

Unison Opening Words ~ *Common Prayer: Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

Give us courage, Lord, to follow the way of your cross, and to trust that though it confounds the logic of the world, your way interrupts the patterns of sin and death, both now and forever. Amen.

Traditional Service Liturgy Following Opening Hymn **and** Contemporary Service Liturgy

Following The Lord's Prayer before the Scripture Reading: This We Believe Document 'Article XIII' and 'Article V' from *The Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church*

### Article XIII – Of the Church

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

### Article V – The Church from *The Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church*

[protected by Restrictive Rule 2 and added to The United Methodist Church's Doctrinal Standards at the union of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren to create The United Methodist Church in 1968 (¶118)]

We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

- Luke 9:57-62.
- Scripture uses a number of metaphors to describe and help us understand the true nature of the church.
  - (1) We know the church is both a building and not a building.
    - It is a structure built on a firm foundation.
    - It is also not the floor, the walls, and the roof; the church is the people.
  - The church is a body.
    - We each have our roles and our functions.
    - We need every one and cannot all be the same one.
    - We are united and diverse (I Cor 12).
  - The church – representative of God's people – is the bride.
    - We are in covenant with God. Scripture tells us of our seasons of faithfulness as well as our seasons of infidelity.
    - God loves us – unto, through, and conquering death.
  - Ezekiel 34:31 reads, "You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord."
  - First Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."

- John Wesley preferred one metaphor to describe and help us understand the true nature of the church – the true gift of the church – above all else.
  - We read this metaphor in Ephesians 4:1, and specifically in the King James translation, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye (2) **walk** worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (v. 1).
  - *Walk* – wrote Wesley in his sermon *Of The Church* – “includes all our inward and outward motions, all our thoughts, and words, and actions. It takes in not only everything we do, but everything we either speak or think. It is therefore no small thing to walk.”<sup>1</sup>
    - Walks are indicative of a journey, rather than a destination.
    - A walk is a movement; therefore, if the church is a walk, then we are to be perpetual motion machines for Christ.
- Our Scripture text from Luke today describes for us *the cost* of our Christian walk – also known as the cost of discipleship.
  - When many hear the phrase “the cost of discipleship” their minds go to the statement of Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke, (3) “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23).
    - Discipleship is **both** our gift to God for all God has done and is doing **and** it is our gift to the world as we share about all God has done and is doing.
      - Our growth as disciples is God’s anticipated outcome for the Christian walk.
      - Our growth does not come without our personal investment, which necessarily includes our personal cost.
    - But what does the cost of discipleship actually look like? What does it live like?
      - Today’s text applies the cost of discipleship in three ways through three circumstances.
      - These sayings of Jesus concluding Luke 9 may or may not have been originally said together, but the Third Gospel Writer grouped them for us.
  - The first cost of discipleship is our (4) creature comforts.
    - Those who follow Jesus will be wholly dependent on the hospitality of others.
    - In Jesus’ day, that meant as he and his disciples travelled, they took very few possessions with them.
      - What they ate and drank, where they slept, their finances and expenditures were wholly dependent on the generosity of others.
      - We have a different experience in our day, as our culture and society emphasize providing for oneself and one’s family – to first be financially sustainable on the way to being financially successful.
        - And yet much of our work in the church – of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ – is wholly dependent on the hospitality we receive from others.
        - Will they listen? Will they welcome God’s message?
        - Will what the Spirit leads us to say find a home in them?

---

<sup>1</sup> ¶III.20.

- Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. Sometimes not yet.
  - The uncertainty of the outcome – the uncertainty of our being comforted by the creatures with whom we share – can discourage us from even sharing at all.
    - Jesus hopes we accept these risks.
    - That we, like he, purposefully set our faces and our feet towards the world’s mission field, and follow.
- The second cost of discipleship is our (5) disorientation.
  - I have known this experience quite well in the recent weeks following my aunt’s death.
  - From moment to moment in the presence of my family, my **role** shifted dramatically.
    - I was daughter and niece. Then I was the family chaplain.
    - Then I could not possibly be the family chaplain because someone was in the room that could only see me as muddy-faced mussy-haired eight-year-old picking tangerines out of Mama Betty’s nursery.
    - It was, at times, chaotic. It was altogether exhausting.
  - One of the clergy from my home church where my parents worship called me in the midst of all this to offer me pastoral care.
    - In our conversation she named the complex place of being both a pastor and a grieving member of the family.
    - She asked what I needed.
    - And I had such great clarity of thought in that moment – what I needed was to lean into and speak the hope of resurrection.
      - Because that is my anchor.
      - That knowledge, that hope, that faith tells me who I am and directs me in what I am doing.
        - When Jesus says in Scripture, “Let the dead bury the dead,” he is not “asking this man [or anyone] to abandon responsibilities [; rather, Jesus] is setting [us] free from the swarm of details and personal confusion that are death’s hold on [us] and inviting [us] to begin a whole new life, to become who [we] ought to be. Jesus is letting [us] know that [our] response to Jesus’ invitation is central to God’s purpose for [our lives] and future identity.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Jesus wants us to walk; Jesus invites us to follow.
- The third cost of discipleship is our (6) lack of resolve.
  - “Determination will be an important characteristic of discipleship.”<sup>3</sup>
  - Jesus’ words to this third person resonate with the call of Elisha by the prophet Elijah.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke Vol I* 282.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

