**Series: Core Values of Agape Christian Church**

**Sermon: When Jesus calls a man...**

My life as a Christian changed dramatically when I was introduced to a single sentence from a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi spy. In his preaching and writing he challenged the agenda of the Third Reich until he was eventually arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943 and executed two years later.

In his classic book, The Cost of Discipleship, is this line: *When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die*. A friend from college taught a song from that line.

*When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die.*

*When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die.*

*When Jesus calls you son, you must not ask Him why.*

*When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come lay down his life and die.*

It took me a while to really understand what that means. I was trying to fit Christian faith into my life so that I could live my life with a Christian twist. I could be who I am and who I want to be but with certain Christian behaviors added. That sounded fair to me. I had my agenda and I was comfortable adding church stuff to it. I would…

         speak Christian speak

         do Christian things

         attend church regularly (or semi-regularly)

         sing some songs, maybe throw some money in the offering plate

         even be a church member

In my mind there were levels of commitment in the Christian community. I could choose those areas of commitment that suit my life while avoiding areas that seemed too costly for me. **But** that one line got to me.*When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die*.

I didn’t change immediately but the process began because I realized that I couldn’t really say I had died to Christ. I’m still working on it. I chose to live for Him but to do it by fitting Him into my life rather than surrendering my life to truly follow Him.

The difference was that my life governed my thoughts and behaviors. **I** chose what I would do and not do. **I**determined how I would live.

Jesus said, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*Luke 9:23 When Jesus calls a man, He bids him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow.

I notice a couple things. First, to follow Jesus is a daily decision. Every day I have to decide to follow Jesus.

And secondly, *take up his cross* refers to surrendering my life, my choices, my way of life, to serve Jesus. *When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die*.

This thought began to sink in when I read another statement Jesus made, *Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*. John 14:27 Put those two thoughts together and it calls for a serious decision:

*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*.

Ben and I have been preaching sermons about the core values of our church. We hope and pray that you’ve learned from our teaching. We realize that what we say is not the last word on any of these topics.

We’ve done our best to relate what the Bible teaches with as little interpretation as possible. By that I mean, what we teach is not simply our own belief. Rather we teach what the Bible says. We leave it up to you to decide if you will accept it as written in the Bible or interpret for yourself what it means.

One of the core values of Agape Christian Church is that we are committed to the responsibility of individual believers to grow into the likeness of Christ, developing a Godly character and lifestyle. We believe that a Christian is one who…

         denies himself

         takes up his cross daily

         follows Jesus

Put another way, every believer should be a disciple of Jesus.

There’s a difference between being a disciple of Jesus and believing in Jesus.

Let me explain, even demons believe in Jesus. James 2:19 says demons believe there is one God. No other religion at that time believed in only one god. The demons knew the truth, and it scared them. The Bible uses the word shudder –  – to be scared to the bone.

Think of the scariest thing you know, maybe a movie like those being shown on TV around Halloween. That’s the kind of fear demons experience because they believe in Jesus, but that doesn’t make them disciples.

That you believe in Jesus doesn’t make you a disciple. A disciple is a follower. The New Testament word for disciple is .  means a witnessing learner – one who learns and then tells others.

In Jesus’ time, teachers had disciples. A student chose a teacher to whom he would be absolutely committed. He learned what the teacher taught, did what the teacher said and did, and obeyed the teacher. He then went on to teach others.

There are many who believe yet who never take on the characteristics of a disciple.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus had disciples. The first reference is in Matthew 5:1, *Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him and He began to teach them*…Matthew 5:1f

The men that Jesus had called earlier, Peter and James and John, etc., were in fact disciples but they were not yet identified as disciples. Not until Matthew 5:1.

There’s a difference between being a disciple of Jesus and calling yourself a Christian. The men and women who followed Jesus were called disciples.

As John Stott observed, the disciples used the name Christ so much that…*the unbelieving public in Antioch, noted for their wit and nicknaming skill, who supposed that Christ was a proper name and not a title, coined the epithet *******

We learn in Acts that they…*were called Christians first at Antioch*. Acts 11:26 The scoffers in Antioch changed the designation of Jesus followers from disciples to Christians.

Don’t get me wrong, I have no problem with the term Christian. In fact, I like it. At the same time I recognize that in our culture the word “Christian” has been weakened.

