

COME, FOLLOW ME: A CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

John 1: 35-51

We've spent a majority of our time since we started The Story reflecting and seeing how God worked to restore that which we destroyed. Time spent, as we should, seeing the destruction we cause and the relentless forgiveness and calling of God to return to him. And then last week we were challenged to look at Christ's entrance into the world. Jesus of Nazareth was fully human and yet his Deism, how he was fully God, was present as well. It's this understanding that all that had been going on with humanity, our destruction, our hate, our work against God's holy ways...was simply not enough. *We* were not enough. So Christ came. God descended...took on human form...and became one of us in order that we might be saved through him.

And today's text is Christ's call to Discipleship. To following him. But it's...not a simple call. It is...but it isn't. The calling from Christ doesn't have any hidden rules because he puts it all before you and you choose. The only "caveat" I guess you'd say there is...is that it's "all in" or nothing.

If you're anything like me, you've probably asked yourself "why me?" "What do I have to bring to this relationship?" And what's really interesting is that I think we can ask that about anyone and everyone. Even those first disciples! Because I guarantee you his work would have been way more effective without *those* disciples. If Christ would have been a little more stringent and picky...maybe there wouldn't have been all the confusion! How many times did they simply not get what Jesus was doing? How many times were they confused? How many times were they trying to push Jesus into doing something else? How many times were they trying to keep people away from him? Comments like:

"Don't sit with those people"

"Don't talk to those people"

"Don't spend time with those people, and Lord have mercy do NOT associate with those people."

"Jesus, we don't have enough food for all these people."

"Rabbi, come here with us but let's not go here or there with them."

"Jesus, I don't understand what you're saying."

"You want me to do what?"

"I'm too tired to stay awake and pray."

"Jesus, how can you say that? I will *never* abandon you."

"I don't know him. I've never been with him. I'm not that guy."

Those had to be the worst disciples in pupil-teacher history!

But let's actually look at what a disciple means – because these responses that the disciples gave are in line with learning...but also in line with the reality of the cost of discipleship.

The role of a “disciple” in ancient Israel is basically the student of a teacher. And what that disciple, or student, would do would be to learn all the teachings and memorize all the words and works of the rabbi. Taking in all those things that are not only important but are important in a religious understanding and concept. There would be history in this, and religion, and social action. And eventually many of those disciples would then go on to become rabbi's themselves – carrying on the teachings of THEIR rabbi that they learned and taking on disciples of their own and passing down the teachings, the words from previous rabbi's. But for Jesus – it was vastly *more* than this. It wasn't simply learning and passing on information – it was living it out. It wasn't simply living it out but it was living *into* it as well. Where other disciples could still be who they were and live and do what they did and act the way they acted...Jesus turns that whole notion of “discipleship” on its head. Because for Christ it wasn't simply about doing what had been taught – but doing what God commanded. One author writes that the requirements from Christ to be his disciple went well beyond the normal pupil-teacher relationship and actually gave new meaning to the word “disciple”. **Luke 12:8** states that our faith in Jesus and our complete allegiance to him is where our future is placed. So it's not only listening...but a complete faith and allegiance to him and him alone.

For Christ – there was a cost to discipleship. There's a cost to the relationship. Because it's not just lip-service. It's not only talking the talk – but walking the walk. And it's not only lip-service from Christ...but a command from him. A command from God.

The cost here is everything. I don't know if you remember last year, during Lent, we talked about what the disciples would face – should they step up to the call to “follow” Jesus and truly *be* his disciple. And during that Lent we talked about “relinquishing our lives” to Christ and we looked at **Matthew 10:5-42** which gives us kind of the job description for being a Christian back then. And I'm not sure if you recall it or not, but I'm going to re-read what I wrote as to what that could look like today should we find that ad in the newspaper, or Craigslist, or some website that was hiring.

WANTED: Traveling announcer, preacher, healer, and grace-sharer wanted to teach the lessons they learn and share the message given. You will be exposed to some, all, and possibly quite a bit more than what you read here.

Homelessness, hunger, feast, famine, and poverty – and yet riches beyond understanding. Wanderings, stability and instability, fear, and danger, persecution, beatings, death, and yet life. Love, confusion, hope, and betrayal...and yet these are only a few of the exciting things you will experience! You will have no home to go to but what is offered; no food to bring except what

you are given; no clothes to worry about except what you wear; and no money to be of concern because you won't bring any, spend any, or take any from anyone. You are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have skin diseases...and drive out demons from those you meet. All of these things by way of no medical education, no book learning, no online course, no magazine – but by *your* love, *my* love, and *my* commands alone. You will need to be willing to disown your own family, be willing to tear apart other families, and be swift on your feet for people will want to capture you and hurt you – probably kill you too...so be ready to move at a moment's notice...flee at the drop of a hat...and then start all over again upon entering the very next town you come to.

The Pay: Nothing.

The length of work: Until you breathe your last.

The Cost: Everything.

The Reward: Life.

In essence...you will be Me to others.

This was the cost of following Jesus – this IS the requirements of his discipleship. This was the cost that I don't think Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael really understood. They knew that this is who Moses had written about, they knew that this is who John had proclaimed would come...the one whom he wouldn't even be worthy of washing the feet of – but there is a difference between what had always been and what now would be when it comes to not only students and their rabbi's...but followers...and Christ.

