

“Grow As Disciples of Jesus”

Today we're in the second week of a series built around and upon the Vision we have as a congregation. We're calling it our “Banner Series,” something we're planning to do (each year) at the beginning of the year as a review of what our congregation is all about. It's designed to lift up and examine the banner (under which) everything we do as a family of faith is placed.

The Vision we have (here at St. Timothy's) is simple. It's not hard to remember. Our Vision is (and if you know it, say it with me), our Vision is to “Know the Father, Grow as Disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.” (Say it again.) Our Vision is to “Know the Father, Grow as Disciples of Jesus, and Go with the Spirit.”

Now, we started this series last week and (I know) some of you were still on vacation. As a reminder, we post all our sermons on our website, you can download a St. Tim's app, Vimeo, podcast, there are a number of ways to catch up (and listen) to what you missed. In this case, I hope you will do that, because there were a number of things we mentioned upon which we're going to build.

Our Vision, there are three verbs in it; three action words that help set the tone. We are to “Know, Grow, and Go.” (Right?) We are to “Know, Grow, and Go”...three verbs that give action to what we are all about.

It also has, along with these three action words, there's some theology. Our theology (we talked about this last week), what we believe to be true about God, is built directly into the Vision.

Our understanding of who God is, as a Triune God, a God who has revealed himself to us as being three-in-one; all three of the persons in God (in the Trinity), Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are named. “Know, Grow, and Go...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

And so, what ties this together? What did we say (last week) about our faith and about how our faith in what we believe about God, what has to happen? We said that those three action words, three verbs, as they relate to our theology (what we believe to be true about God), in order for the faith we share to become real, what needs to happen is that those verbs have to be applied. There needs to be action (tied to our theology) for there to be faith.

If you remember some of the connections we made, we said you can have all kinds of action in your life (things you're willing and wanting to do), but if it's not connected to good theology, (what's actually true about God and our world), then your action, your life, it's nothing more than living for a cause.

And you can have good theology (right thinking about God) and understand how it all works, but if it's not backed by action, things you're actually doing in your life (as a result), then your theology (and right thinking), it's nothing more than establishing a claim.

But when you (bring the two together) – and that's what happens in our Vision - good theology, backed and supported by action – instead of simply having a cause (in life) or making (a claim in life) - what you have is a lifelong conviction and course that will never change, because it's tied and connected to your faith, and it's built and established on what's true.

What drives our Vision (here at St. Timothy's) is our commitment to being theologically sound in what we teach and preach and believe, and tying that theology to what we are actually doing as a congregation, to the things we are working for together and wanting to see happen in the lives of people for whom Jesus died.

Members at St. Timothy's or not, that's not what drives our Vision. We are not about the task of building and growing a church. (We're not.) That's not our task. It's not what we're about.

What we're about is the task Jesus has given us, until he returns, until that day when he comes back and calls it all off and brings it all to an end, our task, our mission, our Vision (theologically sound, tied to our action) is to go into the world and make disciples, baptizing, teaching, following and leading people to Jesus. When that happens, our Lord promises that he will build his Church.

Last week it was the first part: “Know the Father.” Today it's the second part: “Grow as Disciples of Jesus.” Let's talk about being disciples and what it means for us to grow, and let's tie it (as we did last week) to what we believe about Jesus (to our theology).

Just for fun (this past week) I did a little word search. I typed in the phrase “names for Jesus” and what came up (in the New Testament) were two names and 198 different titles; two names and 198 different titles.

The two names (for Jesus) come from two of the (birth stories) we find in the gospels, (in those stories of Jesus’ life). (We’re just coming off of that after Christmas.)

The first name, the name “Jesus” itself, is found in the gospel of Matthew and in the gospel of Luke. In Luke’s gospel it’s part of the announcement of the angel (Gabriel) to Mary, that she will “give birth to a son and (when he is born) she (is to) call his name Jesus.”

