

## THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

TEXT: And when Jesus had called the people unto him, with his disciples also, he said unto them, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34.

A life of Christian discipleship is full of great demand. It calls us to a life that is challenging, satisfying, full of worthwhile work and thrilling adventure. Jesus set up standards of character and accomplishment that leave us breathless when we really think of their ~~true~~ meaning. It was Jesus who said, Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

When we consider such a passage of scripture, we realize that we are just merely scratching the surface of the Christian life. We are only just beginning to experience the possibilities for growth, service, and radiant living that are inherent in the Christian gospel.

Jesus had twelve disciples. These early followers of Jesus knew the hard demands which His way of life involved. Rough and ready fishermen like Peter, James, and John left their nets and followed him. By no stretch of the imagination could they ever be regarded as sissies. They were out-door men, making their living the hard way. They were hot tempered men, filled with fire and enthusiasm. Remember that it was Peter who once snatched a sword and cut off a man's ear. James and John were known as the sons of Thunder. It was men of this type that gave their allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth.

The purpose of this sermon is to examine the demands of Christian discipleship. What does Jesus ask of those who follow him? This sermon has been prepared with the expectation that it would be given on Youth Sunday. It is a message of challenge, not only for our young people, but to all who bear the name of Christian.

The Apostle Paul made the striking remark in his letter to the Galatians: "I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus." What are the marks of a follower of Jesus? What are the demands of discipleship?

A DISCIPLE

CARES

Christian discipleship demands, first of all, that a disciple care. A true disciple has a real concern for people. He forgets himself as he thinks, and plans, and serves, and cares for others. A disciple cares.

Jesus himself provides us with a thrilling example of one who cared, of one who had a real concern for people. Jesus loved people. He wasn't romantic, sentimental, or soft-hearted towards people. He liked people and he wanted the very best for people. His whole ministry and mission were directed toward people. As he himself said, "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."

He loved all kinds of people. Rich people, like the rich young ruler; and poor people, like the widow who dropped a tiny coin into the collection box. Well educated people, like Nicodemus; and people with little formal education, like James and John. Good people, like Mary and Martha; and bad people, like Mary Magdalene. The sick people; the hearty and healthy people. Old people and young people. Jesus loved them all. Even his enemies came within his circle of concern. In the midst of his agony of the cross, he prayed to God to forgive them, because they really didn't know what they were doing.

The concern and devotion of Jesus for people knew no bounds. It went all the way and never stopped to count the cost. His own words were: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Beyond that there is nothing more.

Passing down through the centuries from the time of Jesus, we have known and seen men who were willing to live on the level of a triumphant religion. Men who cared.

I think of a young man belonging to a wealthy family of India who went to London. He was very anxious to be received by society, so he bought expensive clothes, studied the social graces, and plunged into a life of selfish frivolity. One day the light suddenly came to him and

he asked himself the question, by whose sweat was his vain life possible. The answer was that the half-fed poor of his own land had provided all this. The man renounced it all. He returned to India and became the leader of the illiterate, the outcaste, the untouchable, until he virtually shook India and the entire British Empire to its very foundation stones. His name was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was once asked by a foreigner, "How is your family?" And he replied, "All of India is my family." He was a man who cared.

Let us never allow ourselves to fall into the category of the old farmer who use to get down on his knees every night and pray, "God bless me and my wife, our John and his wife, us four no more. Amen." But rather let us hear the words of John Wesley who looked upon the entire world as his parish. "The world is my parish."

A person who is in earnest about the Christian life is deeply concerned about people of all classes and races. First of all, a disciple must care.

A DISCIPLE      The second demand of discipleship is that one must  
SHARES.        share. A person who has caught the spirit of true  
Christian discipleship is willing to share all that  
he has.

A discipleshazes his time, and his energy for the work of the church. One of the things that has impressed me about this church has been the willingness of its members to work unselfishly for the Kingdom of God. I think of the men and women who shouldered the responsibility of the Expansion Fund Program of last fall and of those who now are quietly and industriously carrying our Church forward into the Sector Project. I think of the devoted hearts that gather Sunday after Sunday to teach the children and the young people of this Church the meaning of the Christian life. And I could go on and mention others....the adult counsellors of the youth fellowships, the members

of the choir, the commission chairmen, the leaders of the WSCS, and the Official Board, and the Janitor of our church.....all people devoted to the building of the Kingdom of God. Like the Master whom they follow, they desire not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

*NOT ONLY SHARES HIMSELF, BUT HE ALSO*  
A true follower of Jesus also shares his material possessions.

He gives liberally to his own church and to the world wide missionary program of the church. There's a story that's been told about...