- First Kings 19 tells us that Elijah passed Elisha while plowing a field and placed upon him his mantle – the garment signifying one called by God to be a leader of God’s people.
- Elisha left his plow, determined to follow Elijah, and then he said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you” (v. 20).
- Elisha physically and metaphorically turned his head back.
- To this behavior Jesus says, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (v. 62).
  - Discipleship that lacks resolve is not fit for the kingdom of God.
  - Following Jesus is risky. Following Jesus will cost us.
    - It may cost us certain appetites.
    - It may cost us certain behavior patterns.
    - It may even cost us certain relationships.
      - Our Jesus taught with confidence, “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33).
      - Striving requires resoluteness, and our striving is more joy than chore when we do so in likeminded community with folks both at work – and at walk – looking towards God’s great horizon, as together we follow.
- The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which translates as *called out*.
  - Wesley believed the church is God’s answer to what is wrong in the world.
  - We answer what is wrong in the world through 1) our distinctive called out identity from the world and through 2) our distinctive called out service to the world.
    - Our prayers, presence, stewardship, and witness are obedient responses to what God has done and is doing for us for good.
    - Our prayers, presence, stewardship, and witness make visible our walk in following Jesus.
    - “[Following] Christ means a reordering of life that includes the possibility that one may never settle down; [we will be constantly on the move]. [Following] Christ entails understanding oneself in relation to Jesus, even when experiencing disorientation in one’s own family and confusion in one’s sense of self. [Following] Christ requires a single-minded resolve that looks forward to the work ahead and is cognizant of the risk that accompanies discipleship.”<sup>4</sup>
  - To be the church – to be God’s gift and answer to the hurting world – is to be “held accountable to higher criteria than other humanly derived organizations. (7) The church is nothing less than the body of Christ, Jesus’ hands and feet, Christ in motion, continuing his movement into the world.”<sup>5</sup>
    - We have received this precious gift, and through love and grace, we have been transformed and given the opportunity to be this precious gift for the world.
    - Because of Christ’s transformative life-saving power taking root in our hearts,

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 137.

- we can hear pain and bring healing,
  - we can witness hurt and speak hope,
  - we can walk together and follow.
- Let's not waste this precious gift; my friends, this we believe.

This morning Chelsea shared her walk experience with us. A way that we can support Chelsea, her ministry at South Shore, and show our love for her is by our church – individually and collectively – consider and engage in dialogue about how we will be in relationship and shared ministry with LGBTQ persons. There are two upcoming opportunities for us this. The first is to join me in a small group study beginning next Sunday Evening where we will explore the intersectionality of Scripture Interpretation and Human Sexuality and learn about the future decisions to be made by our denomination as concerns this intersectionality. This group will meet for 6-weeks beginning at 5pm next Sunday, August 22. I will repeat this small group study as many times as necessary so folks can engage with this conversation.

A second opportunity will come to South Shore sometime next year as we host a viewing and round table discussion of the film *1946* – a documentary that explores the theology, history, culture, and politics that led to the inclusion of the word *homosexual* into Biblical translations and the impact that its inclusion has had on the modern and post-modern church, particularly in the LGBTQ community.

This work – these discipleship opportunities, because that is what they are! – is a way for us to support and come alongside Chelsea as a fellow disciple of Christ and it is a way for us to lean into our ever evolving relationship with Scripture as it intersects our daily lives. Jesus did this work. He said “You have heard it said, but I say to you...” We are doing this work every Sunday in worship! For over two years South Shore has had a female pastor. My leadership here among you is proof on our church’s leaning into our ever evolving relationship with Scripture as it intersects our daily lives. These upcoming small group conversations and the viewing of *1946* with round table discussion holds space for our conversation in the same way that Jesus interacted with Scripture, in the same way the church has interacted with Scripture since Jesus.

Friends, pray about your own walks. And pray deeply for how God may be calling you to engage in this portion of our church’s present walk.

1 – Collage of words: Building, People, Body, Bride, Chosen, Priesthood, Holy Nation, God’s Own People

2 – *Walk*

3 – The Cost of Discipleship: All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

4 – Creature Comforts

5 – Disorientation

6 – Lack of Resolve

7 – The church is nothing less than the body of Christ, Jesus’ hands and feet, Christ in motion, continuing his movement into the world.