

Sermon- An Extraordinary Relationship

Scripture: John 15:5-8

Sunday, February 16, 2020

Last time I preached, I talked about Article 17 of the Mennonite Confession of Faith, dealing with choices involved in being a disciple of Christ. The disciple has to make a very stark choice of choosing Christ over the world. As part of that larger choice I addressed 3 special choices. Choosing the will of God over the willful pursuit of one's own happiness, choosing peace over violence, choosing Biblical sexuality over the world's lustful enticements. Today we are going to talk about Article 18 which addresses another dimension of discipleship, Christian Spirituality.

If you look up the definition of Spirituality you will get something like this "the quality of being concerned with religion or the human spirit". As you can see, this term spirituality is actually an extremely general and broad term that means very little. Christian spirituality on the other hand means something very specific and is spelt out well in Article 18. Article 18 opens with these words, "We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit". Spirit is the capital S Spirit which means the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is saying, we believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Holy Spirit".

Now, to summarize Article 18's take on "life in the Spirit", in one sentence, I would say, "to know life in the Spirit of God is to have an extraordinary relationship with the Savior of the world". While we have focused the meaning of the word "spirituality" considerably by this point, we are still speaking in broad terms here. To get us even more focused, I will address just two aspects of a disciple's relationship with their Savior that Article 18 brings to our attention. And to do that, to be true to Mennonite spiritual roots I am going to use two German words 😊

So to get to our first point, paragraph two of Article 18 begins like this, *“By confessing Christ and receiving baptism, we are brought into a new relationship with God through Christ. In God's love, our whole life is freed, transformed, reordered, and renewed. In loving and knowing God, we experience communion with God and allow more and more of our life to be conformed to the way of Jesus--his life, death, and resurrection. We **yield** ourselves to God, letting the Holy Spirit mold us into the image of Christ.”*

This paragraph opens with a description of the start of a new relationship with Christ. The relationship starts by “confessing Christ” that means declaring who Christ is to you, and receiving baptism. The baptismal act is a visual and external demonstration of what has taken place inside of you. Baptism is like the marriage ceremony in a marriage relationship. It is visual and external. But there are changes that take place inside the heart of the couple towards each other that are less visible than a big marriage ceremony but those heart changes towards each other are critically important to making the relationship work.

So one of the internal heart changes that take place in the Christ-disciple relationship is a German word I told you was coming 😊 called Gelassenheit. Can you say Gelaasenhait? Now Gelassenheit, means to “yield oneself to a higher authority”. Yielding to authority is a very important value in the Bible. To understand how this works it might be helpful to look at our faith cousins in the Amish world. Now the Amish very much value Gelassenheit, this yielding to authority. They teach children to yield to the authority of their parents, wives to yield to the authority of their husband’s, husbands to yield to the authority of their pastors and pastors to yield to the authority of their overseers. “Yeilding” is a value that is diametrically opposed to what the culture teaches. In the culture we live in, yes we have law enforcement and the courts etc that help society function, but the message to everyone is, you live to please yourself and no one else. Some people might even say, “I don’t recognize any authority but God’s”. The

problem with this thinking is, two-fold. How can you say you are yielding to God's authority when you are at that very moment rejecting an authority that God has asked you to yield to? That is not yielding to God's authority at all. Secondly, [1 John 4:20](#) says this about love. ²⁰Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot **love God, whom** they have not seen. The same is true for yielding. How can you say you are yield to God whom you cannot see, when you do not yield to the authorities that you can see in front of you? On the other hand, if you do practice Gelassenheit with those whom you can see, you will be able to be "yielded" with the one whom you cannot see. Remember Gelassenheit.

I want to also put forth two principles related to Gelassenheit. The first is, if you think being "yielded is below you, remember that Jesus Christ, the maker of heaven and earth, by whom and for whom all things were created, was yielded to His heavenly Father. So, who then has the right to feel too cool to be yielded 😊 Ironically, it is in our yieldedness that we are all equal in Christ.

The second point is this. If you have spiritual authority over someone, you do not have to "make anyone yield to you". The responsibility of "yielding" is on the one who has to do the yielding. If you force it, it is not yielding, it is coercion. Now if those who you have authority over, rebel against you, then it is on them and you are not accountable to God for them. On the other hand, if you do have some authority over someone else, and if they do yield to you and if they mess up, you will be accountable to God both for yourself and all those you have spiritual authority over. So having spiritual authority comes with a great weight and that is why we have to pray for those who are in authority, especially spiritual authority.