No longer does “Christian” indicate that I am a disciple of Jesus. It means simply that I believe in Jesus. I refuse to give in to that thinking. A Christian is a disciple of Jesus,

         a follower of Jesus

         one who learns from Jesus

         one who does what Jesus did

         one who obeys what Jesus taught

Here’s a hard statement. Listen closely because I don’t want you to get this wrong. **I don’t believe that you can be a Christian and not be a disciple**. Personal Christ-likeness is essential to the Christian life.

It almost seems contradictory doesn’t it: One the one hand I teach that the Bible says that we’re saved by faith apart from works, and then I turn around and say that we have to be disciples.

Think through this with me: The Bible says…*righteousness from God comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe*. Romans 3:22 Righteousness means to be “right with God” and righteousness doesn’t come from anything we do but from what Jesus did.

We love that don’t we? We don’t have to do anything to get into heaven. Jesus did it all.

         It’s not because of what we’ve done but because of who He is

         Its not because of who we are but because of what He’s done

What does it mean to become a Christians? Doesn’t it mean receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Again the Bible says…*to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God*. John 1:12 There’s no doing in this.

Now, do you see the difference between one who is a disciple of Jesus and one who simply believes in Jesus? The demons believe in Jesus but are not disciples. A Christian who is a disciple of Jesus receives Him as Lord and Savior.

Many believers use Ephesians 2:8&9 for a life philosophy: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast*.

They conclude, *I’m saved by faith not by works*. *I don’t have to be a disciple*.

You can’t go wrong with that…unless you read the next verse which talks about God’s purpose…*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Ephesians 2:10

Let’s read it again so that we don’t miss it.

         *For* – purpose statement – we have been saved by grace through faith because God makes us His*workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*

         *to do good works* – That’s actually not even a verb. It’s a dative noun and adjective. Dative means direction. God saved us by grace through faith with the intention that we would do good works that He*prepared in advance for us to do.*

Jesus Himself said, *Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*. Matthew 7:21 Jesus clearly recognized that there are believers who are not disciples.

The problem is that we’ve tried to make Christianity user friendly. More people will respond if it’s easy, so we emphasize, *accept Jesus into your heart*, but give less attention to *receive Him as Lord and Savior.* In that we make a subtle change in the terminology from being a disciple of Jesus to being a Christian.

We did the same thing with baptism. We started calling it an act of obedience. We tell people it’s just something you do because God said to. Well the Bible never calls it an act of obedience, nor does it use the rite in such a way. In the examples recorded in Acts baptism was part of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

When Paul wrote about the change that being a Christian should bring about in our lives, from living in sin to living like Jesus he used baptism to make his point…*don’t you know that all of us who*

*were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*. Romans 6:3f

Baptism is about changing from being a sinner to being a disciple of Christ. We are obeying when we’re baptized and it is an outward symbol for everyone to see, but **it’s nothing if it’s not becoming a disciple of Jesus**. And a disciple is a person who follows Jesus.

Do you remember playing follow the leader when you were a kid? The rules were simple:

         One guy would lead and the rest would try to do whatever he did

         Jump over a bicycle laying in the driveway, everybody jumps over the bicycle.

         Walk along a fence rail…

         Climb through some small hole…

         The object was to see if you could or would do whatever the leader did

         If you couldn’t or didn’t do what the leader did, you lost.

When it comes to following Jesus we changed the rules. We don’t expect that people should actually follow Jesus, to do what He did. We’re satisfied if they call Him Lord.

We actually say, *All you have to do is accept Jesus into your heart*. That suggests you can be a follower of Jesus and not really follow Him.

Did I really accept Him into my heart if I don’t follow Him in my living? *I’m following Him in my heart.*Really? What if I say, *I got a hole in one on #8 at Beechwood – in my heart?*

         Imagine if our worship team just got up here and slopped their way through the songs, *We practiced in our hearts!*

         Imagine if our wonderful volunteers didn’t really teach Sunday school. What if they stayed home and taught Sunday school in their hearts?

Can my belief be real if it stops in my heart, my believing, without reaching my doing?

We encourage people to study about Jesus; to talk about what He is like; even to memorize some of what He taught. That’s all good but we need to challenge ourselves to turn that into action, to do what Jesus did.

I heard this great illustration from Francis Chan. Many of you are familiar with him and his books, Crazy Loveand Multiply, Disciples Making Disciples and about 50 others.

