

McCabe United Methodist Church

April 22, 2018

Luke 8:4-15

Being a Christian Should Make a Difference

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Good Morning Church!

Over the past few weeks Pastor Jenny and I have shared parts of our call stories. We've touched on God's call to us to pastoral ministry. We've also heard a few testimonies from people of McCabe on how God is moving in their lives, how God has called them to use their gifts to make a difference.

This morning we continue to wrestle with this idea that God has a divine purpose for each of us...

Let's Pray:

God of might and God of mercy, may the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock. You are our Redeemer. Amen.

Vocation Video: God has a divine purpose for each of us.

(from the video)

Your life doesn't belong to you.

Jesus said: Come Follow me.

God's Divine Purpose...

Did you know that 78% of the people in the United States say they are a Christian? Then, let's say you have two people in front of you. One person says they're a Christian. The other says they're not a Christian.

For the most part, the research says we can look at these two people and we can't tell who is the Christian, and who isn't...

That makes sense, doesn't it?

Christian or not, we're all regular people. We don't usually **LOOK** different based on our faith.

But it goes further than that...

For the most part, the research says most people can't tell if someone follows Jesus or not even by listening to them or even by watching what they do.

Jonathan Merritt asks: Is it possible that we might be poser Christians? Or, is it possible that we have a religious OUTER shell, but inside, we're protecting it so we don't really have to follow Jesus?

Pew research says that the more faithful we are as Christians:

The happier we tend to be.

The more we volunteer.

The more we donate our time and our money and talents.

The more faithful we are as Christians, the more grateful we are.

The more forgiving we are.

And the more we see the world as bigger than ourselves.

So, I guess a question for each of us today is: If we say we're Christian, do our words and our lives show it? In a nutshell, are we posers, or are we growing and maturing as Christians? Are we, what Jesus referred to, producing fruit?

This morning's Scripture in Luke 8 is all about living our faith. It's all about faith and fruit and results. I'd like to invite you to consider where you are in this passage, and wherever you are, are you growing and maturing as a follower of Jesus?

Luke 8 tells us that people from all over were coming to hear Jesus and

⁴ Jesus told this story...

⁵ "A farmer went out to plant his seed. (When we plant, we plant expecting results).

As he scattered the seed across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it.

(Jesus explained:) ¹² The seeds that fell on the footpath, (they) represent us when we hear the message but we don't receive it. We hear the message but we don't allow it to help us grow and mature. Instead we let the devil come and take it away from our hearts so it prevents us from believing and being saved. The seed can't take root. The seed doesn't make a difference. With no roots, the seed can't produce fruit.

Growing and maturing as a Christian... Being a Christian should make a difference in our lives so we can make a difference in the world.

Our Scripture continues...

⁶ Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture.

Jesus said: ¹³ The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message. They receive it with joy, but since they don't have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.

Can that ever describe us?

Do we ever hear the message? Maybe we even experience the message. Maybe we even receive it with joy, but then we don't really let it take hold. We don't let the roots get established so we believe for a while, but then we fall away when temptation comes calling.

If we're growing and maturing as Christians, it should make a difference in our lives so we can make a difference in the world.

Think about new believers for a moment, someone who's experienced the power of the Spirit for the first time. They're often on fire for Jesus. They want to get started. They want to be engaged. They need to be doing something.

Did you know that new believers, and the most mature Christians, tend to be the most effective evangelists? They know their lives are different because of Jesus, and this is contagious.

Jesus continued:

⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants.

Jesus said: ¹⁴ The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.

Can that ever describe us?

Seeds falling among the thorns. Hearing the message, even understanding the message, maybe even connecting with God's divine purpose in our lives, but then the message gets crowded out by the happenings of ordinary life.

We're talking about camping today...

It can happen with camping. Kids often go off to camp. They have powerful faith experiences, and then they return home. Not enough time has passed for the campers to really establish deep, strong roots. Campers need a chance to engage with their faith, or the competing messages of everyday life can begin to crowd out the real message offering True Life.

When a camper returns from camp, we need to make sure we receive them and encourage them and nurture them in their faith. Growing and maturing as a Christian, being a Christian should make a difference in our lives so we can make a difference in the world.

⁸ Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!" When Jesus had said this, he called out, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

Jesus said: ¹⁵ ...the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word. (They) cling to it, and (they) patiently produce a huge harvest.

Friends Jesus is beckoning us. Receive the seed. Cling to it and cherish it. Nurture it so it will produce fruit. Jesus is describing us in this parable. Jesus is asking us: What kind of garden are you planting and nurturing? What kind of soil is in the garden of your life?

The band Audio Adrenaline challenges us saying: Let your life be the proof. In other words, let your life speak about who you are and about WHOSE you are. It doesn't matter if you're a carpenter or a teacher or a welder or a firefighter or an attorney or if you wait tables or work in the hospitals or if you sell cars or make music or if you have your own business.

We wrestle with being poser Christians with thick outer shells OR being Christians searching and growing and maturing and producing fruit.

God has a call on each of our lives. God has a divine purpose for each of us. The way you live your life should make a difference for you, and for the world.

Let's pray:

Holy God, we praise you because you are God. You are our protection and our strength. When we're between a rock and hard place, we don't need to be afraid. Even when we try to block out your calling to us, you pursue us. We pray that you will heal us, and cleanse us, and wash us clean.

May we have the strength, the wisdom, and the courage, to hear, to receive, and to act. Help us move beyond posing as Christians so you will use us to make a difference. We offer you our lives.

We pray this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.