

## **I. Intro: Last week Luke Gascho helped us kick off this Journey Forward series by helping us examine ourselves and the context we live in today**

### **A. He led us to examine a few fundamental worldview questions such as "Who are we?" "Where are we?" and "What's wrong?"**

1. As Christians who are part of the Mennonite tradition, we struggle to know how to live in neighborly ways within a land that operates under the mindset of an Empire

### **B. Among many truths Luke set before us, he reminded us of the words of Eph. 3:19, in which Paul prays that we may ...**

1. Know this love [of Christ] that surpasses knowledge and that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (NIV)
2. A people who know the unknowable love of Christ and are filled with the fullness of God: I agree with Luke that THAT is the identity we want! (*walk to center*)

## **II. Now in these 3 Sundays we will examine 3 commitments which we want to renew in order to grow into that identity**

### **A. The first of these commitments, as you see in your bulletin, is to follow Jesus**

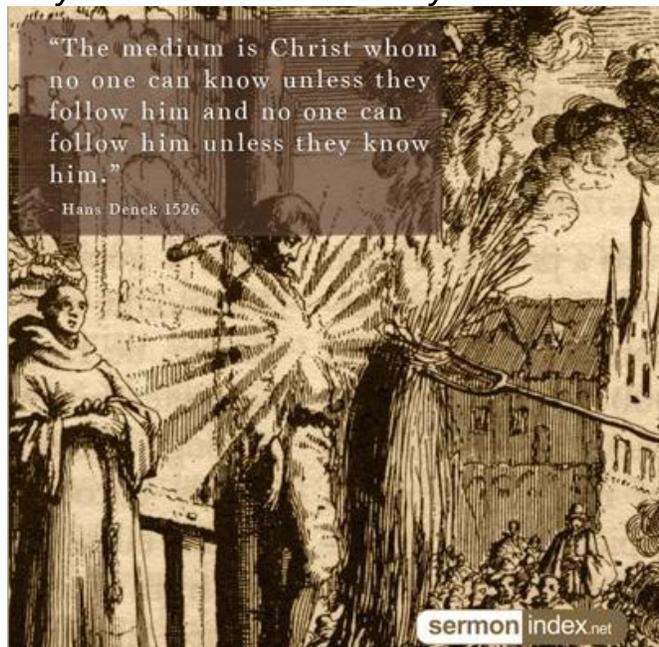
1. *Walk down to center aisle* I'm going to ask you for some word associations, and this is not a rhetorical question.
2. I don't want to put somebody on the spot, but I really would like a few responses, so please call out your answers for what comes to mind. There are no wrong answers, it's just what you associate with it. OK?
3. When you hear the words "Follow Jesus" what words or images first come to mind?

### **B. For me, when I began thinking about the theme for this Sunday, a certain quote came to my mind. *Back to platform***

1. My first association was a famous quote that's almost 500 years old! It comes from an early leader of the South German Anabaptists in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, a man named Hans Denck
2. I came across this quote in my seminary studies and have seen it repeated many times by others.

- a) On this particular Sunday it should probably not surprise you that one of the things Denck emphasized was connecting proper Christian belief and proper living
- b) It appears to me that if people know only one saying from Hans Denck, it is this one, in some variation:

3. In 1526, at the ripe old age of 26, Hans Denck wrote, *No one can truly know Christ unless they follow him in life.*



**III. We're talking about discipleship here** (following Jesus and not just believing in Jesus)

**A. This is a fundamental tenet of Anabaptist Christianity**

1. It's "ground zero" for what Anabaptists say it means to be a Christian ...For nearly 500 years, discipleship has been foundational in the Anabaptist tradition
2. In some ways I may be "preaching to the choir" here in this congregation, but I think it's still valuable.
  - a) This entire series can serve as a reminder, a primer if you wish
  - b) It's a simple review both of who we are as Mennonite Christians & of what commitments we make with that identity
3. Having said all that, I will quickly declare that Mennonites and Anabaptists do not have a corner on this value of following Jesus ...

**B. You can find a strong discipleship emphasis in other Xian circles as well**

1. An example is in a new book that I found in our church library.

- a) Book, called By the Way, is by Derek Vreeland, pastor of discipleship at a large non-denominational evangelical church in St. Joseph MO.
- b) The book's subtitle is Getting Serious about Following Jesus, which is exactly what Vreeland does in re-examining how the gospel of Jesus Christ has often been misinterpreted in American evangelical churches

2. For example, many of us grew up believing that the essence of salvation was "asking Jesus into your heart"

- a) But Vreeland reframes that by writing,

*We enter into the life of Jesus more than Jesus enters our lives. If we go about asking Jesus into our hearts then it becomes easy for Jesus to become a character in the one-act play called "Me". A better way of talking about salvation is to talk about coming to Jesus and following him in order to walk in his ways by entering into his life.*

