

Sermon for October 9 2005

Luke 6:12-19

"Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry"

Introduction

This week we are beginning our sermon series for 2005 - 2006. Between now and June we are going to be thinking about what it means to be followers of Jesus. Our motto for the year is: "We are growing passionate disciples who are building a passionate church." Ruthy and I will be using a series of eight geometric figures, known as life shapes, to help you better understand what it means to be disciples of Jesus. We hope that these visual images help to convey what we are teaching in such a way that the concepts we are learning will be reinforced and better remembered by the use of the life shapes. Lifeshapes is designed to equip us for kingdom life by linking the discipleship principles of Jesus to eight memorable images. It helps to form the vocabulary that expresses the theology and daily life of a disciple of Jesus, painting a clear picture through which individuals can gain a greater understanding of what God intends to do in our personal lives, in the church and in the world.

Lifeshapes is a way to teach a few key concepts that will make us into life long learners. Disciples are those who have a new framework of truth, enabling them to build biblical principles into their lives and grow together in authentic community. When lifeshapes works under the empowering of the Holy Spirit we can make disciples who in turn make other disciples, thus building community in the process.

It is discipleship that is our theme this year and so let's get started.

The Meaning of Discipleship

The word *discipleship* and the word *discipline* are the same word. Once you have made the choice to say, "Yes, I want to follow Jesus," the question is, "What disciplines will help me remain faithful to that choice?" If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we are called to live a disciplined life.

In the spiritual life, the word discipline means "the effort to create some space in which God can act." Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on. In the spiritual life we want to cultivate a place in our inner most being that is like a prairie field and a prairie sky. There is lots of space there. Or it might be better captured for us by the topography of the mountaintop.

The Bible teaches that there are three disciplines important for us to remain faithful, so we not only become disciples, but also remain disciples. These disciplines are contained in the gospel passage from Luke six that was read earlier. It is a passage that speaks about discipline. The disciplines it elucidates are those of

- Solitude (Verse 12)
- Community (Verses 13 - 16)
- Ministry (17-19)

We can better understand these disciplines by looking at our first life shape. In the triangle below you will notice that there are words located at the three angles. "Up, "In" and "Out". These correspond to the three disciplines of "Solitude, Community and Ministry"

As a church we are intended to be living out all three of these disciplines, both individually and corporately. The more fully we live out our life in solitude, community and ministry the more fully we will embody here at St. Augustine's what God means for this church fellowship to be.

A Church community needs to hold these three in balance, just as the Flames need to be balanced. Daryl Sutter wants a team that has strong offence, consistent defense and a goalie who can shut the door on those flying pucks. The more fully the team is able to do this the better their prospects will be of meeting the Sports Illustrated predictions of Stanley Cup Champions for the 2005 - 2006 season. If they are weak in any one of these three areas,

this diminishes their hopes, and ours for a celebration next June that will see Calgary explode into a sea of red along 17th Avenue.

The same is true for us as a congregation. It is as we keep these disciplines of solitude, community and ministry in balance that we will be able to more fully live the kingdom life.

I want to take a couple of minutes now to speak of these three in a more general way. Then on the 16th, 23rd and 31st of October we will take time to look at each of them individually:

Solitude

12 At about that same time he climbed a mountain to pray. He was there all night in prayer before God.

Solitude is being with God and God alone. Is there any space for that in your life? Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to

let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that

voice resound in your whole being. Who am I? I am the beloved. That's the voice Jesus heard when he came out of the Jordan River: "You are my beloved; on you my favor rests." And Jesus says to you and to me that we are loved as he is loved. That same voice is there for you. When you are not claiming that voice, you cannot walk freely in this world.

Jesus listened to that voice all the time, and he was able to walk right through life. People were applauding him, laughing at him; praising him and rejecting him; calling "Hosanna!" and calling "Crucify!" But in the midst of that, Jesus knew one thing—I am the beloved; I am God's favorite one. He clung to that voice.

There are many other voices speaking—loudly: "Prove that you are the beloved." "Prove you're worth something." "Prove you have any contribution to make." "Do something relevant." "Be sure you make a name for yourself."

"At least have some power—then people will love you; then people will say you're wonderful, you're great."

These voices are so strong in this world. These were the voices Jesus heard right after he heard "You are my beloved." Another voice said, "Prove you are the beloved. Do something. Change these stones into bread. Be sure you're famous. Jump from the temple, and you will be known. Grab some power so you have real influence. Don't you want some influence? Isn't that why you came?" Jesus said, "No, I don't have to prove anything. I am already the beloved."

