

January 5, 2014

## **Invitation to Discipleship**

We are now passing through the end of the Christmas season. In the narrative of Scripture a new figure has emerged, Jesus. For some Jesus is someone you have known all your life, for others Jesus is someone new, whom you are just beginning to discover or rediscover. No matter how long you have known Jesus, as he now emerges in the story, as he now calls his first disciples we are left with a question. Who is Jesus to you? What is your relationship to Jesus? I want you to just reflect on this for a bit . . . .

If I was to ask each of you for your answer I am sure that I would get a wide variety of responses. Jesus is my friend. Jesus is someone I am not quite sure what to do about. Jesus is my Savior, my Lord, my God, or even well I am a Christian, I am a follower of Jesus.

When I was reflecting on this question this week I began to wonder what we mean by these things. Is Jesus the sort of friend that we see once in a while and talk about the weather, or is Jesus a friend that we would do anything for, and that we would entrust our life with? Jesus is my Savior – yet what does this mean – is he someone who has healed you? Is he an eternal insurance provider? Has he rescued you out of the deepest darkness? Or if you are a follower of Jesus? Well in what parts of our life? Jesus has had followers who have followed him to their own crosses and followers who abandon him at the first inconvenience?

Furthermore I wonder if for some of us, myself included, if we have not adopted these phrases out of order. You wouldn't call someone your wife or husband after seeing someone every once and a while for a couple months, there is a natural progression of any relationship, including with Jesus. People often describe Jesus as a friend, but Jesus did not use this term, nor would his followers have used this until the last supper, until they had been with him day in and day out for three years. And Savior, Lord, for most of the disciples this was not used until after the resurrection. As far as Christian, a term that basically means someone who manifests the qualities of Christ, someone who is Christ like, now this didn't apply to followers of Jesus until after the Holy Spirit was given and

Christianity began to spread throughout the world. Yet people now call themselves Christian when they have been baptized and never even show up at Church, let alone live a Christ like life. I must admit being a Christian is something I aspire to, yet I am far from.

If these are all things that come later, where do we begin? One of the things our Gospel so beautifully illustrates is that for each of the disciples there is someone else who points them to Jesus. First there is John, who points his disciples to Jesus, basically sending his own follower away. John is here, diminishing himself, so that he can fulfill his calling to be one that points to Jesus. Then these who were pointed to Jesus, who have encountered him, go and invite others. Sometime it is Jesus himself that seeks out like how Jesus sought out Philip.

Our relationship with Jesus always begins with a moment of grace. The moment of grace when someone invited you to come and meet Jesus, when someone told you of the healing or salvation they found in Jesus, or the Joy of encountering God. Perhaps it was your parents, who not only baptized you, but fulfilled their promises to introduce you deeply to Jesus, or perhaps there was someone whose life exemplified something that drew you to find what it was that enlivened them. Or perhaps it was God, who came to you, who spoke to your heart and invited you to come to know Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus usually with someone else, who loved us enough to point the way to point to Jesus. And we begin as someone who took the risk of seeking out what was pointed to. So, who was it for you that gave you the gift of pointing you to the Messiah?

After John pointed out Jesus to Andrew and the unnamed disciple who was perhaps John, or who is perhaps you. They began to literally follow Jesus. It seems more out of curiosity than anything else. I think it is wonderful that this is included. I know that this is how I often feel, who is this Jesus really, what is he really about. There are people just beginning their faith journey and people who have been around the churches for ages who are at this initial stage of cautious curiosity.

Then there comes another moment of Grace, Jesus address us. "What are you looking for?" Here is a question that is great to meditate on especially at the beginning of

a new year. What are you looking for? Deep in your heart, what is your deepest, your core desire? What desire in you is it leading you to Jesus?

