

United Protestant Church of Morgan Park, Duluth, MN  
 First Sunday of Pentecost, Year A, June 7, 2020

Introductory Hymn: "I Stand Amazed in the Presence" (#294)

WELCOME:

*Grace and Peace to you from United Protestant Church in Morgan Park, Duluth, MN where the wind is blustering and the sky is gray, reminding us always to keep that jacket handy.*

*We take the weather as it comes—day by day. Some days are laying in the grass looking up at the clouds, some days are curled up in sweaters with our heads out of the wind.*

*But every day is one of Gods. And every day God's presence is with us. So good or bad? Those are our measurements. Hey, we needed the rain!*

*So let us accept this day and this moment of our lives as good and holy and full of God's love.*

*So now I invite you, come in to this shared space. Be with us. And let us now still our minds and open our hearts to the presence of God.*

Call to Worship: "Christ be our Light" (insert) (first two verses)

SCRIPTURE

*We are in the first Sunday of Pentecost and here we share what's often called "The Great Commission" in Matthew.*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

HYMN: "Hymn of Promise" (insert) (first two verses)

## SERMON “Kavanah”

Can I just tell you how cool our Monday Bible Study is? We’re so cool. I mean, *they’re* so cool, because they *bring it!*... they bring their thoughts and their faith and their ideas and their journey and we lay it all out there, cards on the table, and dive into this shared wonder we have of living together as disciples.

There’s a word I love in Hebrew: *Kavanah*, meaning “intention” or “sincerity” or “direction of the heart.” And that’s what they bring! To their exploration of scripture. To their discipleship.

Do we get to the text? Sometimes. But usually the text gets to us, which is just fine and dandy for faith in my book.

Join us, by the way. Mondays at 6pm in the Sanctuary.

So we’re talking “Discipleship.” From the Great Commission in Matthew: *Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Great! So being disciples as we are, we’re called here to go out as disciples and invite others into our group, and make other disciples out of them. All nations!

Ok... I can do that... but: “What does it mean to be a disciple?”

See, I’ve heard a lot of answers to that question: I’ve heard people say “as long as I accept Jesus in my heart, my sins are forgiven, and I am a disciple.”

I like that, but it doesn’t feel complete to me. It feels, not like a square peg in a round hole, but the other way around. It’s a round peg in a square hole. It fits, yes, but it jostles around a lot.

In other words, it feels incomplete.

Because what we say doesn’t always translate into what we do.

This is where that *kavanah* comes in. That “intention” or “direction of the heart.” Friends, people can say that they “go to Bible Study” and have a smug sanctimony that they did the right thing—but I’ve been in Bible Studies in previous places where people just “go through the motions” as if they’re obliged to be there and they just need to show up. It’s like telling a kid to do something that he or she doesn’t want to do. Remember? *FINE*... and they wash the dishes with a scowl and a grudge.

And that gets me to thinking about people I've met serving in churches, making a meal or offering a gathering—I tend to picture them in the kitchen here—giving a plate of food or offering sweets for fellowship and they have a scowl on their face. Like: *I have to do this it's the right thing to do but I don't want to be here and so and so took my favorite job and they said they liked her cookies better than mine and...*

Ever seen those people in churches? I call it “service with a scowl.”

See, what any of us *bring* to the moment, any moment, now THAT'S the spirit of Pentecost that we're walking with today. Your spirit, in ministry, will influence others. So each of us make a choice, in our daily actions, as to how we bring our *kavanah*, our intentions, influence our actions.

I'll be honest, now at this age, I don't have much patience for crabby, uptight disciples. Now, I have all the time in the world for hurt and struggling people. But those that just go through the motions and assume that because they're doing something defined as “good” and because they're in a church that nobody's going to pick up on their negativity?

Don't go through the motions, friends. Don't show up just because it is the right thing to do. You are a product of the choices you make and the actions you choose to do in response to God's call. Have *kavanah*, have intention. And step forward there.

Put another way: I remember once talking to a person gripped in addiction, tearing apart this person's own life as well as those of all loved one's around. When drinking, this person became angry and violent. Destructive. I remember this person tells me “but I have a good heart” --and I had to respond bluntly, I know you do, but I may be one of the only ones in this world that know you do...because all you choose to show other people is the unhealthy and broken and angry person. So it doesn't much matter if you have a good heart if all you are to others is an mean jerk.

*Kavanah... that's* discipleship. Not the words or the gestures or the proper obligatory actions.

In other words, don't tell me you're a Christian. Don't tell me you are a disciple. Show me you're a disciple. Show me that Christianity means more than a badge or a brass plaque that you put on your outfit.

What's the old line, often attributed to St. Francis? “Preach the gospel, and use words if necessary”

I've just met too many—especially in this time, when so many of us are divided in our values—that say they are Christians and behave otherwise.

So... here's how I've been looking at it recently. My own *kavanah*, my own intention as a disciple. I ask myself: am I "performing" for God? Am I saying "hey God, look what I'm doing, you gotta like this one! Hey, does this negate that mean and broken thing I did yesterday? How's the scales between good and bad?

For how many is that a familiar thing? How many of us grew up that way—our faith centered on God's judgment? Sort of a "you wait 'till your father get's home!" kind of theology.

Friends, we know God is with us every step. (Can we say that with an Amen?) and God is deeply wanting to guide us in every step. God wants us to walk into our lives of faith, and be in relationship.

So shake off that childhood notion that God is some scowling boss or authority figure looming way overhead with a knitted brow ready to berate you for every little thing that you did wrong!

God is with you when you're angry. God is with you when you're sad. God is with you when your heart goes to places that you are not proud of and when you slip back into old habits you had hoped you'd grown out of and...

just accept it. God doesn't leave you. Knows the whole you. Every little fault and all.

Do the right thing? Say the right prayer? You ain't fooling God.

Because God also knows the grace inside of you. That's why God is walking step by step. Because God want's to see that grace come out of you. For yourself, and for this world.

We, literally, ARE the product of our intentions, and our actions. That is how we are disciples, and that's how we evangelize and welcome other disciples. By modeling intention and action.

I think of my role as a father, similarly. This week was my son's birthday, and I'm heading out to the Boundary Waters with him tomorrow, so he's been on my mind. I want to share with you the morning prayer I wrote on his birthday—I think you'll see how it connects here:

Morning prayers brought me to Eliot. My thoughts turn sentimental, but that's not where I should linger. Love is not in scarcity and never will be. Where I linger is the true and honest attachment I have to that bundle of boy. I know he will stir my heart and break my heart. I know I will be afraid and angry and elated and proud—and sometimes all at the same time. I ask God "what is the best thing I can do to honor and support this love?" I hear the words "lead by example" ...I am told to show him

what good and healthy and thriving and just looks like in this world. He won't grow up to be just like me, I suspect. No "Cat's in the Cradle" here. He may not have my values, nor my lifestyle, but I can teach him what love and joy and care and creativity and balance and contentment and justice look like. I think that's what "Dad" means to me now.

I think we could replace that word "Dad" with "Disciple" here, don't you?

Peace be with you friends.

HYMN AFTER SERMON: "And Can it Be That I Should Gain" (#248)

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER / LORDS PRAYER

CLOSING HYMNS: "I Gave my Life" (#508)  
"There is Joy in..." (#497)

BENEDICTION / Distribution of Wipes