

“The Rewards of Discipleship”

Romans 6:12-23
Matthew 15:21-28

Pentecost 9

August 14, 2011
St. Pauls U.C.C., Erin

- I. Today talk about discipleship and the church, you see this year, on June 25th, the U.C.C. celebrated its 54th Anniversary.
 - A. Best kept secrets in American religious scene
 1. Others do not know we exist
 - a. Church of Christ
 - b. Lutheran-which synod
 - B. UCC been on religious scene 54 years, however discussions started on merger in late 1930's just after E&R merger.
 1. Roots go back to early days in America and to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation
 2. Principles go back to beginning of Xn Church on Pentecost—teachings of Jesus Christ
 3. Tradition goes back to our Judeo-Christian heritage.
 - C. Proud and important history that has shaped not only our church, but also Protestant Christianity and our Nation.
 1. Take a few minutes and talk about our church, because this is our channel of discipleship and it is from this church that we receive many of the rewards for our discipleship.
 2. Well, I believe that we have much that we can shout from the housetops, to use a phrase from the gospels, because as I said at the beginning we are one of the best kept secrets in the American religious scene.
 - D. Must say here at beginning, some of this you may have heard before, especially if taken confirmation or a recent new member class, but I believe it bears repeating. After all we need to celebrate who we are as disciples of our risen Savior Jesus Christ.
- II. The United Church of Christ is Christians who believe in freedom.
 - A. Freedom in the past: many of our forebears came seeking religious and political freedom.
 1. Pilgrims and Puritans came to Mass. seeking the freedom to practice what became congregationalism.
 2. Our reformed forebears came to PA, Ohio and WI, from southern Germany and Switzerland seeking freedom from famine and conscription.
 3. Our Evangelical fathers and mothers came from Prussia and northern German states seeking freedom from constant warfare and the oppression of poverty to begin a free new life in MO, IN, and WI.

B. Freedom in America

1. 14 of our forebears signed Declaration of Independence; two became the president of this new country, a beacon of freedom.
2. The Liberty Bell was taken from Constitutional Hall and hidden under the floorboards of Trinity Reformed Church when British invaded and occupied Philadelphia and sought to turn that bell which proclaimed our freedom into cannon balls for British guns..
3. We were active in freeing our country from slavery—Harriet Beecher Stowe among others was active in abolition.
4. As early as the late 1600's members of our church were advocating the freedom and equality of women, in fact in the 1700's Sarah Grimsey, a UCC sister, wrote a book entitled "The Equality of the Sexes."

C. Today our church continues to speak loudly and persistently for freedom.

1. The freedom of all people to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
2. Freedom for equal opportunity in housing, business, and occupations
3. Freedom of people around the world to live the freedom from oppression whether it is political or economic or religious.
4. The cause of freedom often demands that the church take prophetic stands.
 - a. Many of you might remember our UCC supporting freedom for the Wilmington 10 in the 60's. Many even in the church felt that it was the wrong stand—but in the end it was justified.
 - b. Our church continues to speak the word of freedom—freedom for all people, in all places.

D. A reward of faithful discipleship is freedom.

III. The United Church is a people who believe in education.

A. The list of "firsts" for our denomination is long when it comes to education

1. The first college in America (Harvard), the first college for native Americans (Dartmouth), the first college for women (Mt. Holyoke), the first co-educational college (Oberlin). The University system of Illinois, Colorado and California started with UCC founded colleges.
2. The forebears of the United Church of Christ published the first book in the United States, printed the first church publication, wrote the first Bible in a native American language.
3. A member of the UCC chaired the team that translated the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the first post Dead Sea Scrolls version of the Bible.

B. Today we continue to emphasize education.

1. We have several colleges in Wisconsin (Lakeland, Beloit, Ripon and Northland.)
 - a. We have many institutions of high education, colleges, universities, seminaries that continue to emphasize the important of knowledge so that we can be faithful in our discipleship.

