# A Sermon Rev. Thomas V. Abbott 9/16/18

**"Habits of the Disciple-Making Church"**

**Scripture Passages: 1) Matthew 7:21-27**

**2) Matthew 6:1-21**

**3) Matthew 25:31-46**

**Setting the Stage:** I hope our discussion over the last few months about discipleship, about being followers of the Jesus’ Way has been helpful to your journey of faith. Over the last six weeks we have talked about six characteristics that develop in our lives as we follow the Jesus’ Way. We have discussed the qualities of: A heart for Christ alone, A mind transformed by the Word, Arms of love, Knees for prayer, A voice to speak the Good News, and A Spirit of Servanthood and Stewardship. I am grateful for Sue’s willingness to take on the challenging but empowering topic of “A Spirit of Servanthood and Stewardship” during worship last week.

This week and next week we want to be considering how we actually go about nurturing these qualities in our lives. I wanted all of us to have The Message translation of our Scripture passages in hand today, because I think the straight forward translation is helpful. We began our service reading some verses from Matthew chapter 7, which as I mentioned is the ending of Jesus’ powerful Sermon on the Mount. We begin by reading, “Knowing the correct password—saying ‘Master, Master,’ for instance—isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—doing what my Father wills.”

**Leave it to Beaver:** I grew up watching “Leave it to Beaver”. As you probably know, the show was about the stereotypical Clever family, which included the parents Ward and June, and their two sons Wally and Theodore, known as Beaver. Wally was the older son and he had a friend named Eddy Haskel.

If you remember, Eddie, he was the kid who was incredibly polite to Ward and June. He always said things like: “I hope you had a good day Mrs. Cleaver”, “Thank you Mr. Cleaver”, “That is so thoughtful of you Mrs. Cleaver.” But as soon as he wasn’t around the parent’s he was a total jerk. Eddie specialized in knowing the right “password” while the actions or the living of his life was the exact opposite.

Eddie Haskel vividly illustrates the often-great divide that exists between what we hope about our lives, what we express about our lives, what we hope others believe about our lives and how we actually live our lives. For most of us there is some disparity, incongruity between how in our hearts we want to live and how we actually live.

For me, all I have to do is reflect on my relationship with Deb. In my heart I want to love her really well. In my heart I want to love her beautifully. I have great intentions. But the fact is, my daily actions often fall short of the ideal that I have in my head and my heart about loving her. I have that very real struggle before me every day, and obviously this disparity also exists with my neighbors, the homeless person on the corner, people presently being affected by hurricanes and typhoons.

So, if that is the case with our human relationships, then if we are honest, when we consider our relationship with God there is probably some disparity between how we wish our God relationship would be and how our God relationship actually is. What we want to be thinking about today and next Sunday is that reality.

**Don’t Beat Yourself Up:** There are a number of ways that we typically respond to these emotional disparities in our lives. We ignore them. We lie about them. We feel paralyzed by them. We beat ourselves up about them.

I am pretty sure in my relationship with Deb that she doesn’t want me to choose any of those responses to the disparity between how I hope to love her and how I actually end up loving her. I am pretty sure that Deb wants me to just keep trying.

I think we can be extremely confident the same is true of God. God doesn’t want us to ignore our relationship with our Creator. God doesn’t want us to lie about our relationship. God doesn’t want us to feel paralyzed. God doesn’t want us to beat ourselves up. God doesn’t want our relationship to be fake, or forced, or manipulated, or driven by guilt, or fear.

God does want us to be growing in our awareness about our relationship, the motives behind our relationship. And God wants us to be growing in our intentionality for our relationship. As Jesus said, “What is required is serious obedience – doing what my Father wills.”

Now when we think about those two words, “Serious obedience” we may find those words put next to each other, daunting, depressing, life-sucking. Again, that is our Triune God’s last desire. God, through Jesus’ teaching, wants us to know that “serious obedience” to the Jesus way of living is the best way to live, the most joyful way to live, the most rewarding way to live, the most fulfilling way to live, the most life-giving and life-producing way to live.

Jesus sought to illustrate this at the end of the Sermon on the Mount with the parable about the two builders, the builder who built her house on rock and the builder who built his house on sand. The house built on the rock stood through the realities of life while the house built on the sand came crashing down.

Jesus said, “These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on.” We have a God who wants the very best for us, for our neighbors, for our churches, for our communities, for all of creation. We want to be people who are growing in our trust of that truth, and taking action in our lives and in our churches that reflect that growing trust in the beautiful way of life God calls us into.

**Matthew 6:** When we immerse ourselves in the teaching of Jesus we begin to embody this beautiful way of life.

A few minutes ago we read a chunk of Matthew chapter 6, the middle section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus instructs us there about our motives: our motives behind our caring for others, our motives for prayer, our motives for acts of spiritual discipline, our motives for sharing our God-given resources with others.

We live in a culture filled with twisted motives. As people who are following the Jesus’ Way we want to be diligent in untwisting the motives behind the actions of our lives. We want to live lives that are motivated by humble service.

Glenn McDonald writes: “The world is disillusioned with Christians. Jesus told his followers that their lives should be characterized by love for enemies, but we have defined success as regular attendance at Bible studies. Jesus said that we should proactively extend compassion to our neediest neighbors, but we have poured our greatest energy into the battle of hymns versus praise choruses. Jesus proclaimed that our unity would signal his existence to a watching world, but we have elevated the recitation of right theology to the highest priority.” In the church, unfortunately, we often focus our attention and put our energies in the wrong areas, in places other than humble service, loving God, loving neighbor.

**Matthew 25:31-46:** Listen to one more section of Jesus’ teaching about this beautiful way of life. **Read Matthew 25:31-46.**

**Conclusion:** “Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.”

When we immerse ourselves in Jesus’ teaching we realize that churches often lose their way. We all bemoan the fact that much of the American mainline and Catholic church is in decline. Ben Campbell Johnson in his book, 95 Theses for the Church: Finding Direction Today wrote this as Thesis #15: “Mainline denominations are experiencing the judgment of God intended for our correction and redirection.”

Most congregations that are experiencing decline try another program, they try to copy some other church, they try a new pastor. But most of the time congregations are in decline simply because they have lost sight of what it is to be the church, and that is to be a group of people committed to growing as disciples of the Jesus’ Way, and inviting others to join them for the journey.

As we choose to build our lives on the rock of Jesus’ Word, it will transform our lives, our churches, and our world.

As we reflect on our life together as a congregation, does our community life focus most of its energy on helping one another grow in our discipleship. As a congregation are we nurturing a community life that fosters a disciple-making church?

Who is your Lord? Who are you? Who is your Barnabas? Who is your Timothy? Where is your Antioch? Where is your Macedonia? As a congregation are we building the relationships that will help us build our life on the rock of Jesus’ Word, and develop the beautiful qualities that define discipleship to Jesus?

This week I challenge each of us to truly take some time and immerse ourselves in these Biblical passages. Let them shape us and form us. Let us commit ourselves to being a disciple-making community. Let us be a people that builds our lives on the rock, we will find such a life to be more beautiful, and joyful, and fulfilling than we ever imagined life could be. Amen.