

- *Everything belongs to you,  
Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or the world, life, death, the present or the future:  
all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.*
  
- For the last three weeks and for next week as well, we have been focused on the basics of our faith, what is truly important to us and to God and our relationship with God.
  - Week 1 – **God wants your heart.** The call of Jesus and his concomitant promise to be with us always lies at the heart not only of what **we do** but who **we are** as Church and as the Body of Christ. The call of discipleship involves my whole being. In other words, **God wants my heart.**
  - Week 2 offered the why (and the HOW) - **God can ask for our heart because He has given us His own heart** in his Son Jesus Christ. He has rained love upon us in the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.
  - Then last week, week 3 took it further: **God’s heart for us invigorates us for the hearts of others,** not because WE HAVE TO but because we want to please our beloved, to love God in return.
  - And now, Week 4 - **A disciple searches for the heart of Jesus.** How can we do that? How can we put them ahead of us, even and especially for those who challenge us?.
  - And just as a teaser, scenes from our next episode, the climatic finish: Week 5 – **The heart of a disciple is focused on Jesus and shared with others.** It’s actually just a summation but it drives us home to the Lord and out to others. In fact, it brings us right back to the Great Commission.
  
- *Go, therefore, make disciples...I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

- *You belong to Christ*
  - Our readings today are radical and counter-cultural.
    - “Forgo revenge because I am holy,” says our first.
    - Go further, Jesus says in the Gospel. Go beyond the law; be generous, even to your enemies.
    - Clear, concise and challenging. And radical!
  - But I would argue, that the most radical statement comes from St. Paul in our second reading: *You belong to Christ*.
    - Paul seeks to make clear that everything has been given to the one who follows Christ, including
      - the leadership of Paul, Apollo and Cephas who are called to serve them;
      - the world which is theirs for use and stewardship;
      - life which allows them to come to know God;
      - death which allows them to meet God;
      - The present and the future because the one who follows Christ recognizes that God is in control.
    - In other words, everything has been given to us to help us recognize that we belong to Christ.
  - Our belonging to Christ is so much more radical than simply forgoing revenge and the radical fullness of what Jesus calls us to in the Gospel: everything that we have and do, everything that we are and offer is about demonstrating our membership in Jesus Christ.
  - Our belonging to Christ is far, far more than some club with a Baptismal membership card, our belonging to Jesus flows from God’s love for us and calls for a radical journey back towards God.

- And that's what a disciple is: someone who goes on this journey, someone who searches for Jesus.
  - In Church culture, we often use terms such as “disciple” or “apostle” without fully understanding their meaning.
  - The Greek word for “disciple” is *mathetes*, which comes from the verb *manthanein*, meaning “to learn” (think of the term “math”).
  - To be a disciple, then, is to be a learner. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to belong to Christ, is to be engaged in a lifelong process of learning from and about Jesus.
  - The English term “disciple” comes from the Latin *discipulus*, and provides the connotation that this learning process is not haphazard, but intentional and disciplined. To belong to Christ, to become a disciple, is to commit to such growth.
  - The learning process of a disciple is not learning things **about** Jesus but encountering Christ Himself.
  - But it's not merely enough to encounter Christ. We have to open our hearts and learn the way of Jesus, better to say, learn the love of Jesus. We have to open our hearts to the change God calls to us by our belonging to Christ. That change allows us to live truly the call given by Christ.
- And Jesus makes clear that our call is to *go and make disciples*. Our call is to help others start or continue on this path towards Jesus, to seek Him, to learn of Him, to encounter Him, to LOVE HIM.
- To do that, we need to become disciples ourselves and that begins by searching for Jesus.
  - Jesus wants to be found; He wants us to belong to Him. Jesus will not force Himself but all that you need to do is ask, to seek and to knock. Jesus promises to answer, come, and open.

