

PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on Being a Disciple, Part 1.

I wanted to talk about a particular topic this month, but I realized that I have to do a little background first. Because of that, I won't get to talk about what I want to say until next month or maybe even a few months down the line. More specifically, I want to talk about one of the lines in this statement that I put up one of my first weeks here at Maple Street, and have had it in almost every slide show:

AN ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ:

- 1. Is involved in regular Christian service to others;**
- 2. Is a student in a regular Bible School, Sunday School, or other learning environment with a teacher or mentor;**
- 3. Is a regular in corporate worship and private prayer;**
- 4. Is looking for and working with pre-Christians and new Christians to be a mentor for them.**

I realize that before I talk about any one line in this statement, I need to make sure that you understand where it comes from. Now more than ever, it is important not only to know certain things, but to know where they come from. You might wonder who made up the statement above. We were pastors from a dozen different churches (and different denominations) in the Franklinton neighbor of Columbus, and we were discussing a grand idea we had about writing up a "Franklinton Plan." This was a statement that all of our churches could agree on about how we as churches would work together to build up our community physically, economically, and spiritually. One of the first questions we asked was what is our goal for each person who is a part of our churches. In addition to each person having a stable living place, stable employment or other support, adequate food and other resources, and healthy relationships, we would want them to be an ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ. This assumes first that they accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and then demonstrate this faith in the above-mentioned ways.

We didn't just think this up out of thin air. The early church is described at the end of the second chapter of the Book of Acts in the Bible. This passage has been the model for church activity over the centuries:

So those who welcomed [Peter's] message were BAPTIZED, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (CHRISTIAN EDUCATION) and FELLOWSHIP, to the breaking of bread (COMMUNION) and the PRAYERS. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and SIGNS were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (SERVICE). Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple (WORSHIP), they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 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 (EVANGELISM).

Acts 2:41-47 (NRSV)

There are nine items I capitalized in the verses above. The Church is a Fellowship in all that it does. Baptism and Communion occur at set times for different people. Signs occur at times we cannot plan. That leaves Education, Worship, Prayers, Service, and Evangelism. The United Methodist Church has called these the core processes of the church:

CORE PROCESSES of the church:

1. Welcoming people into the church (EVANGELISM)
2. Relating them to God (WORSHIP & PRAYER)
3. Helping them grow in their faith and relationships (CHRISTIAN EDUCATION)
4. Sending them out in ministry (SERVICE)

During our conversations we realized that while churches are supposed to be doing these things, they also apply to individual Christians. Each of us is meant to be personally doing evangelism, worship, prayer, education, and service.

So now I come back to the Active Disciple list at the beginning. As I've reflected about the list over the years, I have found it helpful as a description of a disciple of Christ. But I've also noticed that it is a helpful guide for anyone who feels that their Christian life is not as fulfilling as it should be. If your faith seems a bit dry, it is likely that you are not doing well in one or more of the four areas. I suspect also that when someone chooses to leave a particular church, they might blame the church for not fulfilling their spiritual needs, but it might be that they have neglected one or more of these.

So I want to talk about these points... next month.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'R. A.', written in a cursive style.