

Welcome Back!

Purpose: To call all attendees to take the next step as a disciple and disciple maker of Jesus Christ

Pastor Tom
Sept 7, 2014

It is good to see many of you back after a summer away. And it is good to see many new faces with us today. I am Pastor Tom. I hope you have had a meaningful and refreshing summer. Some of you have experienced just that. You had a tremendous vacation time or lots of time to relax and connect with family and friends. Some of you may have moved this summer. So you've gone through a significant change and wonder how things will turn out. Some experienced an ordinary summer or maybe experienced a very different summer than one you've experienced before.

Our family experienced a different kind of summer. We didn't go away for vacation together as a family. Our oldest daughter was away all summer at Camp Caroline as a counselor. Our other kids were busy throughout Alberta on the farm or camp or mission's trips. My wife went and served in the kitchen at camp. I had my time off at home where we did some projects around the house. Some days it was only our dog Romeo and me. We enjoyed many good conversations. So it was quite different from the normal busyness of our lives.

But whatever you & I have experienced this summer, we are now here. It is the first full weekend of September. School started and the schedule ramps up. People are more focused on the going forward and facing the realities of our lives. Sometimes we face some tough realities or difficult situations. Connecting to a church family is one way we can find others to walk with through the ups and downs of life.

Now there are 3 realities about our church family that I need you to know. First, we desperately need God. (Psalm 73:25-26) Without God we would not be here. Without His continued grace and work in our lives, this church would not continue to exist. We need the Holy Spirit to empower us and sustain for the days ahead. So maybe you wonder if you fit here or might have something in common with others. If you have recognized your need for God and Jesus Christ in your life, you have something in common with a lot of us. We need God.

Second, we imperfectly but persistently pursue a growing relationship with God and one another. Philippians 3:8 – "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord". Jesus said the Greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. We seek to live out this calling. But we do so imperfectly. We're called to bear with one another and encourage one another in this calling.

So first, we desperately need God. Second, we aim to love God and one another in an ever increasing measure. Third, we're living out this calling by taking next steps individually and corporately as disciples and disciple-makers of Jesus Christ.

Just before he left the Earth, Jesus had some very clear words of direction for a group the Bible calls His disciples. A disciple in the first century, was someone who literally followed a teacher . They would travel with him, listen to his teaching and learn about how to live life from him. Jesus' disciples had done exactly that for at least 3 years. Now Jesus was about to depart the earth.

But before he left he said this in words we have recorded in the New Testament. "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always to the end of the age."

Those disciples took that commission and went out to spread the good news about how God had sent Jesus into the world. He lived and suffered a criminal's death even though He was innocent. He did that so that we could be reconciled with God. When anyone puts their trust in Christ as their savior or redeemer, they are forgiven by God and reconciled with Him. And they begin the journey of discipleship.

So everyone here who has put their trust upon Christ has become His disciple. If you're a Christian, you are a disciple of Christ. But coming to Christ is not the end of your journey. It's only the beginning. Each one of us is called to grow as a disciple of Christ. That means we become closer to Christ and mature in our faith. But we are also called to be disciple makers of Christ. The same commission that Jesus gave the first disciples continues upon us today. Go and make disciples of all nations teaching them to obey all Jesus has commanded. We are given many opportunities to do this in our lives. Parents have a responsibility to disciple their children. Grandparents can disciple their grandkids. Those more mature in the faith can disciple those younger in the faith. That's the reason our church exists. We are here to call people to come to Christ, build up disciples in Christ and equip disciples to make other disciples of Christ.

But we can be pretty fuzzy about what this actually looks like. How do you actually come to Christ? What's involved in growing as a disciple? How do you know if you're making any progress? So we've come up with a picture that tries to communicate this. Please take out the blue picture from your bulletin or in the pews in front of you.

There's an attempt to draw what discipleship looks like. The left hand column lists pieces of what's involved in coming to Christ. When you're beginning the Christian life this left hand column what happens as we begin our walk with Christ. But we can't stay in the connecting to Christ column. Jesus calls us to grow as a Christian. We've listed about 10 different areas of the Christian life. We need to learn about these not only in our heads but in our lives. The first disciples certainly sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His teaching. But He showed them how to live out this teaching and challenged them when they didn't.