- We need to use all we have and all we are. Remember, as St. Paul reminded us, all has been given to us that we might truly belong to Christ, that we might be prepared to meet Him, ready to do what Jesus asks of us.
- So many things, though, stand in our way: the busy-ness of the moment, my hurt and anger, even if it is justified, my selfishness, my smugness (Remember the scribes and the Pharisee Jesus condemned last week?), my self-righteousness.
- Our search for Jesus, if we are truly open, will take us above and beyond these things only if we are willing to trust even as we get further and further beyond our comfort zone. We need to stay the course by trusting in God, even as it feels that we are being pushed out further and further on the branch of the tree which seems to get shakier and shakier beneath our feet.
- We need to focus solely on finding Christ and not allowing ourselves to be distracted. There are grumblers around us willing to tell us precisely why we can't go forward, what we're doing wrong and why it isn't worth it.
- And, if you're anything like me, there are grumblers inside as well: the inertia, the lack of willingness to change, to shove it all off as another failed attempt rather than a new opportunity, even if I have failed before. We need to stay the course, not letting the grumblers, either inside or out, stop us.
- We also need to be practical about our search for Jesus so that our searching can become a habit and the habit can grow in develop into a lifelong process. Pray. Read. Act.
  - Pray. Many of you commented that you did not know how. Let give you a simple guide to help you start. It's what I call the 7/7 rule.

- Take seven minutes for prayer for each of the next seven days. Set yourself apart from everything else. Even you can get away for only 7 minutes
- Take the first minute to share with God what you're struggling with, what's in your mind and heart. Take the last minute to focus on what you need from God to get through the day.
- But leave those five minutes in between for God to speak. You may be distracted, struggle to focus. It'll seem the longest 5 minutes of your life.
- If you persevere, if you remain open, if you do not grow weary, you'll know better God's love and gain some confidence in God's will and desire to help.
- **PRAY. READ. ACT.**
- Read the Bible. No better place to encounter Jesus than in the accounts God Himself has given to us.
  - Read the Gospels. Start with Mark – it's shortest. Or with Matthew that we are reading on Sundays. Or the daily Mass readings. See what God is saying, not just once but every day.
  - Don't read to get to the end (Spoiler alert – He dies at the end but it's not really the end. In fact, it's just the beginning!). Read to encounter Jesus. Just read enough to do that. See what grabs you.
  - What is God saying to you, today, in your state of mind? You may have read that passage a thousand times before but God may want to hit you over the head with a new meaning that you never noticed before.

- Use the Word Among Us to help you. It has great articles and great reflections. AND, get this it's **FREE** because of the generosity of the publisher.
- PRAY. READ. ACT.
- Act. Take time out to do something else in your search.
  - Try a bible study or faith sharing group not just to learn about the Bible but encounter Christ in others and to allow them to help share your journey.
  - Make time for a service project, so many of our young people in confirmation preparation said that they encountered Jesus through service, both in those they served but also in themselves. Again, be open to change.
- Let me give you what I think is the best way for those who are hesitant, those who are thinking they should do something but can't quite decide on what or how. If you fall into that category, I want you to try Alpha.
  - Alpha is a series of sessions exploring the Christian faith, run over eleven weeks. Each talk looks at a different question around faith and is designed to create conversation. Alpha is run all around the globe, and everyone is welcome.
  - I have mentioned before why I think Alpha is so important. Around a shared meal, we get to actively encounter Jesus and help one another do the same.
  - It comes around a shared meal, that allows you to decompress from the busy pace leading up to that moment and settle in for a prayerful discussion.
  - It is an easy opening to the Lord. No judgement. No prep necessary. No homework except to reflect on the encounter.

- We are running sessions here in Brunswick and in Middletown, on Wednesday or Thursday evening or on Tuesday afternoon.
- Why do I think so highly of Alpha? Remember Sy Sperling? The president of the Hair Club for Men? In their every commercial, Sy touted the benefits of the Hair Club for Men. At the end, he explained his endorsement: I'm not just the president, I am a client as well. No, the hair is mine but like Sy, I am endorsing something that I truly believe, something I can say without exaggeration (rare for me!) truly changed my life.
- We had examined what programs could help us focus on Christ. We looked at Renew and Discovering Christ and someone others as well. We settled on Alpha because it seemed the most comprehensive and inclusive
- I went to the first session to lend support, intending to stay only as long as necessary. I ended up staying the whole time and even wanted to come back. Already scheduled appointments kept me from the next one, but in my prayer and discernment, I realized that I was being too short sighted. I rearranged my calendar to make the rest of the sessions.
- Alpha offers and introduction to Jesus that helps all, the unbeliever, the struggling believer, and the fully committed believer either to begin an encounter with God or to continue, deepen and strengthen a journey already begun. Try it! You'll like it.
- A disciple is one who belongs to Jesus. A disciple is one who searches for Jesus. Start on the path to discipleship that we can, together, GO and MAKE DISCIPLES.