WHAT KIND OF DISCIPLES DOES JESUS EXPECT?

1. Confess him with their words
2. Confess him with their actions

What is your favorite sports team? I think you know I’m a Packers fan. But what about you? What is your favorite sports team? Is it the Vikings or Twins? Is it a team from a certain sport - maybe basketball or baseball. Is it a college team like maybe Minnesota Gophers? It is always interesting to see what people will do to show their allegiance and loyalty to a certain sports team. Some people will go to some pretty great lengths to show that a certain team’s their favorite. They will spend lots of money to buy tickets to see them in person. Some will paint their faces and wear silly clothes. Others will yell and scream at the top of their lungs. Others you will see wearing clothing with the name of their favorite teams very evident. For some it is the highlight of the week to see their games, making sure to hardly ever miss one of their games on TV or in person.

Fans come in all shapes, forms and sizes. It is always interesting when you find out what people will do for their favorite teams. I remember a young lady who was very petite and mild mannered that we found out after we got to know her a little better was a football fan. She would watch every game and scream and cheer like no one had ever heard her scream before. The things people will do for their team.

As we sit here today we are not going to really get to the bottom of which team is the best or who is the most loyal fan, but by using the loyalty a person might have for a certain team we might begin to better understand what it means for us as children of God to have loyalty to our Savior. We might say that we follow Jesus because of who he is and what he’s promised us. We follow our Lord and Savior who promised us forgiveness and an eternal home in heaven.

As followers of Jesus, this means that we are one of his servants or disciples. But we, as children of God, live in a world that contradicts many of God’s ideas, but God-willing we will be able to stand up with God’s help and follow our Savior by how we confess his name and by how we follow his lead. Following Jesus is not going to be easy, but today we will hope to strengthen our faith so that we will find the answer to this very important question: WHAT KIND OF DISCIPLES DOES JESUS EXPECT. The answer: those who confess him with their words and those who confess him with their actions.

As we look at our text for today we need to realize that Jesus had just miraculously fed over 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The verses just before that text tell of other miracles which Jesus did. The crowds around Jesus by this time must have been quite large. Imagine as the news of these great miracles spread through the towns. We might have heard people say: Come and see this man who can do great things. Along with the large group of people came a great number of people who did not really know who Jesus was and what he came to do. Jesus, knowing this, used this time to strengthen those who were traveling with him, especially his disciples. Jesus wanted to make sure that his disciples were following him for the right reasons.

For this reason he gave the disciples a small pop-quiz. And just to make this a learning experience for us here today, we will take the same quiz the disciples took. Jesus asked them the first question, which was the easier question: Who do the crowds say that I am? They replied: John the Baptist, but others say, Elijah, and others say one of the ancient prophets come back to life. I am sure that the disciples had the opportunity to mingle among these large crowds of people. They had heard what people were saying in their little groups,
and so they told Jesus what they had heard. The answers may have varied, but they were really all the same. Many people thought that Jesus was one of the great prophets who had come before him - Elijah or maybe Isaiah or Jeremiah. These people’s answers clearly showed that everyone did not know Jesus.

As we sit here today we could ask ourselves the same question: **Who do the people say that Jesus is?** As we live in this world we may have an opportunity to listen to the people we work with or the neighbors we associate with or the families we gather with and what they have to say about Jesus. What are some of the answers that you might hear? You might hear that Jesus was just a good man whose example we should follow. You might hear that Jesus was a great prophet who spoke clearly about the coming Savior. You might hear people completely deny that Jesus every came or that he was just made up by Christians. These and many more ideas are floating around this sinful world.

But Jesus then asks the second question on our test: **But who do you say that I am?**

**And Peter answered, The Christ of God.** Jesus shined the spotlight directly on the disciples with this question and he shines the spotlight directly on us sitting here today. Who do you say Jesus is? God wants the disciples of all ages to search their hearts to find the answer to this most important question. This is a key question for each individual. The answer we give - the confession we proclaim will tell us what Jesus means for us.

Peter provides the bold confession, a confession that God-willing we will always give: **The Christ of God.** He gave this all-important final answer without any lifelines or helps. It was an answer that God had written in his heart personally. There is no disagreement to this answer from anyone. All the disciples and Jesus agreed that this is the correct answer. Peter’s confession was correct that Jesus came to save all those who are lost as our Christ.

As we look to be disciples of Jesus, we first need to make this type of bold confession. If we were to be honest with ourselves, there are many times where our confession does not come out as boldly and clearly as this. Whenever we fail to stand up to a group of people who are defaming Jesus’ name and power, we are making a weak confession. Whenever we are afraid to tell others what Jesus means to us, we are making a weak confession. Whenever our lives are not following the example of our Savior, we are making a weak confession. Instead of letting sin and the devil weaken our confession, may we always trust the Lord to give us the strength and wisdom to always boldly and clearly confess that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

But to be disciples means more than just lip service. It means that we actually support Jesus and serve him as we trust his message. It is one thing to confess Jesus, but it is another thing to follow our Savior in everything we do. Jesus puts this out there very clearly for all these people following him as he speaks these words: **Jesus said to all of them, If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.**

True followers are those who are willing to do anything to show their support and loyalty. I have been a sports fan my who life, but one thing I’ve learned as a sports fan is that it takes loyalty to follow your teams year in and year out. For instance, it took a lot to follow the Packers during those terrible years in 70s and 80s. Or how about all the seasons that the Twins have gone without having a winning season. It is hard to be loyal when your teams have struggled so badly. It would have been easy to cheer for another team that was better and say that this is now your team, or to give up completely on the Packers or Twins. But I have always been a Packer fan. I was there for the good times and the bad times.

The sad thing is that many Christians are like the fair weathered sports fan. They say that they are disciples of God, but they give up when things go bad, or they compromise when
they are questioned about their faith. Just look at the religious world we live in. Look at how many different ideas and distractions there are as we seek to follow our Lord and Savior. And we are not immune to these distractions and problems. The devil is seeking to get us to give up on God when the times get tough. He is looking to lead us to follow the path of least resistance, which may be to not follow God.

That is why we as Christians will serve our Lord and Savior well, when we take up the cross and Jesus and follow him wherever that cross might leads us. This cross might be heavy and it might make our earthly lives miserable at times, but in the end our text tells us, **Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.**

May God always lead us by his gospel message of Jesus Christ to follow him with our words and our actions. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with the courage to boldly confess Jesus as our Savior and to follow that same Savior we have confessed. May we always with God’s help and strength - confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior with our words and our actions. Amen.

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