

## The Disciples

John 17:6-8

First, at the table and now in the garden, Jesus has been sharing His heart with the disciples. Theirs has been a long journey. They have had their ups and downs, their ins and outs. They were all from Galilee. It is possible that some could have known the carpenter, Jesus, before they met the Messiah, Jesus. They had the experience of discovery when they found Jesus by the waters of the Jordan or when he called them by name with the words, "Follow Me." They experienced excitement and joy as in the mighty miracles and the people's response to them, wonder and triumph in response to Jesus' teaching and His conflicts with the authorities, shock and surprise when they assumed that they knew Him and what He wanted most.

He was the one who told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. He was the one they found talking with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well. Speaking of women, He was the one who allowed the woman of ill repute to touch Him as she washed His feet with her hair and expensive perfume. He let them participate in the miracle of fish and bread. He empowered them to go out and to repeat His miracles. They have been constant companions, at meals, on the road, among the crowds, during busy days and quiet nights. He was not always pleased with them and they did not always understand Him. Their commitment was not always certain. Fishing was too often a distraction. They had trouble with concepts like forgiveness and serving one another and the relationship between sin and suffering. But, one point of their experience cannot be missed. It is more important than anything else. Jesus loved them.

He knew them. He knew Peter well enough to give him his name. It was first an ironic name but then it was prophetic. He called James and John the sons of thunder. We don't think of John as a dramatic or explosive personality because he didn't stay that way but this is where he started. Remember when Jesus asked Philip, "Where should we buy bread?" or when He called Nathanael an Israelite in

whom is no guile? Or when he talked with Andrew before He had met Peter? Or when He mourned over Judas' betrayal? Or when He would chide Thomas for doubting? He knew them and He enjoyed them and He loved them.

And they loved Jesus. They left everything behind to follow Him and they were rewarded for their confidence. In their own (Jesus') circle they were nearly celebrities. If you wanted to get close to Jesus, you needed to talk to Andrew or John. Puzzled about what Jesus meant, ask Peter. Need to schedule an event? Talk to Matthew. Being with Jesus gave them stature and a respect not associated with fishermen and tax collectors. But they did not just love Jesus for what He did for them in a worldly sense, they believed in Him. They came to believe in both His person and His mission. So, they did not use Him, they served Him.

Part of the burden that Jesus bore on the cross was the burden He shared with His disciples. Jesus did not commit suicide. He was martyred. But He accepted His martyrdom as the intended purpose of God. When every suicide takes place, family and friends are profoundly affected by a beloved one who has chosen kill himself rather than to be there for them. Jesus knew just how profoundly the disciples would suffer through His death and He needed to help them. So, He prayed for them.

But He began that part of His prayer by talking with the Father about them. He let them overhear what He said. First, He said that He had shown Him (the Father) to them and that the Father had given them to Him. They had come from out of the world to become His (to belong to Jesus). And, they had kept Your (the Father's) word. This last was obviously a work in progress. No doubt, the disciples had responded to Jesus' teaching and incorporated it into their way of living. They had not done so perfectly but they were well on the journey. The events of the next few hours would entirely defeat them but they would not stay down. Jesus' own resurrection would rekindle their faith so that their mustard seeds would move mountains. Jesus said then progressively and prophetically, "They have kept Your word."

In verses 7 and 8, Jesus listed 4 convictions that the disciples had come to share about Him. Bruner summarized them as follows:

- 1) That Jesus' life is explainable only by God's gifts to Him.
- 2) That Jesus' words are the very words of God.
- 3) That Jesus came down from the very side of God above.
- 4) That Jesus is God's one great hour of sharing, God's major mission.

The disciples understood and believed these things in the moment and for some time. Imagine the reverence and the awe that they certainly felt in Jesus' presence. 1 John 1 captures this, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life - the Life was manifested and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that Eternal Life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that Your joy may be full."

To what they knew would soon be added the fact and meaning of His death and resurrection. These truths would shape the church and change the world.

This is what it is to be a disciple. To know Him and to be known by Him. To be loved by Him and to love Him. To serve Him. To know God through Him. To hear and believe and to keep His words which are God's word. To live in His presence with awe and reverence for Him in every respect. To be called by Him to join Him in the purpose for which He came. To participate in both His suffering and in His great triumph over sin and death.