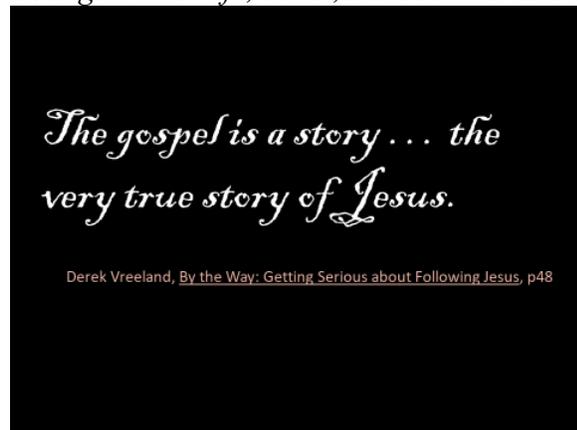
(Derek Vreeland, By the Way: Getting Serious about Following Jesus, Herald Press, ©2019, p 38)

- b) Vreeland helps us understand this in the context of what the gospel is NOT: He says the gospel is not ...

- (1) How to get saved
- (2) How to go to heaven after we die
- (3) How to have a personal relationship with God (and other common spiritual how-to's)

- c) Rather Pastor Vreeland offers this simple understanding:

*"The gospel is the very true story of Jesus – how the kingdom of God came from heaven to earth through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension."*

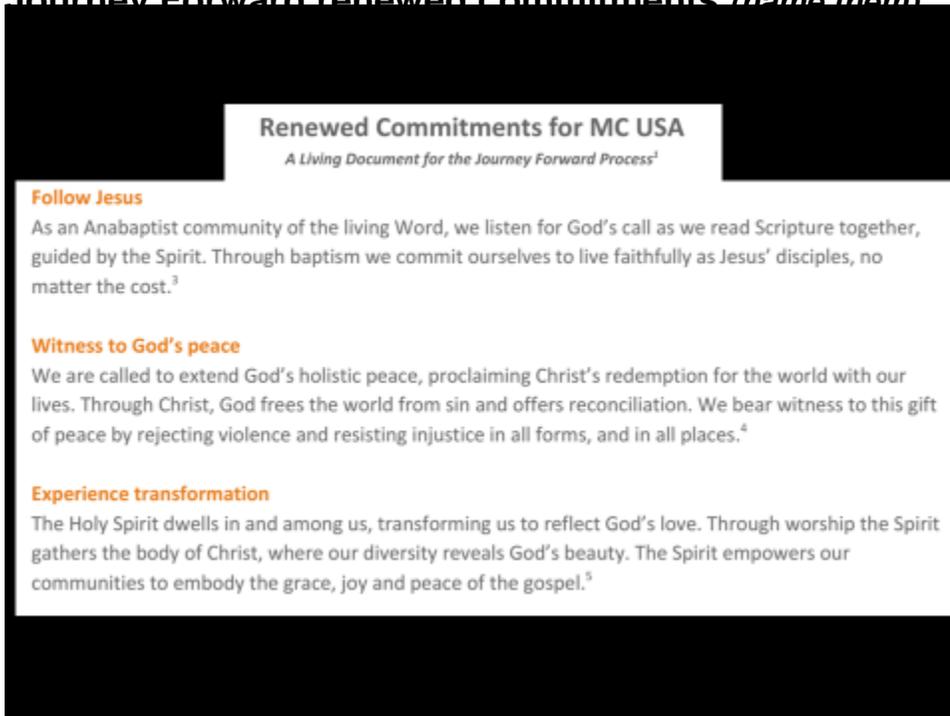


(Vreeland, p47, 48)

- d) This means God has done something huge for us in the past and is continuing to do something for us, so that everything is different now!

**IV. As we seek to be both believers AND disciples at Waterford Mennonite Church, I think it's appropriate today to zero in on the center of our faith: Jesus Christ**

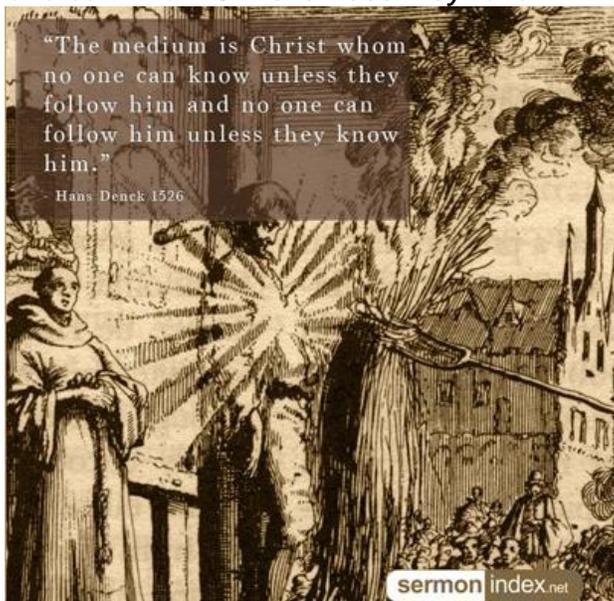
**A. Indeed, it all starts with Jesus. Earlier I referenced the Journey Forward renewed commitments. (name them)**



1. All 3 are important for us as Mennonites, but it all starts with Jesus ... The other commitments arise from that first commitment

