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## *The Revolutionary Disciple: Tenacious* Matthew 7:7-14

We are focusing as a church on one core mission: what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples for Jesus. Christ calls his disciples to two things. He calls us to turn from our old ways (repent) and to follow him, but it doesn't stop there. It's not just about me and Jesus. Jesus also calls me—and you, and everyone who claims to be his follower—to “go and make disciples”... turn, follow, go, make. That is the rhythm of true Christian discipleship.

We heard the Apostle Paul's definition of disciple last week: “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” Sounds audacious at first, doesn't it? But when you put the two together, “Just as I imitate the way Jesus lived, I invite you to imitate me” ...that rings true! One of our Sunday school kids said last week, “Oh, you mean we're supposed to be copycats? Copycats of Jesus?” Yes!

One of the babies I baptized this morning is Claire Hizey, daughter of Duncan and Maya. Maya's mom, Misako, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died just three weeks after Claire was born. I learned how important Misako was in Claire's Christian heritage. Duncan told me, “She loved Jesus so much. Her whole life was devoted to him. She was the most gentle, quiet, peaceful person you ever met...and it all centered in her love for Christ. We found journal after journal, filled with her prayers. She worked in childcare at Henderson Bay, looking after the babies of teen parents, kids that some would just write off. But they were precious to her and it was amazing how many of those young people showed up at her funeral to express gratitude for her influence on their life.” Then Misako's son-in-law offered this sweet tribute to his wife: “Maya's entire life is to emulate her mother, and that is very lucky for me.”

Misako imitated Christ, Maya is imitating her mom, and Duncan, his family and the world are blessed by that. Are you a disciple of Jesus worth imitating? What are the qualities of such a disciple? Let's return to the Sermon on the Mount to find out.

<sup>7</sup>“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>9</sup>“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to

your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup>So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

<sup>13</sup>“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup>But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it....”

Last week I talked about the incredible gift of God’s grace. We do not have to earn God’s love; we don’t have to behave well enough to impress Him. Rather, God loved us first, and deeply, and saved us because he wanted to and because we could not save ourselves. This is the primary difference between Christianity and every other world religion. Every other faith is some variety of do-goodism. If I behave myself, if I earn enough brownie points with God, when I die, I might go to heaven. But the gospel of Jesus says, “You can never be good enough to earn God’s love... but that’s okay, God loves you already... and I’ve come to save you, as a free gift.”

That is wonderful news. But it is also a gift we can take for granted. When we presume upon God’s grace, essentially we are saying, “Since God has already saved me, I can go ahead and live any way I want to live.” Is that your attitude? Remember what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hung by the Nazis for his faith, called this? “Cheap grace!” And Jesus warns against this cheap approach to grace in last week’s text when he told his disciples, <sup>21</sup>“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.”

One of the discipleship myths that Jesus destroys is this: a disciple can live in persistent disobedience. He cannot. You cannot be a disciple of Jesus and persistently disobey Him. And if you are persistently, unapologetically disobedient toward Jesus in the way you treat others or with your sexual behavior or in the way you speak or in how you spend or give your money—if you don’t care how Jesus wants you to live in these specific, practical ways—then you don’t really want to be his apprentice. And, in fact, you may not be his disciple after all.

Disobedient disciple. The two words don’t go together. Here are two others: passive disciple. That’s what Jesus teaches us today. “My disciples are not passive; they are active. They are persistent. They are tenacious. They seek to discover the will of the Lord and then pursue it. They don’t just sit back. They act!

Have any of you been watching the newest Ken Burns’ film, *The Roosevelts*? The first episode dealt with Teddy Roosevelt. Regarding his approach to life, Teddy once wrote, “Get action. Do things; be sane; don’t fritter away your time; create, act, take a place wherever you are and be somebody; get action.”

