

Net•Work Notes

Week 12, Day 1: Putting It All Together—Following Jesus

Our gathering together at Net•Work has taken us through a sweeping look at the Christian faith. We have arrived at the possibility of Communion—a deep and close relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. I say “the possibility” because, just because we have read and talked about the Bible’s story of what God has been doing in the world and is still doing in the world, does not mean that this story has become our story. I think it would be entirely natural for many of you to still have questions about what the story means or how this faith in Jesus Christ gets lived out in your daily lives.

It is not enough just to have heard the stories of the Bible, the stories about Jesus, and to say, “Oh yea, I’ve heard those before.” Receiving Jesus Christ as Lord means more than just saying that I have heard, or even agreed with the stories about him. We expect that Jesus will live in you and your life. We must learn what it means to think and imagine and act as people who are followers of Jesus Christ. I have heard many people say that what they like least about the church is that people talk the talk, but don’t always “walk the talk”. Well, that question is directed at each one of us.

So, take a moment. Are you ready to think, imagine, and act as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you ready to put the interests of others, of Jesus and the church, ahead of your own interests? Are you ready to dedicate yourself to God’s work of healing and re-making the world so that people discover what it means to be made in the image of God?

You see, becoming or being a member of the church is so much more than going to worship a couple Sundays a month. Jesus asked his disciples to follow him. You know that already. But did you also remember that when he asked his disciples to follow him, he promised that he would make them “fishers” of other human beings. He called us to his mission in the world.

Last week we looked at the questions new members are asked when they make their public profession of faith or reaffirm their faith. It is so important to see that this is not just a “ritual” of the church! You are saying to the community who you are. You are telling them to whom you are dedicating your life. You are dedicating yourself to being equipped to be a “fisher” of others for the body of Christ, the church.

List below the ways you are trying to put your faith into action:

In what area of your life do you find it the greatest challenge to follow Jesus Christ?

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Week 12, Day 2: Putting It All Together—Following Jesus

How do I begin to live, think, and act as a follower of Jesus Christ? We begin by dedicating each day to becoming closer to him and getting to know him and his mission better.

My first commitment as a Christian is to grow in my love for God in Jesus Christ. I grow in commitment as I spend more time listening to him, by reading and thinking about his words, and letting his words shape me and impact my decisions.

That is why we have spent a lot of time getting the Bible's story straight. If you do not have the basic overview of the Bible's story clear, you will become easily confused when you try to live out a commitment to Jesus day by day.

Let's look back over where we have been. We have given you a handy way of remembering the Christian faith through a seven-fold retelling of the Bible. Here they are again:

Creation

Crisis

Calling

Covenant

Christ

Crucifixion/Cross

Communion

If you ever want to think through who you are as a Christian or a particular decision you are faced with, you can use the 7 C's to help you out.

Creation: knowing that you and others are good creations of God who are part of an overall good creation of God tells you who you are and that you are a loved and valued creature of God. You are not a problem to be solved! You are not a number

or just an unfamiliar face in the crowd. You are named and known by God.

Crisis: we know that the good creation is hit hard by human beings being out of relationship with God. Sin is our desire to live lives out on our own, without God. Death is just the natural consequence of the sin, of separation from the God of life. The crisis of separation from God continues to affect individuals and nations.

Calling: God doesn't let the crisis destroy the creation. God decides to restore the creation and begins by calling a special people into a special relationship with himself. God's goal is to use this special people (Israel) to heal and make whole the entire world.

Covenant: God forged a unique relationship with this special people and wove a relationship with him into their everyday lives. This is why he spoke to his people and gave them the "Word" of God in the bible, a tabernacle and temple for worship, and the prophets and kings and priests. Covenant is an established and firm relationship that endures through thick and thin.

Tomorrow we will look at the last three parts again. But take a moment to think through the first four C's.

What do you think about the fact that you have been created by God?

What effects of our crisis are you personally experiencing?

How have you accepted the call to be a part of God's covenant people?

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Week 12, Day 3: Putting It All Together—Following Jesus

We are a called and chosen people. But remember that we haven't talked about Christ, Crucifixion, or Communion. Are they even necessary?

The simple answer is "yes". Israel was supposed to live as God's chosen people, but they ended up back in Crisis. The Old Testament ends with the people in **exile**. When we get to the time of Jesus, the people are under the power of Rome, and their confusion on how to live as God's people leaves them far from God and God's purposes for the world.

So that is why Jesus is the **Center** of the Christian faith. As Israel was failing to live out the covenant, their prophets announced that God would act to finally straighten all things out. What was almost entirely missed is the fact that God would accomplish his work through a "**Servant**" who would take upon himself the "life" and "mission" of God's people (cf. Isaiah 42:1-9), a mission **that included the act of bearing their suffering** in order to finally finish God's work of healing the world (Isaiah 53). God's people would not be saved from problems and suffering; they would be saved through it!!

Christ is the title for this **servant**. **Crucifixion/Cross** is the event which focused and concentrated this **act of suffering**.

Christ: Jesus came to be the representative of the whole people of God. He believed he was God's "anointed one" who would finally finish God's work. Representing Israel,

he would bring healing, forgiveness, and redemption to the world. He did what only God could do.

Crucifixion/Cross: We often ask, "Why did Jesus have to die?" It is probably true that this question can never be completely answered, but a beginning answer is that Jesus took upon himself the full consequence of human life lived apart from God: death. In other words, he did not avoid the crisis we were in, he embraced us and our crisis and endured them to the very end, paying the whole cost of our separation from God. But by enduring **through the cross** he overcame the crisis to establish a new life firmly connected with God.

Communion: the result is that God now dwells among a people who are now in complete relationship with God. As Paul puts it in Romans, nothing in all creation can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). Jesus created a new people of God (which we call the church). The church is not a building, it is not a service of worship—the church is the people of God united to Jesus Christ.

Notice how Christ brings it all together. Jesus brings about a New Creation, we are restored to the image of God, and we are given a new name and a new work to do. Jesus embraces the Crisis and makes the Crisis the means of saving us. The New Crisis, the Cross, becomes a sign of victory and worship and not of death. Jesus announces a new Calling to be a part of the new people of God that he gathers to do the work of God in the world. And Jesus establishes a new Covenant that is experienced as complete Communion with the living God. God promises to send his Spirit to live in each one of us so that we experience daily communion with God in Christ

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Week 12, Day 4: Putting It All Together—Following Jesus

The short and long of it is that our faith offers you a changed life, a new life!

Now there are a lot of offers out there for how to live a full life.

One says that you really live when you become important. “Important” comes in a few basic models. Important may mean to prove how successful you are by having a high-powered job or profession. Here in Iowa City, maybe that means becoming a doctor, lawyer, or professor. Important may mean getting a job that pays lots of money and collecting all the visible signs that go with that money: the “right” home in the “right” neighborhood, the new car that says “I’ve made it big”, and clothes, and memberships in the right clubs—you name the badges of money. Important may mean “success” by whatever way you want to measure it.*

We are tempted to think that if we cannot produce visible signs of success, then we are not really living.

We are offering life with Jesus Christ, learning how to follow and serve him. We are offering you a life in which you grow into a person who can make other disciples of Jesus Christ. We are offering a life which focuses on learning how to love as Jesus loves and serve how Jesus serves.

Now, you may still be going to school, deciding on how you will be making a living, dating, perhaps marrying and

having children, etc. Life is made up of these things. But **who** will you be in the midst of these activities and events? Will you be an empty vanity doll seeking an adoring circle of admirers? Will you be a stuffed suit puffing out self-important one-liners to impress clients? Will you be a selfish exploiter working any angle to get ahead? Or will you become more human, more loving, more a meaningful part of the lives of your family and friends and co-workers around you? Will you rise to the challenge of becoming what God wants you to become and a part of God’s mission in healing the world?

Will you live for yourself? Or will you live with and for Jesus Christ?

Does that seem like an easy question?

How would you answer that question right now? Have you prayed to Jesus Christ, telling him what kind of life you want? Spend some time in the space below writing what kind of life you want to be living 10 years from now.

*By the way, a Christian may be a doctor, a lawyer, in business, a professor, a contractor, a computer programmer, a bus driver, a stay-at-home dad or mom, a zoo-keeper, an artist, a librarian... It is not so much what we do for our “living” as much as it is “who” we are in living and “for whom” we are living.

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Week 12, Day 5: Putting It All Together—Following Jesus

It is time to get on with it.

You can't live as a Christian and just sit back and wait for others to do it for you.

There are many ways to live out the Christian life. There are many individual callings. There are many ministries that would welcome your gifts and vision. Mission with Jesus Christ is as close as your own family, neighborhood, school, or place of work.

If you are a confirmand it is probably more difficult to share a faith statement than to read Ne•Work Notes. If you are already a professing Christian, you may think a "faith statement" is something you do just once. But if you want to be an equipped disciple, you need **to be able to express your faith in words and acts on a daily, ungoing basis.**

The key is to do some thinking and acting on your own.

I find great value in saying the Apostles' Creed in worship, especially at Baptism. The creed reminds me of the basic shape of our faith and reminds me how great and how personal God is. It reminds me that God is doing a great thing in this world, this life. It reminds me that I don't live out my life alone (Jesus Christ, God's son, is my daily Lord) or out of my own power (the Holy Spirit is my daily source of strength and love).

But the Apostles' Creed can be said without thinking or believing. We don't want that for you. We want you to have a good, clear understanding of what the Creed, what the Christian faith, says. The mystery of it is, truly understanding the Christian faith is a matter of trying to live it out in faith on a daily basis, sharing this life with others, and continually seeking to know God's mind and heart better in conversation with God's word and the faith, hope, and love of the church (cf. Colossians 1).

So, take another step! Think of what your next step of faith is and share it with someone you know who wants you to grow in Christ.

Jesus calls you to follow him day by day into a fully human, actively growing, fully loving life. I pray that God will bless you and keep you, that Jesus Christ will lead you and challenge you, and that the Holy Spirit will renew you and empower you as you discover fullness of joy reflecting the glory of God!