In Matthew’s gospel, it’s a similar story. Only this time, it’s in a dream of Joseph, where the angel tells him that this child Mary is carrying is a child of the Holy Spirit, and when he is born (this child she is carrying), you are to “give him the name ‘Jesus’, because he will save his people from their sins.” The name “Jesus,” which is also the Greek form of the Old Testament Hebrew name, “Joshua,” literally means “the Lord saves.” Jesus came into this world to save.

The other name we have for Jesus comes from the second half of that (same story) we find in Matthew. “You will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” What follows, (it says), “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah (remember this): ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him (and here’s the second name), they will call him ‘Immanuel’, which means ‘God with us.’” Those are the two New Testament names we’re given: “Jesus” and “Immanuel;” ‘the one who saves’ and ‘God with us.’

Now, along with those two names (and hang with me), there are 198 different titles. “The Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lamb of God (that was in our text today) the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Hope, the Cornerstone, the Rock”...and on it goes, 198 different titles given to Jesus.

The two most important titles (we find), the ones (most common) and most often used (throughout the New Testament) are the titles ‘Savior’ and ‘Lord.’ Jesus was born to become our Savior and he died, gave his life, rose from the dead to become our Lord.

Now, what do we say in our Creed? Each week (when we confess it), what do we say? (It’s the same thing.) We say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” (That was last week...our call to “Know the Father”...who is also our Creator.)

This week (to Grow as Disciples), we say, “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord....He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.” (This is all part of our theology.) It’s all part of what we believe and confess to be true.

Jesus is our Savior. (I know this is basic, but it’s important.) He came into this world to save us, and (he accomplished it) on the cross. All of your sins are forgiven. Everything that would have (eternally) separated you from God (and kept you from heaven) has now been taken care of and (dealt with) in Jesus. His death on the cross has (made real) what he came into this world to do. He saved you. Even his name, ‘the Lord saves’ reminds us of what he has done. He’s your Savior.

But he’s also your Lord. He’s also “The Lord.” He’s Immanuel, ‘God with us.’ He’s the One who died, who was raised, who is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and the day will come (we confess) when he will “return to judge both the living and the dead.” He’s not only our Savior, but he’s also our Lord. Those two titles for Jesus are essential for us to remember.

Now, let’s pull this together and see where it leads us (in relation to) our Vision. Our Vision is to “Grow as Disciples of Jesus.” What’s a disciple? A disciple (by definition) is a person who follows the teachings of another who is their leader. That’s what a disciple is.

A disciple follows. A disciple learns from. A disciple listens to and pays attention to and does (his or her best) to take what they’ve seen (in their leader) and apply what they’ve learned (from their leader) in their own life.

For us, we are disciples of Jesus. He’s our leader. He’s our Master. As our theology tells us, he’s our Savior and our Lord. Our Vision is to grow as disciples of Jesus. As ones who follow, ones who listen, ones who watch, and learn from, and apply what they’ve seen, our Vision is that we are to grow in each those ways.

In other words, the action word (in our Vision) “to Grow” needs to tie with (our theology), what we confess to be true about Jesus (that he’s our Savior and Lord) in order that the faith we proclaim (and believe) can begin to have an impact (not only in our own lives), but in the lives of others. It’s that action, connected to what we believe, that enables (and allows) our faith (in Jesus) to have an impact (in the world).

That's what drives (this part) of our Vision. We are to "grow" as disciples of Jesus that in our following Jesus as disciples we can have an impact and an influence in this world for him.

Now, it's not coincidental that one of the first things we've done (that we're doing) to implement this Vision is to put into place our "Grow Groups." We have "Grow Groups" to help us "grow" as disciples of Jesus. That's the purpose of these groups. They're designed to help us grow.

It's been fun to watch (and to hear) what's happening in the lives of some of our people. (We heard a brief testimony this morning.) In some cases, folks who've been coming to church for a long time, like never before, they're being challenged and encouraged and supported in growing in their faith-walk with Christ.