Then there is the moment of grace upon grace, when Jesus invites us to “Come and See.” As I have been hanging out with people of other religions and other traditions, one of the things that has struck me is how often there is a sort of qualification process before a spiritual teacher will take on student. They have to do certain things, they have to have had certain experiences, they need to be a certain type of person or even have enough money to pay. With Jesus there is none of this, Andrew and the other disciples are simply curious, they just have the initial spark of desire, they just need to have the guts to ask Jesus “Rabbi, where are you staying” and Jesus invites them welcomes them to “come and see.

Often I wonder if we suffer unnecessary dryness in our spiritual life because we don’t understand this simple question and Jesus’ response. Our challenge is that when we think of a teacher we think of someone who teaches concepts or skills, tests their students on these skills and everyone goes home. This is not what is meant by discipleship. They ask the question “Rabbi, where are you staying” because to be a disciple of someone was about learning how to take on the life of the teacher in all of its aspects. This was not just about learning concepts in your mind, or skills for your hands, but rather having your entire life, in all its aspects, to being reshaped by the teacher. Thus a disciple would live with their teacher, they would follow them, watching and imitating them until, the saying went, they were covered with the dust of their master. “Come and See” is the invitation to live with Jesus, and to watch him and thus learn how to live from him.

The question that continues to be with me these days is how much do we suffer, how much we give up in our spiritual lives, actually in our whole life, because we are not willing to submit the entirety of our life, to the teachings of Jesus, to be shaped in imitation of him? And take the initial step of becoming a disciple. For this is the foundational stage of our deepening relationship with him. All of those other words that we like to describe our relationship with Jesus, as our friend, as our savior, as our Lord, as our God, or even to describe our self as Christians, they are all empty words if we have

not first became Jesus disciples, submitting all of our life to his teaching, getting to know Jesus with all of our being.

Does this mean that you need to be perfect, that you need to meet some level? No, do not misunderstand me, if you look at the disciples none were perfect, at least by how we understand perfect, each though was willing to begin the process living with, dwelling with, and having their life reshaped in the image of Christ.

And yes this includes everything, our relationships, how we conduct our business, how we spend our time, what we do for entertainment, what we do with our money, our priorities in our life. Discipleship is holistic, for this is how it makes us whole.

Then comes the pointing others to Jesus. What is important about this story is that from the very beginning, after these early disciples had just met Jesus, already they were calling and inviting others. From the very beginning of our spiritual journey, we are called to invite others, there is no separation between the life of the disciple and the life of an evangelist.

So how do you live out all of this? First begin by honestly reflecting where you are at in your relationship with Jesus. Be honest with yourself. After all no matter where you are at, you are held in God's love, but ask your self have you become a disciple of Jesus? Where are you in your discipleship? Now if you are just curious about Jesus, that is good, that is a wonderful place to be, for that is how it starts. But if you desire something more, if you realize that you have not yet become a disciple then the first step is to be the unnamed person with Andrew and dare to ask Jesus, "where are you staying" or in more modern language, pray, asking that Jesus will teach you how to truly live. Then once you are on this journey of discipleship, from the beginning to the end, there is this continuous process of turning to Jesus and asking, what part of my life are you calling me to lift up to you, what part of my life are you now inviting me to reshape in imitation of you. And then there is the process of gently, with great love, patience and compassion for yourself, reshaping that part of your life. And this is something that is done not as a yearly new year's resolution, but daily and weekly, which is why we pray each day, this is why we worship each week, so that we can be forgiven again, and again

hear God's invitation and word. And along the way as we discover Jesus and we invite others, to come and see.

Then along the way you will discover that Jesus has stopped calling you a servant, and instead now calls you a friend, along the way, you will discover that Jesus has become your savior, that is the one that has healed you and made you whole; along the way you will discover that in Jesus you have met God's, and that the love and compassion of God has now shaped you into the living image of Christ, into a Christian, called to help others encounter and take on the very life of Jesus, the life of the anointed one, the life of God.

“Rabbi, where are you staying?” “Come and See”

Amen.