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Proper 25, Year A
Primary Text: Matthew 22:34-46
Delivered 10/26/14

The DNA of Discipleship

“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The year was 1953. James Watson and Francis Crick sat hunched over their desks with cardboard cutout shapes, sliding them around in different configurations.¹ The men were scientists, and the shapes were stand-ins for molecules. As they moved them, Watson and Crick were constantly calculating the implications and possibilities of each position, checking their work against discoveries made by scientists before them. After much frustration and revision, they finally made their earth shattering discovery. DNA was structured like a ladder, twisting around itself in a double helix pattern. This discovery led to a Nobel prize in 1962, and an explosion of research and other discoveries that continues to this day.

As they worked to uncover the structure of DNA, Watson and Crick surely knew that the puzzle on their desks was a small part of a much greater quest. They sought answers to the great question that every generation before and since has asked: Who are we?

This question of identity comes up again and again in the bible. Books in both testaments include long and detailed genealogies and census information. The Old Testament is full of stories about the people of Israel discovering and claiming their identity as God's chosen people. Jesus' identity is a hot topic throughout the New Testament. He is the Lord, the Son of God, the Alpha and the Omega, in today's gospel he's called the Son of David – the Prince of Peace has more names than “The Artist Formerly Known as Prince!”

But the bible isn't just about the people of Israel or Jesus; it's about us, too. From Genesis to Revelation, the bible is also an attempt to reveal our own identity, the identity of the Christian church. Who are these people who follow the teachings of Jesus, minister to one another, and worship God? Who are these disciples? Who are *we*?

Of course, we probably can't discover our religious identity by sliding cardboard around our desks, but in many other ways human beings are just like Watson and Crick. The

¹ Pray, L. (2008) Discovery of DNA structure and function: Watson and Crick. Nature Education 1(1):100. Accessed at < <http://www.nature.com/scitable/topicpage/discovery-of-dna-structure-and-function-watson-397>> on 10/24/14

Saducees in today's Gospel reading are especially so. They are scientists who have come to the temple of Jerusalem to test Jesus, to do an experiment that will reveal the Truth (capital "T") about just who this revolutionary young man is.

Now, the Pharisees are by no means the most noble or pure scientists. They approach Jesus with a closed mind, having already concluded that he is a no-good heretic trying to upset the apple cart. To them, the question they ask is merely a formality to confirm their conclusion and sanction the action that they're going to take anyway – to take down the "no-good heretic!"

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

For the Pharisees, this question fits into that category of questions that are unanswerable, like "Who is your favorite child?" or "What is the best flavor of Ben and Jerry's?" Any answer is just flat out wrong. It's the perfect trap.

But Jesus' answer isn't wrong; in fact, it chews up and spits out that "perfect trap." Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' challenge reveals the fundamental shape of Christian life and identity. That shape is a beautiful double helix, law and prophets held up and supported by an intertwining backbone of the two great commandments: love of God, and love of neighbor.

It's the DNA of Christianity! Our behaviors, goals, and desires as Christians spring forth from this basic blueprint. *Who are we?* We are the people who love God, who love our neighbors, and keep the law and the prophets close to our hearts! We are the people who worship together, who minister to others, and study scripture for guidance in our big decisions and our everyday lives! We are the people who follow Jesus!

Jesus' revelation to the Pharisees is just as elegant, earth-shattering, and fundamental to our identity as Watson and Crick's discovery of the shape of DNA. Since then, scientists have absorbed that discovery and experimented even more. Scientists have now mapped the *entire* human genome! This means we know the exact order of the molecules in the double helix twisted ladders within us. We know that those twisted ladders make up more than 20,000 Genes that determine who we are, and we know where each one of those genes live on the ladder.

So, what are we going to do with the discovery of the shape of the Christian DNA? Let's absorb it, and do more experiments and make more discoveries! With God as our guide and one another as our lab partners, let's love God, love our neighbors, and keep the law and the prophets close! Let's find the gray areas in the twisted ladder of our identity, let's find more questions to ask! This is the work of the Christian life.

If we continue our worship and our work and our study, eventually we *will* discover the shape of what is to come. Eventually God will lead us to the most elegant, most earth-shattering, and most fundamental Truth that we can only speak about in metaphors and

images. Whether we call it the Kingdom of God, the Apocalypse, or the Second Coming, someday we will know not just who we are, but who we *will be*.

Amen.