What's happening, they're developing some of the spiritual disciplines that are essential to growing as a disciple. They're reading their Bibles, they're setting aside time for prayer, they're learning to listen to what God is telling them in his Word and finding ways to apply (what they're finding) in their lives. And it's changing their lives. It's changing the way they think about and come at their lives.

Not only that, and here's the most important part, here's where I personally believe the Church in the 21st century, if it is to be effective in fulfilling its mission, what it needs to do. What's happening is that they're not just there (in these groups) to receive the support and encouragement and challenge (they need) from others to grow in their faith, but they're also there to help support and encourage and challenge the others (in their groups) in the same way. That's what needs to happen, and it's happening, and it's all consistent with our theology.

The Bible says "we are to grow up into him, who is our head, into Christ." We are to grow and mature (it says) so that we can better and better and better represent Jesus to the world. That's the goal of the Christian life. We are to grow up into Christ. We are to think like him. We are to act like him. We are to follow him and learn from and imitate him, until we look like him and we live like him and we become like him, in all that we do and say. That's the goal.

Now, don't miss the point. We'll never fully get there until we finally get there. (It's a lifelong process; it keeps going.) We will never fully arrive until we finally arrive. But until then, (or until Jesus comes back), that's our call. We are to grow as disciples of Jesus. We are to grow as followers of his; and not just in our commitment and ability to follow (in our own lives), but (equally important) in our commitment and ability (through our lives) to help others to follow in theirs.

Here's the bottom line. A church that keeps its faith on a personal and private level, between its own (individual members) and God, and never commits itself (in real and concrete ways) to reaching out to the world with the message of Jesus is a church that has never fully understood its calling. (It's missed it.)

In the same way, an individual follower (you and me) who keeps his or her faith to themselves and never commits to sharing that faith and expressing that faith and helping to (develop that faith) in the life of someone else, is a follower who has never fully understood what it means to be a disciple. (It's the same thing.)

Our Vision is to grow (as a congregation), in our commitment to making disciples who learn not just what means and (what it takes) to be a disciple of Jesus, but also what it means and what it takes (as disciples of Jesus) to make more disciples of Jesus. That's what growing as disciples is all about.

If you were here (last week), you remember I closed with a challenge, a "5, 5, and 5 challenge" for this coming year. Five minutes in your Bible, five minutes in prayer, five days a week.

Let me close today with another challenge. Last week, it was a "5, 5, and 5 challenge" for this coming year. This week, let me close with a "1, 1, and 1 challenge" for this coming month. A "1, 1, and 1 challenge" for this coming month; and it comes from the passage we read today (from John's gospel). We didn't preach on it today. (This sermon was more topic-based.) But it comes from that same story, where Andrew tells Peter what he has found, and he brings him to Jesus.

Here's the challenge: "1, 1, and 1." Identify one person in your life who either doesn't know Jesus or who is (for whatever reason) living without Jesus, and (each day) when you pray, include that person in your prayers. Find one opportunity to talk with (that same person), for whom you are praying, about your faith. And look for one way to encourage them in their own faith. If nothing else, to come and see (for themselves) who this Jesus is and what he can do in their life.

Identify one person (and start praying), find one opportunity to share your faith, and offer one invitation to continue to explore (if not to meet) this one who was born to become both our Savior and our Lord. A "1, 1, and 1 challenge" for this coming month.

This is one area, (among many), where we all need to grow. Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank you for sending Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord, and for the way in which you have called us to grow in our faith-walk with him. We pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work in us, as we seek to follow and to learn, changing our hearts, helping us to think and to act in new ways, consistent with what we know to be true.

Lord, work in us as a congregation that we might more effectively and fervently be about the task of sharing our faith, and work in us (individually) that we might not only commit ourselves to growing as disciples, but that we might also take steps in helping others to become of you as well.

Help us to apply the action to what we believe, that our faith would have an impact in this world for you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.