Teddy might have liked this teaching from Jesus, because it is full of action. Did you see the verbs? Ask, Seek, Knock. Do. Enter. <sup>7</sup>“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” The Greek form actually has the meaning, “Ask, and keep on asking. Seek, and keep on seeking. Knock, and keep on knocking.” Do you hear the tenacity in this? Jesus is saying, “My heavenly Father wants you to pursue an ongoing, moment by moment relationship with Him. It always delights him to hear from you. You never get old to Him.”

People ask us, “How is Cooper doing at Whitworth?” And our answer is, honestly, “We think he’s fine.” Fact is, we hardly hear from him. I’m sure we are the only parents who have ever experienced this, but apparently there is something in the Spokane water that paralyzes the dialing finger because he never calls. We are glad for his independence; we want him to make his own life. Still, those rare times we do get a text or call from him... they are precious to us. Why? Because we love him!

The disciples of Jesus could not help but notice how tenaciously He pursued his relationship with His Father. Every morning and throughout the day, they witnessed Jesus asking and seeking and knocking—and teaching his apprentices to do the same. God loves to hear from his children, and he invites us to do so tenaciously. To ask whatever we want of Him, knowing He is going to give us all that is good for us. To seek Him in every part of life’s journey. To discover that he wants us to pound on the doors of heaven until our knuckles are raw.

I have been amazed at the way cell phones have changed the culture of communication. When we were on subways in Europe, everybody was on their phone all the time, talking or texting somebody. Every Facebook post gets immediate attention; every text. Technology has taught us what it is like to tenaciously communicate with someone.

Imagine if we talked to God that way throughout the day. And not just about the “spiritual stuff.” What if we learned to pause in the middle of our daily living: “Lord, is this a good deal? Should I hire this person? Should I buy this car? I am so mad right now; how do you want me to respond, Lord? Shall I speak to this stranger?” The Apostle Paul wrote, “Pray continually.” I have been trying to practice this since my sabbatical... thinking about God throughout the day, musing upon Him, talking to Him as if He actually cares about everything I do and actually knows something about the decisions I must make. And I am trying harder to listen to His answers.

Friday evening I was at a restaurant, and I noticed a woman sitting nearby. I sensed the Lord urging me to speak to her so I did. Pretty soon, she sat down at my table, shared about the loss of her husband, her move to Gig Harbor to be near kids, her attempt to rebuild her life. It was a sweet and unexpected conversation. I invited her to church. And it started because I am learning to ask

God, "What do you want me to do in this moment?" I'm hoping to reach a point where my conversations with God are so frequent, I become a pest. But Jesus says, "Bring it on! Your heavenly Father wants you to be tenacious in reaching out to him, because He loves to do good things for you in response."

In fact, that is the context for the most famous of Jesus' sayings, what we call the "Golden Rule." "Do to others what you would have them do to you." Actually, the Greek says, "Therefore, do to others." In other words, just as the Heavenly Father loves to give good gifts to His children, you do the same. Be actively kind to others. Make this the persistent question of your life: am I treating this person the way I would want him to treat me?" Jesus goes on to say, "You want to summarize everything taught in the Old Testament? Do this." Can you imagine the difference in our life and the lives of those around us if every single encounter we had with another person was guided by that question? Tenacious kindness...

Verbs! Action! Ask, seek, knock and do. Enter (another action word) through the narrow gate to the narrow, winding path. When we were in Oxford this summer, we were walking along a wide path in a beautiful park, along with scores of other people. We wanted to move back toward town, but there was only one gate. And it was a strange gate. You walked into a cage, stood near the back, swung a barred gate in the other direction, and then were able to enter into the narrow alley leading to town. It wasn't easy, and there was only room for one person at a time. The easy way was to continue along the nice, wide path (which, ironically, is known as "Dead Man's Walk"), but if you wanted to go to town, this narrow gate was the way.

Many think this is a passage about doctrine; the narrow gate is correct doctrine and the wide path is false doctrine. It's not. The narrow gate is simply following Jesus. The wide path is living life your own way; doing what you want to do. Being a disciple of Jesus—being an apprentice of Jesus—will mean choosing, again and again, not to walk the easiest, widest pathway before you. It will mean, rather, choosing again and again to follow Jesus on the less popular path, because we trust that He really does know where He is going and that staying with Him is the best course of life.