2. This comes back to Vreeland's point that the gospel is not simply what you believe about Jesus but it is expressed in how you are living out the Jesus story in your own life

**B. So I invite you to think again about the Hans Denck quote (*No one can know Christ unless they follow him in life.*)**



## 1. "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

a) We tend to answer questions like this based on the knowledge we have of said person, or if the mere mention of said person's name warms our heart or brings pleasant associations to mind

b) A more Anabaptist response to that question is revealed in whether we're following Him in our lives

*(1) It's a rather well-known anecdote that deep in Amish country, perhaps Lancaster PA area or Holmes Co. OH, some outside tourists struck up a casual conversation with an Amish man.*

*(a) One rather bold visitor, not quite sure about this curious version of Christianity, asked an Amish man, "Are you saved?"*

*(b) The man said, "I can't speak to that." Then nodding at his fellow Amish members standing nearby, he added, "These are my neighbors. You can ask them." And he walked away.*

(2) Would other people around you be able to say that you follow Jesus in your life?

c) Jesus himself tied knowledge of him with actively following him:

(1) In our first Scripture today, after instructing his 11 closest friends to love one another, he told them, (*John 13:35*)

(2) And much earlier in his ministry, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also said, (*Matt. 7:21*)

d) But if you were looking closely, there's another part to that famous Hans Denck quote on the screen, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, which is often left off: And no one can follow Christ without knowing Him.

## 2. So then let me also ask, "Are you following Jesus Christ? Are you aiming to follow the way of Jesus in how you live your life?"

a) In general, if your answer is Yes, I would say "Great!" but then I'd ask "Why are you following him? Who is Jesus to you?"

b) For us as Anabaptist Christians, Jesus is more than just a holy man, a clever, articulate teacher, or an admirable ethical model.

(1) As Christians, we say He is the very Son of God, who was One with God from the very beginning of the world ...

(2) In that incarnation in a child born in Bethlehem and raised in a carpenter's home in Nazareth, Jesus concretely demonstrated God's unfathomable love to humankind

c) If a noble and ethical person wants to pattern their life after Jesus the Teacher from Nazareth because his words were brilliant and his life was exemplary, I'm happy to hear that ... That's a good person to imitate

(1) But I rejoice much more when people follow Jesus Christ because they actually know him personally as resurrected Lord!

(2) The ones who are most fully honoring and following Jesus are the ones who know him as Lord and Savior and then live accordingly out of that belief and that allegiance!

d) Simply aiming to imitate the ethical life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth is an admirable thing to do, but that is far less than what the LORD our God wants from us!

(1) God desires His own Holy Spirit to lead us to come to know God through this Jesus-demonstration of God's love!

(2) Because when we come to know God through Jesus, we WILL naturally want to follow in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## V. Conclusion

### A. Do you want to follow Jesus ... today? More than that: Are you ready to commit to following him ... today?

1. I want to give you a chance to make that commitment, whether it's a new commitment or it's one you first made many years ago
2. In your bulletins is an insert which I'd like you to look at carefully

### B. As a way to indicate a new or renewed commitment you are making to follow Jesus in your life, I invite you to complete and turn in this paper according to what the Holy Spirit is asking of you

1. If God is nudging you to make a first-time commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, please mark the first box on that insert ...
  - a) and then commit yourself to discuss with one of us pastors or a trusted friend this wonderful commitment you've made!
  - b) There are friends you have right here who would love to rejoice with you in this important decision!
2. Maybe you committed to following Jesus at an earlier time when you were baptized.
  - a) If so, I invite you today to renew those baptismal vows you made.
  - b) But just as your baptism was not a private affair, let someone else know that you renewed your baptismal vows today! Don't keep it a secret.
3. Or maybe there are concrete ways or settings you feel called to live out how you follow Jesus:
  - a) On the insert there's a box where you can describe how you are committing to follow Jesus here at Waterford or in your own local church

Texts: Matt. 16:24-26; John 13:34-35

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(1) maybe you'll follow Jesus by being an usher, or helping with children's ministries ... or praying daily for church leaders ...

(2) or maybe it's greeting our senior adults at the north doors or serving on a Ministry Team or as a shepherd for your SS class

(3) Write it down.

b) And maybe it's not at church but out in our local community where you will commit to some way of following Jesus ...

(1) Is it befriending someone who's lonely or ignored at school?

(2) Maybe it's the compassionate way you treat people at your workplace ... with your students, clients, patients or co-workers?

(3) Or maybe it's the kind deeds you do for your neighbor across the street, or the motorist you help beside the road ...

4. Whatever it is, today is a good day to commit or re-commit yourself to following the way of Jesus ... Complete the insert for yourself, sign it and leave it in the basket near each exit for the pastors to read

### **C. Finally let me also add that we your pastors also make a commitment today.**

1. For every paper that is returned with a commitment, one of us will follow up with you by phone or email or in person just to thank you for following Jesus.

2. We want to encourage and support you on this road of discipleship, so you know you do not follow Jesus alone!

### **D. Prayer**