For you and I, today, that charge that Jesus gave to Philip, is the same charge he gives to us. And not only as the church, but as people OF the church and followers, disciples, of Christ. And these are non-negotiables. A follower of Christ must know what Christ teaches. Which means we have to be in the Word. We don't have the privileges those first disciples had. We don't get to sit and listen to Christ as he teaches. We don't have the luxury of asking questions and trying to prod more out of him to understand exactly what he meant. We don't get to watch him as he lives out those very words he gives. Which means...we have to take what we have, what God has given to us, what the Holy Spirit has opened up to us...we have to take that and run with it. We have to do everything we can with what we have – which, by the way, is more than enough.

So if we have been given the Word of God – we need to know it. We need to be in it every single day so that we are fully understanding who God is, the work he did, the grace he bestowed, the commands he gives and the reasons he gives them. Being in the word not only because we're told to, not only because we need to, but because the Bible is more than just food and nourishment, it's truth, honesty, history, poetry, prophecy, and letters that speak of love and redemption – but also speak of the truth and nature of God and *his* workings throughout time.

A disciple of Christ, a Christian, needs to know these. And needs to be ready to give account of what they mean and do and who they proclaim. Because we are to share, encourage, teach, and make *more* disciples. That's the whole sending of the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:19-20**). To go and make more disciples, to baptize, teach, encourage, and send – all by the power, strength, might, and work of the Holy Spirit.

You and I...need to be in the word DAILY! Because honestly, how can we call ourselves a disciple, how can we call ourselves “Christians” if we’re not actually doing that which Christ commands us to do?

So often we think of being a Christian as believing and then being kind to people. Serving others and loving people. Showing kindness and love and grace to others. There's truth there...but even non-Christians do *those* things to others. So we're saying the only thing that separates Christians from non-Christians is belief in Christ? Yes...but no! There's much more to it. I would argue...that the basic understanding of being a Christian comes to us in **Matthew 4:19** – and it's the first 3 words of verse 19: “*Come, follow me*”

That's the calling to the disciples – that's what he has called to you and me. “Come...follow me.” And that word “come” is a powerful, inviting, and yet challenging word. Because it means that you have to move. You can't be idle, you can't sit there and do nothing. You have to get up from where you are and go to where *he* is and where he is going and where he wants you to go.

To “come” and follow Christ means a full-on following and nothing done partially. You can't love sometimes, serve sometimes, think of others sometimes – it's always, every day, every moment in all you do. At home, at work, at play, running errands, watching a sporting event, cheering on your kids, serving on PTO, attending concerts, playing in the church softball league, baking cookies for others and visiting other countries on vacation. It's doing what Pam Whitney was wearing last week at church in the t-shirt that said, “I'm a Christian” or other t-shirts that say, “Got Jesus?” It's proclaiming Christ's reign and rule in not only your life but all of his kingdom all day, every day, without ceasing.

It's asking people how you can pray for them and then actually praying for them! It's asking people, “how they are doing?” and genuinely caring and listening to their answers. It's seeing needs and stepping into those needs at the cost of anything to you. It's challenging other people in how they act, live their lives, and respond to other people when what they do or say speaks AGAINST love, service, hope, peace, and grace.

It's declaring that you follow Christ, you are a disciple of Christ and not of this world. And knowing that when you declare that...you are making a statement that his ways, *his* calling, is

not going to line up with what everyone else says and does. Saying “Yes” to following Jesus and being his disciple...to BEING A CHRISTIAN... is knowing that he asks us to partner with him, to follow him, to be led by him, to be equipped by him, to be sent by him – and to do so by *his* rules and standards...and nobody else’s.

A.W. Tozer once wrote that “*The true follower of Christ will not ask, ‘If I embrace this truth, what will it cost me?’ Rather they will say, ‘This is truth. God help me to walk in it, let come what may!’*”

We started our time with the “want” ad that I had written a few months ago. I want to close with it – but slightly modified. The other one was truthful...but I think so is this.

WANTED: Christian. Not only by name...but by life lived. They must be a proclaimer, announcer, herald, love bringer and grace-sharer.

You will speak out against societal norms, you will speak out against the love of self, and you will speak out against hate, racism, sexism, discrimination, and all other things that cause division and hatred among my people. You will serve. You will sacrifice. You will love. And you will do all of this because you first experienced all of those things from me – as I have loved you, served you, and sacrificed for you.

This role is more than a job, it’s more than a calling, it’s more than 8-5. It’s a life change, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year – there is no “time off” or “weekends free”. The pay is more than you can ever imagine and yet your take-home is nothing you can put in the bank or a check you can cash.

You will not need to give up your home but you will be asked to take in the homeless. You will not be required to go hungry but you are required to feed those who are. You may or may not be asked to give it all up and move to some far off place – but know that if I do send you to the remotest parts of my kingdom it’s not because I’m punishing you but because this is where the gifts I’ve given you are needed to be shared.

You will be looked at differently, considered crazy by many, and probably will be viewed as brainwashed for your beliefs and your stances. But it’s not what others think that matters...it’s what I think that matters.

The pay for your discipleship is nothing.

The length of work will be until I tell you breathe your last.

The Cost is everything.

The Reward: life. Not only truly living now...being rewarded now...but rewarded with eternity with me.

In essence...you will be *ME* to others. If this sounds good...let's talk. I'm easily reached, always available, and always there. I will go with you, go before you, as well as after you and any other "you's" you can think of.

Do these things sound good to you? They should. Do these things sound challenging to you? They should. Because being a Christian isn't easy. Being a true living and breathing and acting and loving follower of Christ is not easy. It takes commitment. It takes sacrifice. It takes love. It takes you putting you last and you putting him first and others right behind him...and always...ALWAYS in that order (God, others, self).

It takes YOU...doing what HE has done for you and doing it for others. And not just talking about it...but doing it.

Jesus invites you to come...and follow me. Will you answer the call? And if you answered the call...are you living it out?

Let's pray.