do not know and to baptize those who come to believe.

We have been given the task of discipleship. And yes, it is difficult at times. But, if we are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, if we are obedient to His word; He will show us, each and every one of us, exactly what we should do in order to fulfill this mission. Are we ready to fulfill this mission today? Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone and do what may seem impossible? We are told that we are saved by grace and faith alone; but we are also told that faith without works is dead. Demonstrate your love for Jesus by doing what he has called you to.

Go in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching and making disciples of all you encounter and those who are willing.

1. . Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)