



“THE DIFFERENCE IN KNOWING IS DOING”

REV. BRADLEY L. DEHAVEN

ST. ANDREW’S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Matthew 7:21-29

There are so many passages of scripture in the Bible that seem to be troubling, or disturbing, if you will, and a good majority of them seem to come in the Gospels. The words and teachings of Jesus – they trouble us because at first glance they may seem perplexing. They may say one thing and then turn right around and say the exact opposite. And it’s confusing. It’s easy for us to get perplexed by it – discouraged by reading scripture.

Today’s reading is another one of those examples. At first it says that Jesus is teaching his disciples that “not everyone who calls me ‘Lord’ will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the will of my father.” And that makes sense. But then there’s that second part, you remember it? He says, “Truly on that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy, did we not cast out demons, did we not do many deeds of power – IN YOUR NAME?’” And then Jesus says, “I tell you, Get away from me. I don’t know you.” And you think, “Wait a minute! Now He just said, that its not just calling you Lord, but doing the will of God, and these folks are doing that, and they’re doing it in his name, so... Wait a minute here! What’s going on?”

Seems that this passage of scripture has more of a bearing on it than what we first read. Jesus is teaching his disciples what discipleship is really about. What believing really means. What it looks like. How it acts. The way it carries itself in society. There are so many folks who know about Jesus... I’m thinking of all the folks in seminary that I’ve known for years – the professors – and there’s probably more than just a few of them who know all about Jesus, but don’t know him. And there’s a difference between the two, isn’t there? There’s a difference between knowing about something and actually knowing something. When you have a relationship with someone, it’s more than just knowing about them.

My father used to talk about that. He said that he had a relationship, no wait, I need to rephrase that...He was in a relationship, no I need to rephrase that too! How shall we say this? He knew Minnie Pearl firsthand! They’d had several conversations. Now, on first glance, you’d think that they actually knew each other. No, they met at an intersection in Nashville. He was coming one way, and she was going the other way, and she said, “After you!” And he said, “no, no, no, after you!” and that was their conversation! (I pick on my father because I can, and he’s not here to defend himself!)

But I think there’s something about knowing someone and just knowing about them. And I think that’s what the heart of this is about. Jesus was talking about truly being known by God and being known by Jesus the Christ and just knowing Jesus. It’s not enough to just call Jesus “Lord,” there’s got to be more. And that’s why he says, “Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord’ will enter the kingdom. But only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.”

Well, that’s a perplexing verb. “Doing the will of God.” When you read this, it says, “And on that day there will be many who will say, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?’” That’s doing! “Did we not cast out demons in your name?” That’s doing! “Did we not do many great deeds of power in your name?” That’s doing! And Jesus says, “I don’t know you! I don’t know you! Go away from me.”

The issue here is in that verb “to do.” What does that mean? What does that look like? We don’t get much of it there in that first paragraph that we read this morning but I think there’s a hint to it in that second paragraph – a strong hint. He kind of elucidates it a little bit better. He says,

“everyone then who hears these words of mine, then and ACTS on them will be like the wise man who built his house on rock.” Having a solid foundation means everything. But you know, I don’t think Jesus is really talking about construction here. I don’t think he’s talking about building codes. I don’t think he’s really speaking about facilities maintenance and design. I think he’s really talking about a life that’s been transformed – turned around – turned Godward.

Several years ago, there was a United Methodist Church, and I want to say it was in Louisiana, but it might have been in Mississippi, I can’t remember. I think it was on Palm Sunday that a tornado swept through the church during Sunday School. It took several lives. One of which was the young daughter of the Pastor. And so between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, that pastor had not only suffered not only a great deal of damage to her church, but had several funerals and had undergone a great deal of mourning, including her own family, at the loss of her daughter. The building was totaled – it was a brick building, by the way. There was no roof, there were no walls, there was virtually nothing left but a slab and a lot of debris. But on that Easter Sunday, they got together and they met and they heard her proclaim through the midst of tears that the foundation has been shaken, and the rains came and the winds blew and the church may have fallen down as a building, but the Church of Jesus Christ was still very much alive, because it was based upon faith and not upon mortar and bricks. And the courage that it took for that pastor to proclaim that, even in the midst of her own loss, was quite profound. I think she had a glimpse of what Jesus is trying to talk about here. That the faith of one that is built upon the rock of Christ can never be shaken, can never fall. The winds are going to come, and the rains are going to fall, and the floods are going to rise, but the faith will continue to keep it strong and stable.

But the foolish person builds upon sand. They build upon those things that shift from time to time. And you look in our society and there’s an awful lot of things that shift. Cultural attitudes shift. Norms shift. What is acceptable and unacceptable changes frequently. The shifting sands of society. If that’s what your faith is based upon, if that’s what your life is built upon, when the rains come, the winds blow and the floods rise, great will be your fall.

And so we are tied into this verb, that Only those who DO the will of my Father and those who hear Christ’s words and ACT on them seems to be referring to that transformation process, that when you hear these words its not just that they are good words to hear! You know, these are really great words!! “Jesus, Great sermon!” I don’t know about you all, but if I had preached this sermon, I’d see more yawns and closed eyelids! It’s not a great homiletical exercise! It’s kind of a strange sermon. But when you hear the words of truth from the very mouth of truth, it transforms you. It changes you. It completes you. And you are not the same.

And when you build your faith upon that rock, upon that truth, upon the living Christ, you KNOW Christ. And it changes you. You become a different person inside and out. And the world notices. And the world is going to send the weather your way – rain, wind and floods and everything to try to destroy you. But if you are in the faith, you truly know Christ, and you are doing God’s will, you won’t be shaken. You won’t be stirred. You won’t be moved. You’ll be solid and firm upon the rock. And at that point, Jesus will hear you, and will say, “You, I know. I know you.” Because the difference between knowing is doing! It’s being transformed and being alive in Christ, and knowing that that’s the core of your being, that that’s the foundation upon which you have built your life. Your life will change dramatically, and the world around you will change dramatically too. That’s the faith we have of living in the kingdom. As a Pentecost people, a people of the fire and of the spirit – we live differently and we breathe differently, and we move differently because we’re God’s people.

And we don’t just know about the Gospel, we become the living Gospel – the good news! Our lives proclaim Christ risen. We’re changed. That’s the rock upon which we’re built.

It's interesting that our trustees have already been notified – all of them probably more than once this morning – about our new guttering system. How many of you like that? We're trying to catch water in a different way our here! I don't know if you've noticed or not... Facilities may be falling apart, but its not the building, folks. It's the people. We are the church. We are the foundation. We will survive, we are thriving and people will know, and more importantly, Christ will know us.

It's not just knowing the name of Christ. It's living like Christ. It's being like Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.