He points out that instead of encouraging people to do what Jesus did, many churches tell people to memorize what He said. Jesus said, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,*

*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. Matthew 28:19f

Someone thinks, okay. I can do this; *Therefore go and make*

*disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* How’s that?

         And we all celebrate

         *Yea, you got it right, word for word*

Now, imagine you say to your son – Son, *go clean your room*.

         Gone for an hour

         *Dad, I memorized what you said. How’s this.* *You said, Go clean your room*.

         A great celebration follows. You hug him and tell him how proud you are.

         *You got it right. Word for word*.

But then:

         *Oh Dad, I can even say it in Greek* – 

         *That’s awesome!*

         *Even better Dad, I’ve got some friends coming over and we’re going to have a study group about what it would look like if I cleaned my room. It’s a six week study with questions and more memorization.*

Chan said that **the most destructive heresy in the church today is when we say you can be a Christian and not be a disciple of Jesus Christ; not truly follow Jesus**.

Let’s go back and look at the Great Commission: *Therefore go and make Christians of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

What’s wrong with this? He didn’t say, *Go make Christians* did He? He said, *Go make disciples,* including*baptizing and teaching*.

This is important friends. A Christian is not simply someone who said *The Sinners Prayer* and received Jesus into his heart. **A Christian is a disciple of Jesus**; one who learns from and follows Jesus; someone who actually does what Jesus did.

We can do better than we’re doing. We have what it takes to follow Jesus, and even if we don’t in ourselves, God gave us His Holy Spirit. We can do what Jesus did. We can be like Him in 2017. We can be not just believers, but disciples.

Think of the impact we would have on our society if the Christians in America did what Jesus did.

Being Christian in our country isn’t popular today. That’s not because our message is faulty. It’s because for far too long Christians have failed to do what Jesus did. Much of our behavior is not much different from that of people who don’t claim Christ.

         We have sex outside of marriage at almost the same rate as others

         Our marriages break up at nearly the same rate as the rest of society

         We ignore the poor as much as does the rest of America

Let me ask this: what do you think people expect to see in us?

Do you know that 30% of our church doesn’t come to church? I know we all have things going on that interfere, but don’t you think there’s room for improvement?

         When we stay home, how are we any different than the guy who doesn’t believe in Jesus?

         What do you think it says to your neighbor when he knows your church has gathered for worship and you’re mowing the grass or playing golf? And what does it say to your children?

Do people see a significant difference in how we talk and how we treat people? Do they see Jesus in us?

Challenge: get on the internet and read what people think of Christians. They laugh at us. They compare us to the Taliban. They call us hypocrites. That’s partly because they hate Jesus and want to discredit Him by discrediting His people. But part of the problem is that they don’t see much difference between our behavior and that of people who don’t claim Christ.

Even people who don’t hate Christians are often skeptical because they don’t see a level of commitment that suggests we’re disciples.

One time a speaker at the NACC shared this story about a Mormon woman he baptized. Many Christians had tried to share the Gospel with her but she always turned them away with one question, *Do you tithe?*

         When they admitted that they didn’t quite give 10% she would say,

         *I’m more committed than you. Come back when you really put Jesus first in your life*.

         Finally two men from this guy’s church met her – *Do you tithe?*

         *I tithe to our church. But then I give to missions and other charities as well.*

         She accepted the Gospel from them and became a disciple of Jesus.

Imagine what people will think of us when they see us loving the people around us; reacting in love when we’re treated unfairly; forgiving those who hurt us

Imagine when they see husbands truly being humble servants to their wives; fathers modeling Christian living for their children; teens living like Jesus in High School

Imagine what people will think of Christians when they see that we’re not just believers, we’re disciples who follow Jesus, doing what He did.

I know I’m preaching to the choir. Perhaps you’ll help me get the message to the rest of the church. We can do better. Are you hearing me today? Do you get it?

What describes you? Christian? Believer? Disciple? Jesus follower?

We really are saved by faith in Christ, and faith only. But that doesn’t make us disciples. A disciple follows Jesus, doing what He did. At Agape Christian Church **we are committed to the responsibility of individual believers to grow into the likeness of Christ, developing a Godly character and lifestyle**.

We didn’t make that up. That’s just our way of saying, When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die.