**Ways of Faith 1**

Unity Church July 13, 2025

Psalm 86:10-13 2 Corinthian 5:17- 6:2

Two weeks ago, I chuckled as we called Sunday School to order. I mean what I say about “called to order,” because usually there are about 5 different conversations going on as folks get coffee and whatever goodies Trish has lined up for that morning. But the reason I was chuckling was at the grace of our Dad and what he has accomplished in this church over the past 10 years. We had more people in class than were at worship my first Sunday here in July 2014. God is good, all the time.

This class is one of the highlights of my Sundays because one never knows quite where the conversation is going. The class is organized, somewhat loosely, around working through a book by Brant Hansen. We completed his first book called Unoffendable and we’re currently on his most recent book, Life is Hard, God is Good, Let’s Dance.

I like his writing because he tends toward the random spastic world that I live in. There is little formality and lots of ideas and situations that spark conversation and discussion from the class. The true blessing is the different perspectives brought by various members of the group. Let’s just say that it’s never boring.

One of the questions that was thrown out for discussion this past Sunday is what things should we be doing as Christians. Various ideas were offered, praying, Bible study, helping others, loving people etc. I pointed out that the problem with these various intended lists start out with the imperative, “we should”, which becomes “we ought” and ends up, “we must.”

At first blush one might say, “what’s wrong with that?” It does after all get the things done that “should” be done. (There’s that word again.) My argument may be subtle, but I think it bears exploration.

Prior to this discussion, the leader had mentioned that they had got into the habit, on most days, of starting their day with the spoken question: ‘Ok Lord, what do you want me to do today?” 1

If one lays this beside the idea of a list of “should, ought, must,” actions, I think you’ll see the difference. One is the act of submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the other is performing a learned set of actions, possibly out of a feeling of obligation. True, the actions may be the same, but the motivation is completely different.

Keep in mind, the Pharisees of Jesus’ time actually kept the law, the “should, ought, must” list that had been given them by Moses. They kept each dot and tittle of the law. Jesus condemned them though, not for how they kept the law, but that they had lost sight of the God and his ways behind the law. Which is why I get nervous when people start saying that we must do something.

I got thinking about that whole conversation this week and felt that it’s not as black and white as it first appears. Not that we need a list of suggestions, rules, or measuring tapes, but we all need a general understanding of walking out the faith we claim to have and what walking it out looks like.

Toward that end, I’d like to do a little series on a Way of Faith. What I’d like to focus on are the habits, the practices, possibly the discipline of practicing, doing our faith. As believers, we are called to discipleship which is another way of saying we are called to learn the ways of, the lessons of Jesus Christ and then practice them.

To start we should probably define what a disciple is. Webster describes a disciple as one who follows, especially Jesus, but also a teacher, leader, or philosopher. In the New Testament, the word translated as disciple, comes from the Greek word, “mathetes,” a pupil or learner which comes form the root word, “manthano,” which means to learn, to understand.

For purposes of our conversation in this series, let’s agree that a disciple is a student who learns by following, by doing. One can argue over what the meaning of pupil or student is. Realizing that we are talking about being a student of Jesus, there are real considerations due to the recorded history of his life, death and resurrection, 2000 years ago.

2

The Psalmist gives us two paradigms, one experiential and one scholarly. “O taste and see that the Lord is good,” and “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.” I am drawn toward the idea of apprenticeship, because that is the way I learn. The old saying of “see one, do one, teach one,” as a means of taking an idea or action and making it our own.

In 2005 New Wilmington held a Heritage Days Festival, celebrating the history and ways of those people who settled and developed this area. Another woodworker and myself set up an exhibit to demonstrate woodworking. A guy came up and asked me if I would be willing to let him apprentice with me. It wasn’t full time, he had a job and a marriage, but whenever he could, Steve was at the shop; learning, doing, asking questions, helping, discussing furniture design.

I taught him the basics of woodworking, let him learn from his mistakes and kept challenging him with projects that were just a little beyond his reach. He built some beautiful furniture: a desk and chair, a hope chest out of book matched curly maple with good handcut dovetails. Before he went to medical school, his mother asked him to build her a buffet. I helped him with the design and about twice a week, I’d get a phone call with various levels of frantic questions. What was going to be a Christmas present got moved into the dining room on New Year’s day.

