

“Final Words; Final Wish”

John 14:12-27

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Our attention is drawn this morning to the Upper Room in Jerusalem where Jesus and the disciples have gathered to observe the Passover meal. At some point during the meal, Jesus began talking about leaving them.

“My little children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now. Where I am going, you cannot come.” (John 13:33)

This created a great deal of confusion and led to several questions from the disciples. Peter, Thomas, Philip and Judas interrupted Jesus in their attempts to get more details.

Peter: “Where are you going?” “Why can’t I follow you?” (John 13: 37-37)

Thomas: “We don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

Philip: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” (John 14:8)

Judas: “But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” (John 14:22)

Jesus sensed their anxiety and understood why they were disturbed. At the same time, he knew he would do them a great disservice if he did not warn them about what was getting ready to happen.

The disciples knew Jesus’ life was in danger. Some of them even tried to talk him out of going to Jerusalem this particular year to observe Passover.

They were aware of the religious leaders' contempt for Jesus and their desire to silence his prophetic voice. Jesus had, after all, exposed their hypocrisy and insincerity.

He openly criticized them for caring more about their own welfare than the wellbeing of the people they were called to serve. He accused them of being addicted to power, prestige, attention and money instead of revealing the nature of God and doing the will of God.

Talk like this will always meet with strong resistance. The disciples, however, were not prepared for how far the authorities would go to separate Jesus from his devoted followers. They had no idea Jesus would be arrested before the night was over, and he would be crucified the next day.

This is why much of the Farewell Discourse in the Upper Room rattled the disciples and led to so much confusion and fear. It is also why Jesus talked not only about his departure that evening, but assured them his arrest and crucifixion would not have the final word in his life or theirs.

There was more, much more to come for him and them. Jesus wanted them to know this beforehand, and he wanted them to understand their good work would continue.

In our text, which is a small portion of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus talked about this work. It was imperative, he told them, that they continue doing what he had been doing and had trained them to do.

After his crucifixion and resurrection, they were to go back into the villages and homes of the ordinary people who were dealing with all kinds of problems and struggling to survive. They were to listen to their stories and respond to their needs with the same mercy Jesus showed them.

They were to teach people about the God who loved them so much he sent his own Son to be their advocate in the pursuit of justice and peace.

They were to model, as Jesus did, the kind of life that reflected the heart and nature of God by being honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, fair, unselfish, sacrificial, courageous, compassionate, merciful, forgiving and generous.

These were the things Jesus did and what Jesus wanted them to continue to do after he was gone. His earthly ministry was ending but theirs was just beginning. It would soon be time for them to make circles of friends everywhere they went, as he did, and to make hope visible to all they met.

To help the disciples do these things after Jesus' departure, he assured them his heavenly Father would send another Counselor to guide and to empower them, the Holy Spirit. God would never leave them on earth as orphans. The Holy Spirit would live in their hearts and, like Jesus, be their constant companion.

You know what intrigues me the most about today's text? It is Jesus' insistence the disciples obey his commands and be faithful to continue the work he began after he was gone.

I sense Jesus was greatly concerned about their future and the future of the work he was calling them to continue. It was one thing for the disciples to follow Jesus while he was there with them to instruct, guide, admonish and encourage them. He knew, though, it would be quite different when he was no longer beside them.

No longer would he be there, much like a coach in the middle of a hard fought game, to point out what they needed to do and to correct their mistakes. They were going to have to step up and take initiative and control. This would require great strength, passion and discipline.

Like Jesus, they would face difficult challenges, strong resistance, numerous distractions and powerful temptations to back off or to turn away. How would they handle these trying times? Would they remain faithful or abandon this divine mission?

Jesus had to make it clear what he expected, and he did.

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)

“If you love me, you will do what I command.” (John 14: 15)

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. (John 14:21a)

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching, (John 14:23a)

Let these words sink in. Picture Jesus looking each disciple in the eye, calling their name and saying to each one, “Peter...James...John...If you love me, you will do what I command.”

Now, picture Jesus doing this with you.

What do you hear him saying to you? I’ll tell you what I hear him saying to me in light of our theme for 2018: **FBC263 A Call to Discipleship.**

The call to follow Jesus is a call to take every decision seriously. Decisions have long and short term consequences that are good or bad for us and others.

Identify these consequences and weigh them carefully. More is at stake than our personal needs or desires. Much more.

The only time decisions are about you and you alone is at Baskin Robbins. When you cross over that threshold, it is all about satisfying your taste buds.

When you step back over that threshold, no decision is just about you. Don’t act like you are in the ice cream store when you are not.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to believe Jesus wants the best for us and those around us. We must have enough faith in Jesus to believe he would never deceive us or lead us astray. To the contrary, we must believe every decision Jesus leads us to make is with our best interest in mind in light of what God is doing around us and can do with us.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to recognize Jesus’ way of living is best for us. It is to be confident that Jesus’ way of arranging values and priorities, handling problems, dealing with

temptation, resolving disputes, experiencing true joy and building healthy communities is far superior to anything the world may pitch our way.

We must see the flaws in every alternative vision for a full and abundant life compared to Jesus' way and know for sure it will not accomplish the hopes and dreams Jesus has for us during our time on earth.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to live by the highest ideals and standards. Jesus did not settle for mediocrity and neither should we.

At all times, in all places and under all circumstances, the call to follow Jesus is a call to choose good over evil, right over wrong, generosity over greed, people over possessions, honesty over deceit, others over self, sacrifice over self-indulgence, justice over injustice, community over corruption, healing over hurting, hope over despair, love over hate, peace over violence, life over death and God's way over ours.

The call to follow Jesus is also a call to confront evil, right wrong, lift up the lowly, find the forgotten, make room for the disenfranchised, liberate the oppressed, heal the sick, feed the hungry, enable people to achieve their potential, forgive people who make mistakes, give people another chance to turn their life around, teach people how to live peaceably with one another and inspire people to build bridges of goodwill, understanding, hope and reconciliation instead of erecting walls of suspicion and hate.

This is the work Jesus was engaged in and the work he has called us to continue. It begins by living by the highest ideals and standards. We must show people the way, as Jesus did, not merely tell them about it.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to admit mistakes, reconsider bad decisions, change our minds, ask for forgiveness, repair the damage we have caused and move in a new direction. Jesus does not expect perfection from us, but he does expect us to put down our defenses, confess our sins and humbly repent. When we do, we'll receive the same respect, compassion and mercy the early disciples did.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to rely upon the Holy Spirit to enlighten, encourage, strengthen and guide us. Being obedient to Jesus and faithful to our calling to be the presence of Christ in a broken world is a big challenge.

None of us has a sufficient amount of strength and determination to overcome the resistance and temptation we'll face. Jesus knew this when he spoke to his disciples that night in the Upper Room, asking repeatedly for their faithfulness.

So did God, and this is why Jesus told the disciples he would ask his heavenly Father to send the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower them. Never would they be alone and without help. The Spirit would remind them all that Jesus taught and give them the strength and courage they needed to be the presence of Christ to others in their daily walk.

God will do this for us as well. This is why our faithfulness need not be dependent solely upon our intentions and promises, but also on a strong reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

Who has modeled or is modeling this level of obedience and faithfulness for you? Who needs you to model it for them?

As I pondered these questions last week, I wondered who Jesus looked to for inspiration and guidance. I think I know two people he would mention, Mary and Joseph.

Both of them set aside their plans to follow the God's lead. They offered God their lives and futures as they discerned where God was at work in this world. They chose obedience and faithfulness over security and certainty.

No wonder Jesus did, too.

How about you?