



“I’m Gonna Let It Shine! Discipline”

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany

Saturday & Sunday – February 15 & 16, 2020

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Deuteronomy 30:15-20;

Psalms 119:1-8;

Matthew 5:21-37

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past month I read an article from our presiding Bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Elizabeth Eaton. In her article she's talking about the spiritual state of the church and she is concerned about that and she recounts in the article a letter that Martin Luther had written to a friend of his after he had visited a number of the parishes that were right around Wittenberg, congregations that had accepted the Reformation and had been a part of this new reforming movement.

In it he wrote, “Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers. Yet supposedly they all bear the name of Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments! As a result, they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all of their freedom.”

Now far be it from me to call you irrational pigs, but I wonder if there is some truth in that? I wonder if things haven't changed all that much? Are we misusing the freedom we have in Jesus Christ?

In a 2005 study Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton did a study of the common beliefs of American youth and the researchers found that today's youth roughly believe that...

- God exists,
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other,
- The central goal in life is to be happy and feel good about yourself,
- God does not need to be particularly involved in your life, of course in case you have some problem and then it's okay to invite God in to solve the problem,
- And all people go to heaven when they die.

The researchers as they looked at what these beliefs were called it a Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. What that is that basically it's a wishy washy, feel good, be nice, god in general religion that doesn't really answer our deepest needs, our deepest questions, and quite frankly doesn't demand much of our time. It's faith without sacrifice.

Christian author Richard Foster who is writing right around the same time in a book called *The Celebration of Discipline* said, “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for a deep people.”

You and I don't need the latest spiritual fad or religious movement. We don't need to just scratch the surface of faith. As we saw from our gospel reading, Jesus calls us into a life of radical following of going deep in our faith. Doing what is necessary to love God and to love people. Turning from our brokenness from sin and aligning our self with God.

As Lutheran Christians we believe that the good life of the kingdom of God breaks into our hearts by the grace of God alone. We are not only saved by that grace, but we are to live that grace as well. So, when that the doubts, the waves of doubt or mediocrity or sickness or anger or jealousy or disappointment or regret come up us, we are to dive deeply under those waves. Dive deeply into Christ our Lord.

In the book *The Cost of Discipleship*, German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who is fighting against the Nazi regime made it clear that grace is free, but it is not cheap. The grace of God is unearnable, but if we ever expect to grow in that grace, we must pay the price of intentionally choosing that as a way of life, a course of action, not only for ourselves but also for our Christian Community.

Disciples learn through discipline. Both of those words have their root in Latin having to do with learning or growing. Think about something that is planted, its roots go deep so then it can grow up and be strong and tall. The disciplines are here for our spiritual growth.

Now think of the discipline that it took for the Kansas City Chiefs to win the Super Bowl. There were practices, they had meetings with their position coaches, they had to talk to their coaches after they won a game to talk about what they had done well, after they lost a game to what they needed to improve in. There was weightlifting, the studying of the play book, and even the time that they had alone as individual players to set their own goals that they had for themselves. It took a lot of work and discipline for them to be able to win the big game. And it is not that different for Christians. The church over the centuries has taught discipline as a way of growing in our faith with God.

And I would like to lift up five disciplines from our Christian tradition.

The first is **Spend time with God**, worship God. Come to a place like this to be able to share in his word and in his holy sacrament. When you take that bread of life and you take it into your body, you take in Christ, his real presence for your faith. Pray, meditate, read scripture, sometimes read a chapter, sometimes just read a phrase and then just read it over and over and over again and commit it to memory. In doing so, we are not only hearing and listening, but then ultimately, we will be obeying those words. Really listen to God.

Secondly, a **Life of simplicity**. God, church, family. The psalmist says to us "happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways." Walk in the ways of the Lord, get away! Find some time with God, unplug from all your devices! Take a walk in the woods and enjoy the beauty of creation. Medieval devotional writer Thomas a Kempis said that we should develop "a familiar friendship with Jesus." I love that phrase, *a familiar friendship with Jesus*.

Thirdly, **Submit**, now this isn't something that is forced upon you or me, we are free to be. We are free to follow, but I invite you to make the choice to submit your life to Jesus and his mission. There is freedom in that submission after all, you and I are pulled in so many directions but giving our life to Christ we say "no" to all of the false gods and the distracting fictions that we cling to.

Fourthly, **live a life of service and caring** – Jesus gave us the Great Commandment to love God and to love people and we can do that through simple acts of courtesy. It is about being nice and caring for one another. The Bible says that we should bear each other's sorrows and burdens, and after all in the gospel it is all about relationships! Not only with our family and friends and the people that we love, but even with our enemies.

And finally, **live a life of joy and celebration** – It is great to be the church! Have some fun with it! This is a Celebration that gives us life! Jesus Christ died for you and for me to offer life in the fullest. Joy is the fruit of our relationship with God and you will notice that every time we do a baptism joy is one of those gifts of the spirit that we pray for that individual. And if you find that you don't have a lot of joy, get praying, repeat all of those disciplines. Grow deeper in your faith.

Saint Augustine said, "The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!"

Brothers and sisters, Let your Light Shine! Go deeper in your faith! Amen.

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

Copyright © 2020, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org