

SERMON - PASTOR GREG

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John 10:22-42. Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one". Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you a mere man claim to be God."

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I have often heard it said that the LCA is poor at making disciples. After Maundy Thursday night service asked Alicia what she thought of my sermon and she replied along the lines that it was not really applicable to her life. I asked her what she wanted in a sermon. And her reply? 'I want something to help me become a better disciple'. I suggested that she go and read my sermon notes and consider all that I had in it!

In that sermon I referred to the Passover Lamb which provided the blood for salvation, the daily sacrificial lambs to atone for sins, the meal provided for by God to Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel at the foot of Mt Sinai, the Manna- the Bread from heaven, the blood sprinkled on the Altar and the People to confirm the Covenant which all comes together as we hear and receive: THIS IS MY BODY. THIS IS BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT GIVEN FOR YOU FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS. How does that not help in your desire to follow Jesus!

So how do we make disciples anyway? There are so many books, so many videos, so many resources available but still we struggle to make disciples in our church. Why? But before that let us listen again to Jesus: *Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of Holy Spirit and teaching them to keep/obey/guard/observe all which I have commanded you.*

And here lies the struggle. We are good at baptising. Already in the last 15 months I have had 11 baptisms. In previous years I have often had 20 or 30 a year. And I have been involved in so many Confirmations. But I cannot and I would not even try to **MAKE** them disciples of Jesus Christ. It takes two to tango and those two are the Holy Spirit and the individual person. The temptation for the Church has always been to take over from the Holy Spirit and in so doing so run the very real risk that we fall into either legalism or a theology of prosperity.

LEGALISM: This is what you must do. Give 10% of your income. Do not drink alcohol. You must be a virgin when you get married. You must never look with lust at another person if you are married. You must not smoke. You must wear a head covering. You must never receive Holy Communion. You must never tango with someone who is not your spouse. And on and on it goes.

The lists change from church to church but the risk is ever present- that we fall into rampant legalism and then works righteousness. Other denominations are seemingly better at making disciples but what is their foundation?

PROSPERITY. It seems pretty crass but a lot of churches teach this. Very basically- the more you give to God and the more obedient you are the more blessings God will give to you.

The difficulty in all of this is that the above is true in one sense and is written in God's holy word:

Gal 5: 16: So I say, live by the Spirit...the acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Malachi 3: (Give a tenth of your best) and test me in this, says the LORD God Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it.

So again I ask: How can we be better at making disciples? Always and for ever we listen to Jesus Christ:

SINNERS. *Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

BAPTISM. *Truly, truly I tell you that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again of water and the Spirit.*

HOLY COMMUNION. *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you.*

FOLLOWING. *If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples.*

Mathew 7:2:) Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

THE GOSPEL. *I AM the Bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry. And he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*

I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

DISCIPLING. Have I answered the question yet? Really, it is clear and simple but will never be easy: Listen to the word of God and do it! And when you fail- fall on your knees and repent. And then stand up again and have another go.

There is no easy answer and no easy way. The world and Satan and your sinful nature are always threatening to derail you- to condemn you- to shame you- to guilt you- to take you away from Jesus Christ. We can lose our salvation but only if we are the ones who throw it away: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*

And the best work we can ever do is this: *JOHN 6:29 The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.*

I recently read this: Jesus always gives just enough of himself to make faith possible, and yet he also hides just enough of himself to make faith necessary. Amen.