The Importance Of Knowing
Matthew 10:1-20
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, June 15, 2008

Listen to this parable I remember hearing years ago.

There was a village near a rocky coastline. During stormy weather it wasn't unusual for passing boats to crash against the rocks and sink. As a result many lives were lost.

The people in the village, awakened to the crisis, pooled their resources and built a lighthouse on a cliff and a life-saving station below on the beach. The villagers took turns standing watch every night and they all pledged to man the life boats whenever the alarm bell sounded. As a result many lives were saved.

As the years passed someone decided the life-saving station was the ideal place to hold parties. They voted to put in a kitchen and a social hall. Several years later another decision was made: the life-saving station became a private club and more money was raised to upgrade and redecorate the building.

Unfortunately fewer people volunteered to stand watch in the lighthouse at night and when the alarm sounded even fewer people answered the call to man the life boats. As a result, many lives were lost.

For about six months my benediction (or last word) that sends us out from worship back into the world is lifted from this morning's passage in Matthew's Gospel. This is Gene Peterson's unique translation: "Go out to the lost, confused people right here in your own neighborhood and tell them God's Kingdom is here. Heal the sick, raise the dead, touch the untouchables and kick out demons… And don't worry about what you will say. The Spirit of your Father will give you the words."

I have repeated this benediction these many months to keep us focused on our Vision Statement, "Bringing Christ to People."

Last Sunday's sermon warned we can't isolate ourselves from problematic people. Following Jesus' example we are to befriend the lost, confused people in our neighborhood, remembering we too become lost and confused whenever we forget we are here to follow in the footsteps of the saints and apostles who gave their lives to Christ and his Kingdom.

Let's revisit selected verses from this morning's passage:

"Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease… These twelve men were sent out by Jesus with the following instructions… Do not carry any…money in your pockets…or an extra shirt. A worker should be given what he needs.

"When you enter a village…look for someone willing to welcome you…if some home or town will not welcome you…leave that place and shake the dust off your feet…

"Listen I am sending you out like sheep to a pack of wolves. You must be as cautious as snakes and gentle as doves… Everyone will hate you because of me."

I'm sure at least one of the disciples was screaming inside, "Hey, I didn't sign up for this! I'm not sure I'm cut out for this sort of work."

Funny thing: Matthew says absolutely nothing about either the success or failure of the twelve disciples' first solo mission tour which makes me wonder. Was Matthew guilty of an over site or a cover-up? Either way we are left to draw our own conclusions.

Question: What determines the success or failure of anything you try to do? Granted whether you succeed or fail at anything is often determined by circumstances beyond your control. Even so, there are three things you can incorporate into your thinking that will empower you to accomplish your purpose and God's plan for your life.

Here are the things all Christians should know:

I) Know Yourself
II) Know Your Purpose
III) Know God's Vision For Your Life

I) Know Yourself

Self knowledge is essential. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

"Who am I?" Answer that question correctly and you're on your way, but be careful, you are much more than your role in your family. You are not just a mother or a father, a sister or a brother. Nor is your identity based on your profession. You are not just a business man, a teacher or a computer programmer. And don't get too philosophical by saying, "I think, therefore I am." That will just leave you even more confused.

So where do you go to know yourself completely? Start with the Bible. The scriptures reveal you are created in God's image, with an eternal soul.

God is your Father and God created you to be his precious child through his Son Jesus. And yes, when you believe in God's Son, Jesus becomes your brother, Lord and Savior. So when you answer Christ's call to the servant lifestyle, and as you invite Jesus deeper into your life your new identity emerges. You are a child of God and a disciple of Christ and you can conclude along with Bonheoffer, "…whoever I am Lord, I know I belong to you." Know Yourself.

II) Know Your Purpose

Most Presbyterians know the question from the Westminster Catechism, "What is the chief end of man?" and the answer: "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." Imagine that, our starchy Presbyterian ancestors taught your divinely inspired purpose is to enjoy God.

So your ultimate purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Let's break that down. How do you glorify God? When you obey your thirst for God and do what God requires. You see, when you obey God, your life becomes in sync with God's life. When you ignore your thirst for God there's really very little to enjoy, because you are cutting yourself off from the source.

Let's put it still another way, you were created to give God pleasure. Think about that. God made you, so he can enjoy you. So, are you living up to your purpose, are God and you enjoying each other or is there a wall of your own making keeping you from each other?

Let's try putting it one more way. Your main purpose in life is to love God with all your heart so you can then love your neighbor and yourself.

Which brings us to the third and last important thing on the Christian's To Do List.

III) Know God's Vision for Your Life.

If you want to keep the greatest commandment, Love God, your neighbor and yourself, then you need to know God's plan for your life. Your job as a Christian is to figure out how God wants you to spend your time, talent and treasure according to his plan.

Consider this, God created you to be like no one else who ever lived. You are one of a kind, no one else has your unique personality, gifts and talents; and no one else was created to accomplish what only you can accomplish. So, yes God created you to enjoy you, but to also make a unique contribution to the world so, are you spending your life for God or are you wasting your life?

To answer that question correctly you must first discern God's vision for your life and your role in your family, career, community, and your church. How is God calling you to nurture your family and to give yourself to your neighbor in need? What are you doing to heal the sick, raise the dead, touch the untouchables and kick out demons?

The parable of the Light House warns how things go terribly wrong when we never learn our true identity as God's child, never discover our purpose because we've denied our thirst for God and then forget we are put on this earth and led to this faith community to accomplish something important, something only we can do for Christ and his Kingdom.

God planted Babcock Church in this community to be a life-saving station. If we forget this, many lives will be lost. If we remember this, many lives will be saved.

This morning Christ is asking you and me to consider the implications if we forget our mission, but to also realize Christ's joy and pleasure when we remember Who we are, Why we are here and What God is calling us to do through our ministry to each other and our neighbors out there in the mission field.

May God be with us and use us to make the Gospel real to those who need it most.