

“Applying Christ’s Word”

John 8:31-36

Last weekend Pastor Puls encouraged us to do two things. Does anyone remember what those two things were? That’s right. First thing was to read in the Gospel of John chapters 6,7, and 8. And the second was to bring your Bibles to worship. How many of you read the chapters? Remember, you are in God’s house so be honest. How many of you have your Bibles with you today? Good. While it’s not necessary to have them during the sermon, it certainly will help. And if you don’t have yours and your neighbor does, ask if he or she is willing to share.

The translation I am using is the ESV- the English Standard Version. You may have an NIV or an RSV, or even a KJV- and that’s ok. Some words may be slightly different but the overall message is the same.

Today as we continue our sermon series on Discipleship, asking ourselves what it really means and looks like to be a follower of Jesus Christ, we look at the topic of “applying Christ’s Word.” For the past two weeks, our focus was on learning Christ’s Word, remember? This book is the story of Christ. It all points to him. But it is also our story as well. We need to learn what Christ says because the world tells us a different story doesn’t it? Christ wants us to stay with him and not walk away like many did in his day and like so many continue to do today. And in order to stay with him, our faith needs to continue to grow. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, that’s what happens when we learn Christ Word- our faith grows stronger.

And what do we do with growing faith? Do we keep it to ourselves? Do we check it off as something we’ve always wanted to accomplish, like just another item on our bucket list? Ok, let’s see, “I’ve run a marathon; I’ve travelled to Spain; I’ve take a photography class; and oh, I’ve learned Christ’s Word.”

No. We apply Christ’s word in our lives. And this is where it gets hard, I have to tell you. Running a marathon is like walk in the park compared to actually applying Christ’s word in our lives. And while this is certainly tough today, it was tough in Jesus’ day as well. If you did your homework, you saw some examples of the challenges that arose in people’s minds as Jesus spoke and how they reacted. John provides us some fascinating dialogue in chapters 6-8. Did you catch any of it?

Take for example John Chapter 6:35. If you have your bibles, open them up to John chapter 6. Jesus the previous day had fed the five thousand. The people liked this guy mainly because he gave them food- real food. The next day, the crowd is looking for Jesus. They want more of that free food. And what does Jesus say? In 6:35, he says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." I can just see the crowd's reaction. "Huh?" "What?" "I just want some bread not some philosophical saying that makes little to no sense. I'm hungry!"

And how about this one? Further down in chapter 6 vs. 41, Jesus says to the bickering Jews, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." No, they said. "You are Joseph and Mary's boy. We know your parents."

How about chapter 7? Jesus in fact knew he was a wanted man but he kept talking. In verse 14, he is in the temple teaching and people are marveling. "How is it that this man has learning, they asked? He has never studied. And Jesus answers in vs. 16. "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me." What? "What is wrong with the guy? "Why is he talking like this?"

In all serious, were some of these reactions not similar to our own reactions about Jesus today? Some of us just want the bread from Jesus. Not the spiritual bread of life but the tangible things from him as if he is some kind of genie in a bottle. "Hey Jesus, if I follow you will you give me more?" Some of us still act like Jesus was just another son born to normal parents who grew up to be a good preacher and teacher but the life giving bread from heaven? Maybe or maybe not. The verdict is still out.

But that's not what how Christ wants us or anyone else to treat his word. Look together with me at our text today from John Chapter 8. Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." If you live in it, by it; if you wake up to it, spend your days with it, go to sleep with it. If you let his word be part of everyday life whatever life may look like that day- you will know the truth and that truth will set you free. That, my friends, is way more than just learning a few verses from the Bible. That is applying the living and active words of Christ. But it's not easy to get to this point is it?

Reading the rest of John Chapter 8, we see so many struggling to grasp the depth and most of all the authority of Jesus' words. Some went so far as to say that he must have been possessed by a demon (vs 52). People just didn't talk like Jesus talked unless

something was severely wrong. And many rebelled. They just couldn't get who this man was or at least who he claimed to be. But we know. He is God in the flesh, the promised Christ. And still, even for us who have learned from his word who he really is and confess our faith in him, we, at times, wrestle with applying his words in our lives don't we? I know how hard this can be. Our nature is to rebel and apply our own words or someone else's words. It can be a real struggle. That was the case for many Jesus was speaking to in the Gospels and it was the case for a young Augustinian Monk over 500 years ago.

That young monk of course was Martin Luther. You would think if a person willfully gives up the promising future of practicing law in favor of the regimented life of the monastery, if they didn't have this Christ thing figured out at the beginning, they would after a few months right? These men were sheltered. They prayed, studied the Bible, ate and then prayed, studied and ate day after day. On the surface, it may have looked like young Martin was learning and applying Christ's word. But in those early days he wasn't applying. He was only learning. As knowledgeable as he was about the Bible, he struggled to apply Christ's words to his life. In fact, the more he learned the more he actually despised God. He asked the questions many of us probably ask. "Who can do this stuff? "Who can actually keep all God's commandments?" This tormented Luther. He tried and tried to please God by going to great extremes to get God's attention but in his mind, he continued to fail. The smallest sin only added to the overbearing guilt that he already had. He questioned how he could ever get right with God.

But as he studied and learned he came across these words from Paul in Romans Chapter 3. Turn to Romans in your bibles or just turn over your bulletin and read with me the words from verses 23 and 24. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." We are right with God not because of what we do to please him but because of our faith in what he did for us! Through Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, he provides us with redemption. It wasn't as if Martin Luther had never read these words. He knew them. He just never understood how to apply them.

But Luther came to trust, believe and rejoice in the truth of Christ and what it meant in his life as a redeemed child of God through his faith alone and this truth really did set him free. (Expand) And the same, I hope, is true for you and me.

Plenty of us here struggle with guilt over past sins don't we? Plenty of us like Martin Luther, question a loving God when there is so much pain in the world. But Luther not

only learned but applied the truth that set him free. He learned to see life through the cross of Jesus Christ. And the same has to be true for us in order to truly apply Christ's words. And it comes down to this: We don't have to get God's attention; we already have it because of our faith in Christ who got his attention by dying for our sins. And because of the one who sacrificed himself, the one relationship we could never repair no matter what we do, has been restored.

Think about how much this means. To know about Christ is one thing but to apply his saving words and follow our loving God who has set us free is another. And it's a life of freedom even in the hardest of times. "Abide in my word, Jesus said, and you are truly my disciples." That's what he wants from us. Turn to his words and apply them to every area of your life because they are the most important words of all. **Amen.**