If you were an apprentice bricklayer or piano player and the master said, "Lay bricks this way" or "play the scales this way," how stupid would you be to say, "No thanks; I'll do it my way?" And how surprised would you be if you ended up being a lousy mason or lousy musician? We are lousy Christian apprentices (disciples) when we refuse to say to Jesus, "I trust you to teach me and lead me to where I should go, even when it seems odd or hard."

Jesus warned that it is not easy to be his disciples. What he requires of us—loving one another, loving your enemies, forgiving and doing good for those who harm you, being generous—this is not an easy way. Following Jesus means abandoning our desire to be the master of our own lives and going his narrow, but best, way.

There is nothing about this that is easy...and nothing about it that doesn't fly in the face of our culture. Everything is acceptable in our culture, except saying that not everything is acceptable. Every religion is equally good, except the religion that dares to say that not all religions are equal or good. It is hard to follow the narrow way of Jesus in this culture. In fact, the very word "narrow" is a harsh criticism today, isn't it?

The way of Jesus can cramp our style. When the way of Jesus challenges how snotty we are to our husband or kids, when the way of Jesus is to sell some of our possessions and give the money away or to buy nothing more because we have enough... when the way of Jesus says, "Do not live together before you get married because it is not God's best for you!"... when the way of Jesus says, "I want you to make the priority of being with your church family at least as high a priority as your hobbies"... that's when the gate narrows down and the way gets windy and when the apprentice of Jesus has to decide, "Will I tenaciously choose the way of Jesus in everything I do, every time?"

I got an email Monday from a godly woman whom I admire very much. She was nervous about last week's message. She grew up in a denomination that was all about trying harder and being better, and she never quite felt like she made it. She cautioned me not to lay that impossible burden upon our church. I could not agree more. If, when you hear me say "be obedient" or "be tenacious" all you hear is moralizing... all you hear is, "You have to try harder to please God... to make sure you are really saved" ...if that's what you hear, then she's right. That is a false message.

But here's the deal. She once lived in a church culture that expected too much of its people. It expected a life of holiness and obedience born out of fear of a God who is impossible to please and entirely dependent upon the effort of the poor disciple who can never be sure of her salvation. But that is not our culture. The American evangelical culture expects too little of its people. Ours is a culture where we expect to be a Christian without being disciples, expect to be saved without being obedient and expect to grow without making any effort.

I am **not** saying that by our efforts—by trying harder, by being tenacious—we will earn a fickle God's favor and a shot at salvation. But I am saying—and I'm using the words of Jesus here—that those who really know him, really love him, really trust him as Lord, really want to be His apprentices are going to be obedient and are going to be tenacious in learning to live His way.

"Get action." That was Teddy Roosevelt's odd way of saying, "Live life! Go after it!" Isn't that what Jesus is saying when he concludes his Sermon on the Mount with, "Ask... seek... knock... do... enter." If you want to follow me, follow me! If you want to be my apprentice, do the things I do! If you claim to be my disciple, then

live the way I live. Not to earn my love, you already have that, but because my way of living is real life, and I want you to have real life!"

## **Sermon Questions**

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. When you think about being an "apprentice" of Jesus, what does that suggest to you about your own life? Do you believe that Jesus wants the best for your life or not? That he is worth imitating or not? Discuss.
  2. Identify all the verbs in this passage. Since a preacher normally picks his concluding comments carefully, what do think Jesus is trying to emphasize as he concludes the Sermon on the Mount?
  3. Look at 9-12. What is Jesus' assessment of our human condition? (verse 11) Why is that verse all the more surprising because of that assessment? Why do you think that Jesus tags the Golden Rule on to the end of this passage? ("Therefore, in everything do to others, etc.)
  4. What does that narrow gate represent? In what way are you choosing the wide gate and easy path.