One last thing about Gelassenheit. The literal English translation of Gelassenheit is not yeildedness but "serenity". I remember when I was in Pittsburgh we used to have an

international Student ministry banquet every Christmas by a ministry that was not what I was primarily involved with except to be part of their Christmas banquet. Now this was an event where there were about 600 people and they were all served a sit-down dinner that was free to the attendees. It was truly remarkable event. But part of the reason such an event was event possible because the founder of the ministry, Rev Stonebreaker was also pastor of the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Church that was part of the holiness movement. I have no idea how big this church was but many in the church cooked and served the entire meal. It was a big production as you can imagine. But the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist church people were very different. I could see something different about them that I can remember distinctly to this day. I could not put my finger on what it was then but I do now. It was Gelassenheit. They were a people yielded to God and I could see it in their faces. They had a serenity about them. They served with dignity and grace. And it made an impression on me almost 20 years ago that remember to this day. When you are yielded to God, you have a serenity in your life that passeth all understanding. Being a disciple of Christ means wearing your yieldedness with grace.

Another value that is important to the Mennonite spirituality is Frommigkeit. Can you say Fromikite? Now Frommigkeit means a devoutness or piety. Now sometimes people think, piety is about putting on a show of religiosity and an attitude of being holier than everybody else. That could not further from the truth. Piety or Devoutness is simply the sincere practicing the spiritual disciplines that help you to be yielded to Christ. See the Gelassenheit does not come automatically. It comes from practice just as no one wakes up one fine morning and decides to run a marathon. Before they can run 26 miles they run 2 miles and build up on that by a very deliberate running plan that includes a regular scheduled runs that slowly increase in distance till their capacity is built up to do the entire 26 miles in one go. Well, piety or devoutness is the diligent engagement of the spiritual disciplines. Article 18 details the spiritual disciples as “prayer, study of Scripture,

reflection on God, corporate worship, singing hymns, simplicity, witness, and service are training in godliness.⁵

So there are two aspects to Frommigkeit or piety. If you want to increase your capacity to life faithfully, following the instructions of the Lord of your life, you need to **know** the will of God and you have to do the will of God, right? So knowing the will of God for you for that day is where prayer, Bible Study, reflection on God, corporate worship and singing of hymns comes in.

But piety also includes **doing** the will of God. That is where the simple living or what I call a *detached attitude to material things*, witness and service come in. Those are the doing part of the will of God. In the parable of the wise and foolish builders for a long time I thought that the difference between the wise and foolish builder was that the wise builder built his house on the foundation of Jesus Christ. But actually when you read it, the foundation of the wise man's house in Luke 6:47-48 it says this, "***I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it.***"⁴⁸ ***It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock.*** Clearly the solid foundation is not just knowing about Jesus Christ but listening to the teachings of Jesus Christ and following it. Piety is also doing the will of God.

So when you put it together, piety is a daily intentional exercise in knowing and then doing the will of God. Practicing the spiritual disciplines is like training to get better and better at yieldedness to the human authorities and ultimately to Christ Himself.

Remember, God is always looking at the heart of man. God looks at our intentions and God looks at the way people prepare themselves to walk with Him daily. God then responds to that kind of devotion to Him. James 4:8 says ***Draw near to him and he will draw near to you.*** I Tim 4:7-8 says this "***Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.***"⁸ ***Physical training is good,***

but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”

What are the benefits of these spiritual disciplines, then? Article 18 says this, “Such disciplines open us to a growing relationship with God and to putting ourselves more completely into the hands of God. Disciplines are also preparation for times of testing and of suffering. If we practice the presence of God in calmer times, we find it easier to know God's presence in difficult times.” In other words, the serenity from having yieldedness in your life comes from practicing the spiritual disciplines when things are not too bad. The Gellassenheit on your face comes with Fromikite in your schedule. That is what the spiritual life of a disciple of Christ looks like according to article 18.

And remember this. When you are yielded to Christ, you are connected to Christ. **John 15:5-8** New Living Translation (NLT)

5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

Colossians 2:6-7 says, **“Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving”**.

This my friends is the blueprint of the spiritual life of a disciple of Christ. A disciple of Christ in order to practice an yieldedness to Christ, practices yieldedness to the human authorities in their life. A disciple also practices spiritual disciplines daily with two objectives. To know the will of God and to do the will of God. Then they will be deeply

connected to Jesus like a grape vine is connected to its branch, yielding abundant fruit for its Lord and Master Jesus Christ. May all of us be yielded and connected to Christ so that we can be that branch that bears much fruit, to the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. Let us pray.