

Sermon on Stewardship Un. Chapel
Sunday January 21, 2018
at 7 a.m.

Topic: Call to Discipleship – being a good Steward

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Today we will look at what it means to answer the call to discipleship as we continue in our theme on Stewardship.

The scripture lesson read from John 1: 43 speaks to the fact that Philip was immediately responsive to the call of Jesus and invited his friend Nathaniel to come along. When Philip first approaches Nathaniel to entice him to come and hear Jesus, Nathaniel was not impressed as he knew that Jesus had come from Nazareth and he asked pointedly: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip was confident of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and so he said to Nathaniel, “Come and see”. Of course, when Nathaniel met Jesus, he too, became convinced of his importance as the Messiah and answered the call to discipleship. One could say that Nathaniel was skeptical about Jesus because of where he was from. He was being guided by his own prejudices and biases.

So many of us, like Nathaniel are influenced by our own biases and prejudices. We need to see for ourselves before we are convinced. Jesus expands our vision, allowing us to see life and others with “new eyes”. He allows us to see life in its fullness and abundance and this allows us to overcome our prejudices.

So we see that following Jesus changes everything. It does not matter where we have come from; it only matters where we are going. We accept the invitation to “come and see”. And do you see what came out of Nazareth, the place where Jesus began his healing ministry: Jesus of Nazareth – the world’s savior and our own.

So let us explore together what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In Mark 1: 16 – 20 we read how Jesus called his first disciples. It says:

¹⁶As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷“Come, follow me, ”Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

To be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him, to go the way that he goes – to accept his plan and will for our lives.

In secular Greek the noun for disciple was *mathetes* which means an apprentice in some trade, a student of some subject, or a pupil of some teacher. In the New Testament times we find the same primary meaning with the “disciples of Moses” who were students of the Mosaic law, and the disciples of the Pharisees, who were preoccupied with an accurate and detailed knowledge of Jewish tradition as given both in the written Torah and in the oral Torah. These disciples would submit themselves entirely to their Rabbi and were not to study the scriptures without the interpretation and guidance of their teacher, although they expected to become teachers themselves after extensive training.

Closer to the specifically Christian concept of being a disciple come the disciples of John the Baptist who attached themselves to this New Testament prophet.

So to be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him, to go the way that he goes, to accept his plan and will for our lives. Matthew 16:34 reads “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. It is a call to say “No” to the old selfish life of sin, and to say “Yes” to Jesus. Inward belief must be accompanied by outward obedience. **There is no true faith without obedience and there is no discipleship either.**

The world of today is being increasingly influenced by disciples of another kind who understand this matter of obedience much more clearly than the average Christian. Listen to what this BBC radio programme said about women terrorists: they showed that they were loyal to the uttermost, they would never betray a colleague, they were

totally ruthless, and they were willing to go to any lengths to achieve their objective.

Should we expect any less if we are to see Christ's revolution of love changing the world scene of today? But until we respond to this unconditional call to obey, flinging away the cautionary "Yes, but...", we shall never see the light of Christ scattering the darkness of this gloomy world. To say "No Lord" is a contradiction in terms. Yet many within the Christian church want the comfortable compromise of conditional discipleship. In the long run, it is we who want to call the tune. It is we who wish to have the final word, when to say yes and when to say no, but the truth is uncomfortably clear: if Christ is not Lord of all, **he is not Lord at all**. There are no half measures in the discipleship of Jesus.

In this painful but liberating life of obedience, however, we are not to battle on our own. We are to exhort and encourage one another every day.

Within the family of God we are eternally united to one another. If such understanding leads to qualities of love and trust which transcend ordinary human relationships, the resulting corporate strength is immense. The Spirit of God who enables us to call Almighty God "Abba"! Father!" is the same Spirit who helps us to see every other true Christian as brother or sister. Jesus calls us to absolute obedience, but only because he has first laid down his life for us, placed his Spirit into our hearts, and given us one another in love.

Jesus repeatedly found that he had to correct his disciples as they fell into two equal and opposite temptations which crippled the spirit of service in their lives. The first temptation was ambition. Several times they argued amongst themselves as to who was the greatest. James and John asked for the places of highest honour in the kingdom of heaven. This is the spirit of the world: seeking for status instead of service, Jesus rebuked them saying “Whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45.

The second temptation of the disciples was self-pity. “Lo, we have left our homes and followed you,” said Simon Peter as he began to feel the considerable cost of discipleship. But Jesus assured him that those who left everything for the sake of the kingdom of God would ‘receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.

The needs of the world are vast. God in His love longs to reach out to all those who, inwardly or outwardly, are crying out for help; but he has chosen to work primarily through the disciples of Jesus. If we are taken up with our own personal needs first and foremost, or if we are looking for position and status in the church, we shall be of no use to God. We are called to serve; and a servant must go where his master sends him and do what his master commands.

God's Alternative Society

When the church commits itself to a pattern of corporate life based on radical biblical principles, it immediately challenges the moral, political, economic and social structures of the world around it. In this way, by its very existence, the church is both prophetic and evangelistic. And only in this way will the proclamation of the gospel make much impact amongst the vast majority of people who, at this moment, are thoroughly disillusioned by the church as an institution. (not only the church but political leaders). For this reason it is impossible to separate the call to discipleship, the call to community and the call to mission. Without a strong commitment to discipleship, there can be no authentic Christian community; and without the existence of such a community, there can be no effective mission.

It is sad that for many Christians in many churches, fellowship means little more than casual acquaintance, or at best a working relationship because we happen to belong to the same group which exists for some specific purpose. When Jesus drew men and women into discipleship he was requiring a depth of relationship that would be much more demanding and, as a result, much more enriching and powerful. He wanted them to find their identity as true sons and daughters of God, which included a total commitment both to himself and to all others within God's family. This was to be their life and their security.

In conclusion, I share with you a story from a devotional writer from from our Daily Bread series - which offers some insights into stewardship:

When my son Xavier was six years old, a friend brought her toddler to visit and Xavier wanted to give him a few toys. I delighted in our little giver's generosity, until he offered a stuffed animal my husband had searched several shops in different cities to find. Recognizing the high-demand toy, my friend tried to politely decline. Still, Xavier placed his gift into her son's hands and said, "My daddy gives me lots of toys to share.:

Though I'd like to say Xavier learned his confident giving from me, I've often withheld my resources from God and others. But when I remember that my Heavenly Father gives me everything I have and need, it's easier to share.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to trust Him by giving a portion of all He had supplied to the Levite priests, who would in turn help others in need. When the people refused, the prophet Malachi said they were robbing the Lord. (Malachi 3:8-9). But if they gave willingly, showing they trusted the Lord's promised provision and protection, others would recognize them as God's blessed people.

Whether we're managing our finances, our schedules or the gifts God entrusted to us, giving can be an act of worship. Giving freely and fearlessly can show our confidence in the care of our loving Father – the ultimate generous Giver.

Let us pray:

Lord, please help us live with full confidence in Your faithful provision, so we can give freely and fearlessly to

You and others. Make us faithful stewards of this mission. We believe that you have given us everything we need to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God and to be the seeds and beginning of that Kingdom here and now. May the Holy Spirit sustain us in this great work. And may we look forward in hope to the day when God's reign is established once and for all throughout all creation. AMEN