



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Have you ever heard the term, "Practice makes perfect." I can remember my flute teacher telling me that over and over again. How many of you have used that with your own kids? Well, I learned later in life that only perfect practice makes perfect. You can practice a few measures of a song over and over again and if you are playing it wrong, even with practice it will be wrong. Make sense?

I remember as kids, our father tried to teach Gail and me to juggle. I was really interested but certainly could not get it the first time. I practiced over and over again, bruising many an orange. Finding it safer, I moved on to golf balls and eventually I had success keeping the three balls in the air. But my sister, could have cared less. She tried a few times and lost interest quickly. My dad, seeing that I could do the three balls with little trouble went on to instruct me on how to keep four balls in the air. That was a bit more than I could ever manage. Even with practice and watching him, it was outside of my ability. Today, I can still do the three balls with a bit of practice, and I have found it is a skill that has no practical use in my life today.

I think you might agree that everything we learn to do well in life has started by watching someone else do it first. I will never forget the day that Liz Carpenter and Carol Ave came in to teach a few of our high school girls how to knit. After one week, they were just starting to get it. By the next week one of them came back with a glove almost finished. We asked how she was able to learn to do that difficult task of making the fingers, and she said that she had watched a YouTube video.

I learned to paint China by taking direction and watching my teacher, Marilyn Preston over and over again for several years. Cooking I learned from my mom, guess I was not paying much attention to that one. My favorite sport in college was bowling. I learned in a simple Learn to Bowl class and from watching and studying pro bowlers on TV and in

tournaments hosted in my place of employment. I have been blessed with many tutors in my life. But where do we learn to be a follower of Jesus? Who taught you to follow Jesus?

Our Gospel text for today has Jesus waking the shore of the Sea of Galilee and asking men that were fishing to "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people!" Peter and Andrew were the first brothers to follow and then Jesus called James and John to come and follow too. All 12 of the men Jesus called accepted Jesus' call on their lives and followed him. But I do not think that it was Jesus wish that they just follow him, like the crowds follow Tiger Woods around the golf course. But Jesus meant more than just follow. He wanted these 12 men and us too, to study and to learn and then to imitate Him. Today, many more than 12 are called to follow, but some lose interest, some find it too hard to follow, some find no instant reward or gratification and fall away.

Even the 12 disciples that were called by Jesus, did not always get it right. Sometimes they did not understand the parables of Jesus and had to ask for an explanation. Yet, they continued to learn, to scrutinize the life of Jesus and were willing to follow in his path, no matter the cost. And that my friends is the difference between being a disciple and a follower.

As you will hear a bit later during our annual meeting, I have reported to the ELCA that we had 69 members at CTS at the end of 2022. 75% of you are involved in the ministry of our church and not quite half of you come to worship on a Sunday. So how many disciples do we really have here at CTS? Not for me to judge what is in your heart, but rather to continue to try to make disciples for Christ. So how do we make that step that Jesus wants for us to be disciples not just His followers?

As you know, I have been going to physical therapy for my thumb for the last few months. In the waiting room there is a picture on the wall that has the word DISCIPLINE on it along with a beautiful scene of a long bridge leading from the forest in the foreground to the mountains in the distance. As I sit there waiting, I have been thinking about that word, discipline. If you take the "in" out of that word, you get the word disciple. Just some food for thought.

Last week we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr day. I also began to think about that too. What are my dreams for the future? Well, I have to say that I have a dream for this congregation. I hope and pray that you will all live into the difference of being a mere follower of Christ and being one of His disciples. I believe that Jesus not only wants us to

follow Him but to go the step further and be his disciple. I pray that each of you will see the Christian life not as a destination but as a journey that lasts a lifetime.

The old camp song "Day by Day" reflects that wish:

Day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray

To see Thee more clearly

To love Thee more dearly

To follow Thee more nearly

Day by day.

First, we need to see Jesus more clearly. We must take time to examine His life. And folks there is no substitute for studying the Bible. Take time away from the worries of the world and read Scripture. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you understand what you read. Or be part of a Bible study group and listen to how others grasp the meaning of the written word. And this is where our discipleship journey begins.

Then we will come to love Jesus more dearly. We cannot love what we do not know. And the more we know, the more we love Jesus. We will find a desire to have a relationship with Him and talk to Him in prayer. We will want to give of our time and talents to further His love. We will come to love our neighbors because it is another way of loving Jesus. Serving others is the most tangible way to express our gratitude for His amazing grace.

But folks that is not all. The last line of our camp some talks about following, to follow more nearly. Being a disciple of Jesus means striving to imitate Jesus in how he treated people and lived his life. We have His perfect example of a Christ like life to be lived.

Christ calls each of us to be his disciples. And if you are hesitant remember that God does not call the equipped but rather God equips the called. So, we are all equipped to be disciples. He calls us in our circumstances not in spite of them. Christ makes us fit for discipleship. Our call and our commission go together. At our calling Christ equips us. He makes it possible for us to follow him, to participate in the mystery of his death and resurrection and to make that mystery visible to others. That is what discipleship is all about.

So have discipline being a disciple and practice following Jesus so the life you live will be blessed beyond measure. **AMEN**