Together, we want to grow as a body of believers in following the Father, Son & Holy Spirit through prayer, the Word and worship. We need other Christians to encourage and challenge us so we come together in smaller communities. We need to learn the Gospel and share it. We need to discover how God has equipped us to serve others. We need to grow in our giving and generosity which are all qualities that Christ calls us to nurture. We need to learn about and live lives that overcome sin and the devil by the power of the Holy Spirit. And we more and more need to grow in cultivating a Christian worldview in our increasingly secularized society.

So there are some specific ways you can take the next steps listed on the back of that page. I would encourage you to spend some time on the Discipleship Link on the website. It has this picture on it along with a message which launched this direction from this past March. You can use the discipleship material with a partner or in a little study group say on campus or with some friends. You could sign up for one on one mentoring. You could join a small group or ministry. You could join the Baptism and Membership class that starts next Sunday if you have questions about the faith and baptism. Serving is one of the greatest ways you grow as a disciple. These are some ways you can take the next step God calls you to take as disciple and disciple maker.

But we are also going to take some steps together collectively through the preaching of the Word. I aim for us to grow in two primary areas this year through the preaching series.

The first area will be in cultivating a Christian worldview specifically in the area of suffering. One question often raised about God concerns suffering. If God is good and powerful, how come there is so much suffering in the world? As Christians, we also face suffering. How can Christians respond to suffering in a way that glorifies Christ and furthers our walk with Him?

To explore this, we are going to spend the Fall session of preaching on the book of Job. If you've ever read Job, you know it can be a tough book to grasp. The story might be familiar but what we're supposed to take from it can be pretty

murky. Job raises all kinds of questions. Is suffering related to whether or not we live good lives? What does Satan have to do with our suffering? Do our expectations about the way the world works need adjustment? Most importantly, what does Job teach us about God and His character? We are not going to do a verse by verse study through the whole book. But I want to give you an overview of its most important messages. And lest you think this is going to be a pretty depressing series, I want to end each message with the hope we have because of Christ. Job's original readers did not yet have that understanding or hope. Yet glimpses of Christ can be found here and we have this hope to look forward to.

The second major series we will look at this year concerns Jesus Himself. It struck me that in the past 8 years we have not been through an entire Gospel or Good news account of Jesus' life. If we are going to be Disciples of Christ, then it's pretty important that we know Him and His teachings more and more. So starting at Christmas, we will begin a journey through the Gospel of Matthew. In it, we will discover the story of Jesus' life from the perspective of a lost soul who once was far away from God. Matthew was a tax collector. They were notorious cheaters and betrayers of their own people. But he became one of Jesus 12 disciples and offers His unique inspired perspective that has been preserved for us today in the first book of the New Testament. If you would like to prepare for this series, I would encourage you to read Matthew this Fall before we start it on the first Sunday of Advent.

So we want to go forward as Disciples of Christ and disciple makers of Christ. You have opportunities to do that as individuals, with others in smaller communities and together as one body.

But just before I close, I want to speak to those of you who think that this is something you'll get to at some point in the future. This past summer, we had opportunity to reflect on the importance of seizing the time and opportunities we have before us. Lori, my wife, got to spend a week serving in the kitchen at Camp Caroline. She worked with a team of people including a kind and gentle couple. They come to camp every year to serve in the kitchen for a week. It is a very special place for them because that is the last place they saw their son alive. They said goodbye to their son in the kitchen in the summer of 2003. Then he left with his fiancée, her sister and Mom to travel back to Spruce Grove up Highway 22. In less than two hours, all four had been killed in a tragic accident. Their 21 year old son was gone. This couple impressed upon Lori, and through Lori to me, the importance of making time for people and the important because you never know how much time you actually have.

Then a couple of weeks ago, a family friend of ours from Ottawa passed away. Blanca Campos was a dear friend who was one day short of her 59th birthday – only 8 years older than me. She died from an aggressive cancer that she was diagnosed with only about a year ago. Her time is done. Her journey of discipleship is over before she expected it to be. But such things are not under our control.

We look at this new year and think it's one of many, many more that we will be given. We think we are guaranteed and deserve at least 80 years of life. But we never know. I was reading in 2 Corinthians 6 earlier this month and was struck by verse 2 which states simply this – Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Now is the time to take the next step as a disciple and disciple maker. Growing as a disciple and making disciples of Jesus Christ is one of the most important investment you can make with the time you have. So what next step will you take? Where is God calling you to grow as you trust Him for this next step?

On the reverse side of this diagram, there are opportunities for you to take the next step. I want to give you a few moments to pray and respond to God with what is your next step? Then I will pray.