Two wealthy Christians, a lawyer and a business man joined a party that was traveling around the world. In Korea one day, they saw a boy pulling a rude plow, while an old man held the handles and directed it. The lawyer was amused and took a snapshot of the scene. "That's a curious sight! I suppose they're very poor", he said to the missionary who was acting as a guide.

"Yes they are." replied the missionary. "The old man is Chi Nut and the boy is his son. When the church was being built here, they were anxious to give something to it, but they had no money. So they sold their only ox and gave the money to the church. This spring they're pulling the plow themselves."

The lawyer and the businessman were silent for several moments. Then the businessman said, "That must have been a real sacrifice."

"No they didn't call it a sacrifice," said the missionary. "They felt that they were fortunate to have an ox they could sell."

Some months later when they reached home, the lawyer took the picture he had taken in Korea to his minister and told him the story. "I want to double my pledge to the church", he said. "And give me some plow work to do. I've never known what sacrifice for the church meant. A converted Korean taught me!"

Only recently in our own Church, we had a very touching experience which helps to illustrate this demand of sharing. One morning in our church office, we found an envelope on the desk with

\$2.76 inside. There was a note attached to the envelope which said, "Enclosed is money I have received from selling old papers and from saving part of my allowance." "Please put this into the Expansion Fund." And then the boy's name was signed to it. \$2.76 represents what I would call sacrificial giving on the part of a ten year old boy.

A stingy farmer, who had persistently refused to attend John Wesley's meetings, one day was induced to go. The preacher's first point was, "Make all you can", and the farmer was delighted. The second point was, "Save all you can", and this just about threw the farmer into ecstasy, and he thought to himself how foolish he had been to miss such preaching. But the third point was, "Give all you can". This last point, the farmer said, spoiled the whole sermon.

As disciples of Jesus we are called on to share. We are called on to give all we can.....not only our material possessions, but also ourselves - ~~our time, our strength, and our hands to the building~~ of his Kingdom.

#### A DISCIPLE

##### DARES

The third demand of discipleship is that one must be willing to dare. Dynamic discipleship has in it a spirit of daring adventure. One must not only have the faith to expect great things from God, but he must have courage to attempt great things for God.

During the last world war, we often read about young German boys going into battle with the cry of "Heil Hitler" on their lips. The young men had given themselves completely to Hitler. What he said, they did. Where he led, they followed. With a loyalty such as this, but in a different spirit and for a different purpose, we need to give ourselves in daring discipleship.

The pages of history are filled with accounts of men who were willing to dare. I think of Martin Luther appearing before the Diet

of Worms in 1521, having been asked to take back some of his ideas. His words made history: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me.!" The Elector, Frederick the Wise, in writing down the historic event for future generations had this remark to make: Dr. Martin Luther spoke wonderfully before the emperor, the princes, and the estates in Latin and in German, but he is too daring for me." Luther was accused of being too daring. Can a disciple ever be too daring? As Emerson once said, "God will not have his work made manifest by cowards."

A true disciple of Jesus dares to think for himself. He is not a victim of mob psychology; he does not blindly follow the thinking and behavior of the group. He has a mind and he dares to use it. He lets others know that he has certain moral and spiritual principles which he believes in, and which he tries to follow at all times.

Ernie Pyle, popular war correspondent who lost his life during the last war, told of a trip which he made on a hospital ship from the Italian battle zone back to Naples. The thing that stood out in greatest contrast to his other war experiences was the fact that this ship, unlike every other ship of war, made no effort to conceal itself. It attempted no camouflage, but displayed a large brilliant red cross. It observed no blackout, but travelled with its brightest floodlights blazing. No one would mistake its identity.

As Christians too many of us have been afraid to show our colors and to hold aloft our emblem, which is likewise a cross. We have perhaps tried to camouflage ourselves, and to look and act like the environment about us. We must dare to be different from the crowd.

A disciple must dare. He must attempt great things for God. A poem entitled "A Prayer" by Louis Untermeyer expresses well this spirit of daring

"Ever insurgent let me be,  
Make me more daring than devout;  
From sleek contentment keep me free,  
And fill me with a buoyant doubt.

From compromise and things half done,  
Keep me, with stern and stubborn pride;  
And when at last the fight is won,  
God, keep me still unsatisfied."

SUMMARY These then are the three demands of Christian discipleship. First, a disciple must care; second, he must share, and thirdly he must dare.

What is your answer to this challenge of Christian discipleship? Dare you travel the pathway of a disciple of Jesus? It is a life of great demand. It is a life that is challenging, satisfying, full of worth-while work and thrilling adventure. Can you accept the challenge?

"To every man there openeth  
A Way and Ways and a Way.  
And the high soul climbs the high way,  
And the low soul gropes the low,  
And in between on the misty flats the  
rest drift to and fro.  
But to every man there openeth  
a High way and a low,  
And every man decideth  
The way his soul shall go."