

Dedication of Disciples

Let us begin this look at the subject of the Dedication of Disciples by listening first to a couple of readings:

“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.” (Acts 12:1-4 NIV)

“When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:54-60 NIV)

Both James and Stephen were so dedicated to their cause that they were prepared to die for it. James was killed with a sword, Stephen by stoning.

Abdul Mudallad, aged 23, was prepared to die for his cause when he boarded that plane on Christmas Day with the explosives attached to his legs. So often that is what we can think of as being dedicated, or maybe it is just me. Dedication means suffering, torture and possibly being killed. But that is the arena of the fanatic. However it is for us, as we are reminded from time to time by Vilma through the information she brings from Open Doors that Christians all over the world are suffering because they are dedicated to being Christians in an environment that is hostile to them being Christians.

So does it mean that to be a real Christian I have to suffer, I have to be a martyr? Let us look at some other people who too were dedicated.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:32-37 NIV)

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.” (Acts 9:36-39 NIV)

Two more people who were dedicated, but in different ways. Barnabas was the encourager – he liked to help people and give them a leg up so to speak. Just as we read about Dorcas or to use her other name, Tabitha. They were dedicated to helping people and we do not read of them being martyred or suffering. I know we first come upon Dorcas as a woman who has just died. But what an epitaph for her though!

“Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.” (Acts 9:39 NIV)

Peter arrives and they want to show him all that Dorcas had done for them. What a Christian witness. Would that be said of us when we die?

So we have dedication in that sense that of being dedicated to a cause, but there are other meanings of the same word.

Think of someone that you really admire and you admire what he or she says and does. The person has to be a real person, but they can be dead or alive.

1. Would you want to hear every word they said?
2. Would you want to be taught by them?
3. Would you want to see on which side of the bed they slept?
4. Would you want to see what they did in the morning – bath or shower?
5. Would you want to see what they did in the toilet?

I imagine the answers to the first two questions is yes, but not to sure about the others. However in the time of Jesus, people like Jesus would have had disciples wanting to follow them everywhere. They would hide under the bed so gain information about their rabbi. They would want to see what the teacher did with their phylacteries when they went to the toilet.

The disciples were dedicated to learn everything from their master. Jesus we read taught his disciples and they listened. One time we are told

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”
(Luke 11:1 NIV)

They wanted to know about what Jesus did, how it would affect them. How dedicated are we to learning about Jesus, about God and how to live the Christian life. This morning we said during the service this belief

We believe that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Bible, and that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws

But how can we do that unless we know about Jesus as revealed in the Bible – this means the whole Bible? We also said

I promise to uphold Christian values

How can we do that unless we know what those values are and how can we know those values unless we read the Bible? How dedicated are we to being a Christian, to our master

So being dedicated is important. I do know that some people learn by reading, others by hearing, and others by doing, or a combination of those three. But which ever way suits you, you need to be dedicated. If we are dedicated to remembering a particular topic like football teams and results, or facts about a sport, or even the sci-fi series Star Trek!

How dedicated are we, or do we just play at it really?

But there is a third meaning of being dedicated. Let us hear some more readings

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
(John 20:19-23 NIV)

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-14 NIV)

The disciples are dedicated by God for God. In the John passage the disciples receive the Holy Spirit – they are given that seal, which is spoken about in the second reading we just had from Ephesians 1.

Last year, Darren was ordained as a minister; he was dedicated to that task. We too are dedicated by God to a task. As John 15:8 says

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8 NIV)

We are dedicated by God for his glory, not ours, not for the glory of Ashurst Drive Baptist Church, but for God’s glory. And we do this by Rooting Deeply in Jesus and then by Branching Widely, as our theme for this year states. And we do this, not in the future, but now. More on this next Sunday morning.

So how dedicated are we? We cannot escape being dedicated by God, because that is outside of ourselves. But we can choose whether we live up to that dedication, by being prepared to go where God wants us, and also to get to know him better and better. Is it part of our DNA? It should be.