2. We have high very standards for those who desire to serve our congregations as pastors.
 - a. We require undergraduate degrees, a graduate degree, and now we are encouraging, through periodic review, regular continuing education for our pastors.
 - C. We have been on the cutting edge of Christian Education curriculum.
 - a. Remember the “New curriculum” of the 60’s, or the covenant curriculum of the 70’s & the Whole People of God in the 90’s.
 - b. We have written our own material and we have joined together with other denominations in cooperative endeavors to teach the faith to children, youth and adults.
 - D. Probably some of the most well known theologians in our country have had ties to the United Church of Christ beginning with Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mathers in the pre-Revolutionary days.
 1. Reinhold and H. Richard Niehbur in the last century, and Walter Brueggeman and Susan Thistlewaite, who continue to write, teach and lecture today, are leaders in the theological field
 - E. The United Church of Christ has encouraged not only its pastors but all of its members to continue to learn and grow in the faith. Here in the Wisconsin Conference we have a wonderful lay academy. We do not want those who blindly follow. We want an informed and educated laity that helps the church discern the truth that continues to break forth from word of God.
 - F. One of the rewards of faithful discipleship is learning and growing in the faith.
- IV. The United Church of Christ is a people who have been concerned for others.
- A. Our past
 1. Our forebears began the first foreign mission board in the United States, which began in a haystack meeting during a thunder storm in New England.
 2. We also are credited with the first home mission society – the American Mission Association, which began at the close of the Civil War.
 3. We have take the gospel to Japan, China, Africa, the Pacific Islands beyond the shores of our country and to many native Americans within our country.
 4. We have been concerned with the body and mind as well as the soul starting the Deacons Hospital Organization (Of which some of you remember had a hospital in Milwaukee), Emmaus Homes, Orphanages and children’s homes, we have retirement homes—including Cedar Communities and Fairhaven in Wisconsin.
 - B. Today many of those institutions continue to carry on a vital ministry and that ministry keeps changing with the needs of people.
 1. For example Ryder Hospital in Puerto Rico has developed one of the world famous program for AIDS research and care.

2. Faithful discipleship calls us to care for our world and a reward of that discipleship is a better world in which to live.
- V. The United Church of Christ has been a body of believers that has sought over the years to manifest the unity that is present in Christ.
- A. Early in the history of our country just a few years after the Pilgrims and Puritans, who could not get along in England, came to Mass., The Cambridge Platform was drawn up that brought these two groups together into the Congregational Church.
 - B. In the early 1800's a group of former Methodists in Virginia and NC, a group of former Baptists in New England, and former Presbyterians in Kentucky came together around their common belief in the Bible and formed the Christian Church.
 - C. We know that in the 1930's both the General Convention of Congregational Christians Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church came into being.
 - D. In the late 1930's talks were begun between these two bodies for another merger, that was delayed because of a World War and Korean War, but eventually lead to what we are remembering this day—the United Church of Christ.
 - E. This desire to work together has not stopped.
 1. Several years ago we entered into a covenant relationship with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ to work together, recognize ministry and share common sacraments.
 2. Over the last few years there has been a very active gospel choir exchange between the Wisconsin Conference and our sister church in Germany.
 2. Several years ago we entered another covenant relationship with the ELCA, Disciples, Reformed Church in America, and Presbyterian Church US—a historic day because for the first time since the Reformation followers of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli can share together in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as well as recognize ordination and membership.
 - F. The United Church of Christ has been a leader in the ecumenism movement of the WCC, NCC, Consultation on Church Union and now the Churches United In Christ.
 - G. On a local level congregations have sought ways to made real the oneness that all Christians have in Christ. In Menomonee Falls we had the LARCUM group, in Milwaukee there is MICAH, Sussex has the cooperating Churches, and Waukesha has SOPHIA, among others.
 - H. One of the rewards of faithful discipleship is gathering together with brothers and sisters in Christ to worship, witness and work.
- VI. We have a proud tradition, and a promising future of making and celebrating faithful discipleship.. Thanks be to God.