I drove up to Greenville to see it, and I was as proud of it as he was. It occurred to me as I was driving home that this is the process that we are called to, as Christians. Steve learned the discipline of woodworking the same way that I am learning the discipline of being a pastor and a preacher. He learned the hows, whats and whys of woodworking. We are called to learn the hows, whats and whys of Jesus Christ. We are called to be apprentices of Christ, to be students, to be disciples.

I hesitate in using the word the discipline here, whether talking about woodworking or Jesus Christ, because that word can have such strong meaning. Even using “ways of,” can be troublesome, because there are so many people who believe that their way or their discipline is the only one. This applies to both woodworkers and Christians. 3

If we are disciples, students, apprentices of Jesus, it makes sense that we would learn his approach, his actions, his ways. Unlike someone who has apprenticed under me, those of us who are students of Jesus are blessed with the perfect example, the perfect teacher. We have been offered the opportunity to study under the Perfect High Priest, the physical incarnation of God.

We are not being taught a bunch of theoretical ideas, we are being taught by real day to day actions. We are not being coached by a professor who has academically studied the game, but by the one who created it, and actively plays it. He tells us to love and forgive, not as establishing an ideal of what should happen, but as a reality; this is what I have shown you by doing it, now you go and do it the way I have shown you.

Let’s say you wanted to build a hope chest. I could write a paper on the spacing and layout of proper dovetails. You could read the paper and think, hmm, that makes sense. Or I could take the boards that will make up that hope chest, pull my marking gauge and scribe out of the drawer and walk you step by step through the calculations and layout of the pins. I could write in the paper why we cut the pins first and the tails second, but until you have cut the pins and marked the tails yourself, it doesn’t make sense. You would have no point of reference, unless you already knew how to lay out dovetails.

If you were in the shop while I was choosing the boards for this hope chest, you would get the opportunity to see first hand the thought process that goes into grain matching wood. One can read about it, but sort of like riding a bicycle, until you jump on it and go, you won’t fully understand.

It is the same way with our mentor Jesus Christ. One can read the theoretical about how we need to love one another or forgive each other, but until we have been loved and forgiven, especially by the person and God who was willing to purchase our forgiveness with His own blood, it doesn’t become real. It is simply a nice idea. In experiencing the reality of what length and price he was willing to go for our reconciliation, we see the true value, the true cost, of this love and forgiveness that He teaches.

4

As I said earlier, apprenticeship is not the only way that we are taught or shown as students of Christ. By virtue of the fact that the passion of the Christ happened 2000 years ago, there has to be an historic record and document, not only of that particular occurrence but also the foundational background of a God who created us, loves us, and is faithful.

These two aspects of learning, studying and practice, are the right and left hands of being a disciple. In between is the Holy Spirit, which we will get into more deeply later. But we can leave it today that this “paraklete,” as Jesus calls him, is the illustrator, interpreter, teacher, who brings this ancient document to life and supervises, leads our apprenticeship.

Without the historical teachings of the Bible, we have practices of love and forgiveness that are basically social standards. Without the practical application, the walking out our faith, we simply have historic theological theory. The practice, the walking out of these teachings in our lives is where we find the confirmation of what we read and study. I can read in the Bible that God is faithful or that God is love, but it is in the walking out of my faith, wrestling with the ways of God, putting into practice what I see or have been shown what confirms the truth or veracity of the Scriptures.

Sometime after Steve had finished the buffet for his mother, he and I were talking about the building process of it. He said that one of the good things about building this piece by himself was that for the first time, things that I had told him years ago, finally made sense. He said that in his shop, there was no one there who was three steps ahead, making sure that something happened or watching that this tenon was going to fit in that mortise.

Folks, Paul tells us that in Christ, we have become a new thing. Our savior, our Lord, our mentor is waiting for us to say the words of the Psalmist, “For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God. Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.”

5

Matthew 28:19

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Psalm 86:10-13

For you are great and do marvelous deeds;  you alone are God.

Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.

For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths,  
    from the realm of the dead.

2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:he old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6:1 As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. 2 For he says,

“In the time of my favor I heard you,  
    and in the day of salvation I helped you.”I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation