



Become Like Jesus

Becoming Who We Really Are, Together

May 30, 2021

SONG #1

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 34:3-6 (Lily)

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness
and find safe pasture.

**Delight yourself in the Lord,
keep company with God,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

Commit your way,
your life's journey to the Lord;
trust in him,
and he will do whatever needs to be done.

He'll validate your life in the clear light of day
and stamp you with approval at high noon.

SONG #2

KIDS DISMISSAL

SONG #3

PRE-SERMON READING | Colossians 3:1-4 (Ally)

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from *his* perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your *real* life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. *He* is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you.

BECOME LIKE JESUS | Journeying Home Together Recap

Every time we gather, we do so to set our minds' attention and hearts' affection upon Jesus. We step out of the ordinary rhythms of daily living so that we might [follow Jesus](#) as we enter again into the everyday roles and relations that make up life—resting our hopes for life in a life with him. Trusting that who he is and what he has done is all we need for abundant and eternal life—life to its fullest and forever.

“follow me” is the invitation Jesus extended each of us when we first encountered him. And it is our response to him that brings us into fellowship with one another this day. Jesus, desiring us to join him along the road to where he is going. And, as we saw last week, the place Jesus is going is to the Father.

“I go and prepare a place for you...In my Father’s house...I will come...and will take you to...where I am...you know the way to where I am...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

(Jn. 14:2-4, 6)

The path we share with Jesus leads us to life with God our Father. A destination that is a presence, relational proximity to the Creator of life, the “very good” of existence. An abiding which ensures that we will be truly and wholly who we are made to be. An “**ultimate end**,” says Thomas Merton, “**in which our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled**,” as we are brought “into contact with the One we seek,” united “to God in a union of wills.”¹ The will (heart and spirit): the part of us that initiates and creates, that puts us in motion, leads us to act in life.

It is this union of wills that makes us a family of faith as we follow Jesus—relating and responding to one another as brothers and sisters and to God as Father.

whoever does the will of God, [who hears the word of God and does it (Lk. 8:21)], he is my brother and sister and mother.”

(Mk. 3:34-35)

“...we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are” (1 Jn. 3:1), declares John the beloved. Because we receive Jesus’ life and work, believing who he is and what he says, as truth, we have been given “*the right to become children of God.*” (Jn. 1:12) But, continues brother John, “*that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up!*” (1 Jn. 3:2)

I think we all want to find out, right?! That’s what keeps us coming back to a place like this, to people seeking the same thing we are?

Well, to make sure we get to experience “the more” of our God-given, Jesus-won identity, we employ the dual designations of **apprentices and pilgrims**. Eugene Peterson describes how these designations help us fully get in on our life together with Jesus this way:

¹ Thomas Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness*, 13.

Apprentice “says we are people who spend our lives” following “our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a grow-learning relationship, always. An” apprentice “is a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the worksite of a craftsman. We do not acquire information about God but *skills* in faith.

Pilgrim tells us we are people who spend our lives going someplace, *going to God*, and whose path for getting there is the way, Jesus Christ. We realize that ‘this world is not my home’ and set out for ‘the Father’s house.’”²

A pilgrimage we do not take alone, but one we join with **sisters and brothers in Jesus who are hearing and responding to God with us**. Any life of faith in Jesus, any life with God, is lived in the company of “spiritual companions,” called *the church*. A family of faith, responsive to God the Father who, says Peterson, “announces to us early and clearly the kind of life into which we can grow, to help us set our sights on what it means to be a human being complete.”³ A “community of people who explicitly and consciously submit themselves to the direction and training of” Jesus through the Holy Spirit “so that excellence is pursued in” **becoming who we are in Jesus together** (1 Jn. 3:2).

Now we need to recognize that the churches named in the pages of our scripture are simply a *fact*. They are neither idealized nor bemoaned. “They are.” as Eugene Peterson contends, “God’s means for calling persons together so that they can realize who their Lord is, and who they are, and develop the relationships that are coherent with those identities.”⁴

That’s all, that’s it. Whatever else the church might be in ideal or ambition or experience, in its simplest, God fashioned essence; *the church is a hodgepodge of spiritual companions (apprentices and pilgrims), a family of faith (listening and responding to the Father), following Jesus as the way to home on earth as it is in heaven.*

² Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction: discipleship in an instant society*, 17.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Run With The Horses: the quest for life at its best*, 30.

⁴ Adapted from Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: the revelation of John & the praying imagination*, 53-54, 55.

BECOME LIKE JESUS | Being Who We Really Are, Together

So, what does it look like to be on this road, “the ancient way,” “the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:24), together with patient endurance as siblings and partners in life with Jesus (Rev. 1:9)? Over the next several Sundays, we’ll attempt to answer that question not merely with ideas and images but with *practices*: things we can do together that help us stay true to the path and purpose that has brought us together in the first place. Actions we can take with others when the questions “Where are we going?” and “What’s the way?” arise as we journey home with Jesus, together.

Understanding that “church” is a community of spiritual companions and friends on our way to life complete and forever with God, one of the primary things we do is stay true to what we are seeking when we accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him, and then support one another as we, like the psalmist, said, and Lily read for us, “*Delight ourselves in the Lord, keep company with God,*” recognizing that “*he will give us the desires of our heart*” (Ps. 37:4)

The apostle Paul said that what we were after when we ran into Jesus, or he smashed into us and did something for us that compelled us to follow him, is a new life, resurrection life, our real life. Oh, we probably couldn’t have expressed our desire in those exact words at the time; nevertheless, what drove us to him *and* to stick with him, was the life we saw through him.

What do we see through Jesus who lived, died, and lives again? A glorious life, splendid and radiant. A life knowable only when all the muck and entanglements of sin and wickedness, brokenness and pains, distortions and illusion are wiped away and exchanged for something whole and holy new. A life that is ours because it is his.

That’s the gospel, isn’t it?! That Jesus takes from us what keeps us from the “very good” of our God-imagined being and trades it out with his goodness. The good news that life in the tribulation (the muck and mire) can become life in the kingdom (presence and reign of God) at the same time. The good news that God is with us and for us, and what he desires is what, as the psalmist said, he will make happen. All we do is commit to being on the way with him and trust (Ps. 37:5), well, learning trusting obedience through suffering (little deaths and daily resurrections) along the way with him, just as Jesus did (Heb. 5:8).

And here is where we need each other, especially at a time in history when everything we see is trying to tell us (sell us on) how we can become who we really are, what we need to be ourselves truly, and any self we want to be. What we see in the passage Ally read for us is Paul encourages his sisters and brothers in Colosse to go all out for and live in step with their deepest desire,

if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. [Let that desire drive you, your will get you going.] *Pursue the things over which Christ presides.* [Which, as we saw in the Revelation, is everything good, true, and beautiful even in tribulation, but most explicitly and effectually over “the churches” his apprentices and pilgrims.]

Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that’s where the action is. [That’s where the Father’s will is being done on earth as it is in heaven; in and through the lives and relationships of his children.] *See*

things from his perspective. [What he sees and is doing.]

*Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your **real life**—even though invisible to spectators [hidden in Christ, known only through Jesus]—is with Christ in God. He is your life. **When Christ** (your real life, remember) **shows up** again on this earth, **you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you**. [The you that is the desire of your heart.]*

(Col. 3:1-4)

So this is what we are all after, whether we can articulate it or not: our true selves (full and forever life) in relation to God and others. Our real-life with God is the desire that compels us to action, to know and experience our *real-life “hidden with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3), the desire that brings each of us into fellowship with one another, whether we have articulated it that way before or not.

Each person in that company of spiritual companions we call the church, joining us along the pilgrim road, is after this same thing, which manifests in kaleidoscopic beauty of uniqueness in unity. The purpose of our shared life is to help one another live out who we really are—who God has made them to be in Jesus truly. This uniqueness in unity which is the work of God among us (see Eph. 3:14-4:17), is why Thomas Merton said to his spiritual friends and faith family,

“Ask me not where I live or what I like to eat...ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.”⁵

How do we discover and stick on the path to becoming who we really are in Jesus, together? We do three things: we serve one another by listening, we help one another discern our desires (what we are living for), and we encourage one another to live congruently to God's desire for us.

Let's briefly look at each service, help, we provide our fellow pilgrims, and then well put them into practice.

⁵ Quoted in Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together In Christ: experiencing transformation in community*, 74.

Listening To Serve

In his famed track, “Life Together,” written while imprisoned by the Nazis before being executed at their hands, Dietrich Bonhoeffer concludes his wisdom on our shared apprenticeship to Jesus in community, outlining several ways we “minister” to one another. He says,

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins in listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the [family] is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother and sister when we *learn* to listen to them.

We become like Jesus by learning to listen to one another for the purpose of connecting one another to the presence and purpose (actions) of God. Which doesn’t always entail speaking or direct action on our part, which is the hard part for most of us! Bonhoeffer points out what is true of most of our “church” interactions,

Christians...so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others...They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening.

Bonhoeffer contends that there is the paradoxical consequence of trying to take more responsibility than is ours, to play kings and queens of another’s life, rather than responding from a quieted heart and content soul in the presence and purpose of the Father. He says, ironically, that,

But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon no longer be listening to God either; she will be doing nothing but [talking at length in a foolish or inconsequential way] in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he or she will not be conscious of it.⁶

We love and serve one another by listening in the way Jesus did because in doing so, we stay in a place where we can receive the love and service Jesus continues to show and provide us. It keeps us humble and in a posture of love for God and one another.

We start with listening to one another, not offering advice to one another, not fixing one another, not trying to mold one another into our image for them, and in so doing, cultivate the humility, meekness, and awareness necessary to walk together for the long haul of our pilgrimage. It is the only way we can walk together over a lifetime.

⁶ Dietrich Bonehoeffer, *Life Together*, 97-98.

Julian of Norwich provides us a helpful posture to take as we *learn* this skill of faith. She said that in her pilgrimage with fellow apprentices, she would enter into conversations with a particular exercise, a specific eye movement:

“I look at God, I look at you, and I keep looking at God.”

It’s my intuition that Julian’s posture developed from Paul’s encouragement to the Colossians 3 to keep their eyes on things above in this resurrection. To see each other’s true selves in the action around Jesus and where Jesus is ruling and reigning—which was among his fellow apprentices and pilgrims. Doing so ensured that all parties in the relationship would get in on the new life. Ruth Haley Barton explains how and where this posture leads us,

“Looking at God (or Jesus) speaks to the idea that even before I start listening to the other person, I can acknowledge the reality that both of us are in God’s presence. I can pray that I will be sensitized to God’s purposes in this person’s life and in our conversation rather than being swayed by my own agenda. Then as I ‘look at you’ and listen to you, I am not seeing you or experiencing our interaction simply in human terms. I am ‘listening through’ to sense God’s heart [his will, desire]...for you so that I can join God [in his will or desire for you]. I am aware of myself and the other in God’s presence, desiring only to be responsive to whatever God is doing in the moment.”⁷

We start with listening (not advice-giving or fixing or pre-measured molds but with humility, meekness, and awareness before God’s presence and will (desire, plans, heart) for each other. And in our listening, we help one another discern our desires, what we are living for, what we are really after in life.

We do this in two ways. One is simply getting to know one another. Letting the other tell their story, express their heart and hope, frustration and longing—formally and informally. But there is also a time for more directed service along the way. A practice to help our sister or brother *hear and respond to Jesus asking them what they want*.

⁷ Barton, 59.

DISCERNING DESIRES

One of Jesus' favorite questions to ask (variously phrased) is "What do you want?" "What are you looking for?" "What do you want me to do for you?"

Two instances of Jesus' questioning occur back-to-back in one chapter, [Matthew 20:20-34](#). The first is Jesus' response to the mother of James and John, Zebedee's wife. The fact that she is in the company and voicing her desires is pretty astounding, considering this was first-century Palestine where a Rabbi (master or teacher) would not have women apprentices, and women were limited within the Temple on how close they (and their prayers/sacrifices/offerings) could get to God. So it is pretty significant that she is comfortable enough with Jesus to approach him and speak to him on behalf of her sons. It tells us that she had been a part of this group for a while, following him for long enough time that the deeply engrained cultural hesitations would not keep her from seeking Jesus' personal audience. Requesting a word, Jesus simply asks her, "What do you want?" (v. 21), and without reluctance, she reveals her desires to Jesus.

Now here is the thing, her desires for her sons (and consequentially their shared desire), to sit next to Jesus on his throne, are not entirely pure. What she wants from Jesus for her sons—and thus in some way for herself as a mother—is not precisely in line with what the Father desires for them.

We see in verse 24 that her/their desire is detrimental to the community of companions, causing division, and are thus isolated from the relationships in which they lived. Her desire was also a bit naïve, a surface desire, as Jesus says in verse 22, "You do not know what you are asking." She, like many of us, desires something, but the vision of the desire fulfilled doesn't see the whole picture—cost or consequences.

But notice, that Jesus does not rebuke either the mother or the brothers. She (and her sons) wanted glory and honor. They, like anyone, were after success in what they were living for. From what we know, Zebedee's family owned a prosperous fishing group with multiple ships. Their prosperity allowed the sons and their mother the time and resources to venture around the region with Jesus, albeit at the potential cost of the family's long-term prosperity. And so, like a good mother and wife, she wanted to be sure her sons' sacrifices would pay off, that their efforts were worth it. So, Jesus presses them through the surface desire for glory, honor, success, to *faithfulness* like him (drinking his cup), and letting God bestow honor as he sees fit (vs. 23). He also presses them through isolation and relationships, from desiring fulfillment from glory and honor and success to fulfillment in *service* like him (vs. 25-28). **Through their expressed and discerned desires, they found their calling, that thing to live for, participation in the life of Jesus for the sake of others.**

The very next scene finds Jesus once again responding to those seeking him, this time two blind men whose yelling for Jesus, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" (v. 30) is a confession of desire and belief (whether they really believed or just desperately hoped). Unlike the mother and the brothers, these two had not been following Jesus, didn't really know him, but had heard enough about it that they knew he offered something they desired.

You'd think Jesus wouldn't ask these guys what they wanted since it was clear what their need/desire was. Nevertheless, Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 32) Their response, as we'd assume, was straightforward and obvious, "let our eyes be opened" (v. 33); so, Jesus compassionately gave them their immediate desire. They were right! God really does grant the desires of the heart! And if the story had ended there, we'd think that's it. But notice something at the end of verse 34. They got what they desired but

discovered they were really after (desired) was something more, for they didn't just see...they "*followed him.*" Better, once they could see, they could see what they wanted most; a totally new and other life. **Once again, Jesus pressed their desires to the core, granting their surface desire and revealing their deepest desire, what they were really after, and showing them they could find it only on the road with him.**

Both scenes are set within a community of others following Jesus, though neither community was too helpful in the moment! In just a minute, we'll see how we can be different and help one another in discerning desires by responding to Jesus' question.

But first, let me say this, the final (for today) we serve our fellow apprentices on the pilgrim road is we encourage them to live congruently in the union of wills—God's desires and their own.

ENCOURAGING CONGRUENCE

Congruent is not a word we use in everyday conversations, and that's the point. It makes us think about how we serve one another. Congruent means "in agreement or harmony." And so, as our spiritual companions and friends discern their deep desires—those things that drive them to action, to intentionality—we support them in making practical decisions that are in agreement and harmony with their expressed desires.

Now, this is different than just doing "whatever you want" and traditional "accountability" around some pre-conceived mold for the Christian life. Remember that we get to these desires, discern them in relation to Jesus via the Spirit and another. By delighting in the Lord, keeping company with God together (Ps. 37:4). And so, **we hold each other to making everyday decisions that will help them "do the will of God," to be responsive (obedient) to the desires the Father has given them and said he would bring forth in/for them as they commit their ways and trust him** (Ps. 37:5). Paraphrasing Thomas Merton,

"Spiritual companions ask us, in detail, what we think we are living for, what desires God has given and said he fulfills us as we commit our way and trust him. And, they ask us what we think is keeping us from living fully, in congruence with, the thing we desire, to live for."

When this becomes a question asked by those who know us, who have listened to God and to us, with and for us, we'll be able to walk well together and for the long haul.

Okay, let's practice discerning desires.

TOGETHER PRACTICE | [Responding to Jesus' Question](#)

SONG #4

COMMUNION

Father, you have taught us to abide;
in you,
your Word
and your Love.

In joyous obedience,
to keep company with you;
by loving you, our neighbor,
and one another.

Grant us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit,
that we may be devoted to you
with our whole heart, mind, soul and body

and united to one another with pure and gentle affection;
until we have all become like Jesus inside and out.

Be present, be present, O Jesus,
who died for our sins
and is alive for our living.

Be present with us as you were with your disciples,
and be known to us as we follow you with one another;

until our real lives in Jesus become the only life seen.

To your glory
and our neighbors' good,
Through Jesus, amen.

SONG #5

BENEDICTION

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:1-8)