

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
Alive in a Global Uprising: Just Do It
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Genesis 12:1-9

Matthew 7:13-29

They couldn't handle and so they left. It was so different that they couldn't stay. Reed College was not for them. Many of you know that our daughter Katie went to Reed College, in Portland Oregon. Many of you also know that Reed, while giving grades in order for students to be admitted to graduate school, encourages its students to never look at them. And if a student asks, "What can I do to get a certain letter grade", the professor will essentially answer them, "That is not the point of being at Reed. Reed is a place to learn and not a place to earn particular grades." For some students that is just wonderful. For two types of students however, it is deadly. The first type of student for whom it is deadly are those who need the grades. They need the benchmarks. They need to strive for that prize of the "A". So, after a semester of wandering in the grade wilderness, many of them leave. The other group for whom it is deadly are those who believe not worrying about grades means they do not have to worry about working. This group emerges very quickly at Reed, and they are asked very kindly not to come back. I offer you a look at these two types of students, not because I am pitching Reed, but because I don't think either of them would do very well at Jesus University.

What we have before us in the Sermon on the Mount that we have been walking through over the past five weeks, is Jesus University. This is Matthew's one great teaching moment when Jesus gathers students, gives them a very good ethical-religious education and then sends them into the world. But just as those two types of students did not do well at Reed, I don't think they would do well at Jesus University either. And here is why.

The first type of student doesn't do well because Jesus gives no metrics but has high expectations. This type of student doesn't mind working hard and striving to learn, but they need those benchmarks. They need to know if they are passing or failing, if they will be expelled or graduated. So, while Jesus sets a very high bar for following him, he doesn't give them metrics by which to measure themselves. We can see this in the morning's story. Jesus tells them that the gate is narrow, that they must bear good fruit, that they should do the will of Jesus' father in heaven, that they must act appropriately on Jesus' words and build a house that will not falter. We can add to this all the other teachings about being light and salt...all of which set a high bar for ethical-religious living, but Jesus, unlike the Pharisees never spells out exactly what this looks like. And so many people drop out, discouraged by the lack of even an obvious pass-fail grading system.

The second type of student doesn't do so well because Jesus has high expectations and one must work to meet them. This group of students do not think they should work at all. These are what my seminary friends refer to as "flaming Lutherans." When I got to seminary I heard people talking about "flaming Lutherans." At first I just smiled when they said it, not wanting to let on that I had no idea what

they were talking about. But finally I gave in and asked. “Flaming Lutherans,” it was explained to me, are people who walk around saying “Grace, grace, grace, everything is grace.” Meaning that because grace had come, which was Luther’s position, then we didn’t have to worry about works. I have to say, I am a great fan of grace, but Jesus in his closing words certainly appears to tell us that we as students at Jesus University are supposed to do things. Listen again. The Road is hard that leads to life...meaning we are to be walking the road. We are to bear good fruit, meaning we are to do those things that make the world better. Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of God. And at the end, we are not only to hear Jesus’ words but we are to act on them. This certainly sounds like if we want to graduate from Jesus’ University then we need to get busy and do the things that Jesus calls us to do.

What then are we supposed to do? Over the centuries the church has come up with two basic responses. The first is to create their own pass-fail grading system. Like the Pharisees they determined what made for an “A” and what made for an “F”. The second basic response was to go with Luther and say it is all grace so all you have to do is accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you graduate to heaven. Any other work is optional. Unfortunately, in my opinion, both of these ignore the plain meaning of Jesus’ words, and the motto of Jesus University which is in Latin, “Solum Fac Id” or loosely translated into English, “Just Do It.”

The Jesus University motto of Just Do It holds in tension the two poles of Christian faith – grace and works. It reminds us that being a follower of Jesus Christ is just that, a follower. As we have been discovering as we read *We Make the Road by Walking*, we are to be on the road, learning, growing, serving, loving, and being changed by God. Being a follower is never, and never has been, simply about believing certain things. It has been about becoming a particular kind of person who lives in a particular kind of way and does particular kinds of things that reflect the love and grace of God in Jesus. What this means is that if we want to find our way into God’s kingdom we will do so by following and working. The motto also reminds us however, that we don’t have to do it perfectly. We don’t have to love perfectly, because we can’t. We don’t have to serve perfectly, because we can’t. We don’t have to forgive perfectly, because, well you get my point. The motto is a reminder that we live in the shadow of grace; a grace that receives and accepts us when we are less than perfect, reminding us that it is God’s love that offers us our diplomas and not our perfect actions.

The challenge for us is to just do it; to strive the best we can each day to follow Jesus down the narrow way of love, trusting that as we do it, we do it in the grace of God that accepts us as we are but pushes us to be better. So, my friends, this week my challenge to you is this, at the end of the day as you prepare for bed, ask yourself this question, “How did I do today?” and then use that answer to prepare you for the next.