I love Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. The father holds his son, holds his daughter, and touches his son and his daughter and says, "You are my beloved. I'm not going to ask you any questions. Wherever you have gone, whatever you have done, and whatever people say about you, you're my beloved. I hold you safe in my embrace. . I touch you. I hold you

safe under my wings. You can come home to me whose name is Compassion, whose name is Love."

If you keep that in mind, you can deal with an enormous amount of success as well as an enormous amount of failure without losing your identity, because your identity is that you are the beloved. Long before your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, your teachers, your church, or any people touched you in a loving as well as in a wounding way—long before you were rejected by some person or praised by somebody else—that voice has been there always. "I have loved you with an everlasting love." That love is there before you were born and will be there after you die.

It is as we pay attention to discipline of solitude that we learn to hear this voice.

Community

13 The next day he summoned his disciples; from them he selected twelve he designated as apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, Andrew, his brother, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, 15 Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon, called the Zealot, 16 Judas, son of James, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

After prayer, after solitude, comes community. Jesus formed a community of 13, including Himself.

Why did Jesus form this community?

Strange as it may sound, Jesus needed community.

What did Jesus do after He spent the night praying and meditating? Luke has this to say:

Remember the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus wanted and needed the community of his 3 closest friends to be with Him - to help Him through His darkest hour. He wanted them to support and encourage Him. He wanted them to pray for Him. He wanted them to keep watch with Him.

If Jesus - Almighty God, without sin, perfect in every way, knowing all things - needed community to do ministry we certainly do too. None of this Lone Ranger stuff. None of this trying to be a Christian without the church.

The Bible commands and encourages us to seek community with each other so we can grow and develop and mature as believers. The Bible commands and encourages Christian community so we can support each other and encourage each other. The Bible commands and encourages community so we can pray for each other. The Bible commands and encourages us to seek community so we can engage in ministry.

Consider this example from the Sequoia trees:

The Sequoia trees of Sequoia National Park tower as much as 360 feet above the ground. Strangely, these giants have unusually shallow root systems that reach out in all directions to capture the greatest amount of surface moisture. Seldom will you see a Sequoia standing alone, because high winds would quickly uproot it. That's why they grow in clusters. Their intertwining roots provide support for one another against the storms. Like the Sequoias of California we need the support and encouragement of a community. To survive in a hostile world we need community. In order to do what the Lord calls us to do, we need to be part of a community.

Ministry

Jesus spent the night in prayer and meditation with God. In the morning He chose twelve to form a community with Him. In the afternoon He began to do ministry. Listen to what our Scripture reading says:

17 Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed. 19 Everyone was trying to touch him--so much energy surging from him, so many people healed! (Ministry)

All the disciples of Jesus are called to ministry. Ministry is not, first of all, something that you do (although it calls you to do many things). Ministry is something that you have to trust. If you know you are the beloved, and if you keep cultivating life in community then we can do no other but minister..

Jesus cured people not by doing all sorts of complicated things. A power went out from him, and everyone was cured. He didn't say, "Let me talk to you for ten minutes, and maybe I can do something about this." Everyone who touched him was cured, because a power went out from his pure heart. He wanted one thing—to do the will of God. He was the completely obedient one, the one who was always listening to God. Out of this listening came an intimacy with God that radiated out to everyone Jesus saw and touched. Trust in that healing power. Trust that if you are living as the beloved in community, you will heal people whether or not you notice it. But you have to be faithful to that call.

Jesus never lost sight of his Father's vision—to reach out to a dark and dying world. Jesus prayed to his Father before calling a team of people to share in the kingdom work. Jesus chose from the larger crowd of disciples a group who would become his friends, and he lived out his life in their presence. But he also walked among the crowds—teaching, feeding, healing, comforting. Jesus did not wait for the spiritually dead to come to him. He went to them and ministered to them at their point of need—and his critics hated him for it.

We were created to be three-dimensional beings; when one dimension is missing or is suppressed, the other two do not work as they should. If we do

not have all three elements of the Triangle—the Up, the In, and the Out—we are out of balance, and we will wobble through life. If you've ever driven a car with tires out of balance, you know what I mean. It's not only a bumpy ride but eventually there will be a blowout—it can be downright dangerous. Jesus' model of a balanced life is also the model needed for a healthy church.

Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry. It was how Jesus lived. Should it not be the way we live?