

Disciples of Jesus

Our second Scripture reading is John 1:35-42.

The one called to prepare the way for Jesus to begin his ministry, John the Baptist, says to his own disciples, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (I prefer the translation, "*behold*, the Lamb of God, as I think of the additional phrase in verse 29 where John adds, "*who takes away the sin of the world.*" This phrase is from my favorite section of Handel's Messiah). Let's note how two disciples of John the Baptist respond to this introduction and become disciples of Jesus.

Follow as I read our text:

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

The first definition of "disciple" in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* is "one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another." Also included in this definition is the concept that a disciple is "a convinced adherent of a school or individual." What does it mean for us to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and are we the kind of disciples described in our Scripture text?

How well are we making disciples? We can be sure that non-Christian and even anti-Christian groups are zealously making disciples to further their causes. It's distressing to read about terrorist groups, especially in the Middle East, having aggressive and effective ways of training recruits to their causes, zealously spreading their doctrine and their acts of destruction.

In our Scripture text for today, we see the first disciples of Jesus as they take their first steps in following him. The other gospels record for us the later steps of commitment they will make as they forsake their occupations and begin to follow his call to discipleship. In our text for today we have the instance of God's initial work of grace in their lives that leads them to become disciples of Jesus, those who will be convinced adherence of his teaching, and devoted to spreading his message to the world. In contrast to the disciples of terrorism, the Apostles of Jesus were committed to the Kingdom of God, seeking to bring salvation and the gift of eternal life to all who will

believe. We who are believers in Jesus Christ are also called to be his disciples. In fact our calling, according to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to his church, is to go into our world and make disciples of others (Matt. 28:19-20). Our text gives the ingredients/elements of being a disciple of Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus, like Andrew and John, first of all, have found Jesus. John and Andrew were with their teacher, John the Baptist, when he introduced them to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John the Baptist gave this introduction two days in a row (verses 29 and 36). And Andrew excitedly reported to his brother, Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (verse 41).

From the human perspective his statement is true. But as we take a more thorough look at the text we recognize it is Jesus who found them. The word "to find" is a key word in this text, in verse 41, and also in verses 43, and 45 (W. Hull). It's a single expression that summarizes all the activity of God who makes himself known to us and available to us. God in Christ and by the Holy Spirit made himself "find-able". From our perspective it looks at first that we have found God. But the more we understand, it becomes clear we would never have found God had he not made himself known to us. We were not seeking God. Rather, he sought us from the very beginning of our lives. Finally, our paths intersected with the path of God whom we saw by his grace through our response of faith. What a joy it is to find the God who has first found us!

Jesus pictures the heavenly Father as one who is like a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the fold to go after the one lost sheep and who rejoices when that lost sheep is found (Matt. 18:12-14; Lk. 15:4-7). This picture tells us that if you were the only one lost, Jesus would die just for you and the Father would rejoice over just your being found.

Like you, I made a personal choice to follow Christ as my Lord, yet I know God's grace had put everything in place for me to be able to understand and believe and to follow Jesus. His grace lifted the blinds from my eyes and gave me a heart to believe and a will to obey. Although I was not in the bonds of sinful decadence as an eight-year-old, I understand it took as much of God's grace and activity in my behalf as for the thief on the cross beside Jesus. God found me by placing himself before me in a Christian home so I could find him through saving faith.

Andrew and John were drawn to follow Jesus as one who fulfills us. Jesus turned around and asked John and Andrew the penetrating question, "What do you want?" One gets the impression our Lord knew exactly what they wanted and was asking them for purpose of reflection. These first disciples followed John the Baptist because of a longing in their hearts to meet the one whose way John the Baptist was preparing.

Everyone has a longing. Maybe it's a longing for freedom from the pain of illness, loneliness or guilt, or the longing for peace or understanding. These are longings that are secondary. The deepest longing of the human heart, whether we recognize or admit it or not, is a longing for a relationship with God. Saint Augustine said it best:

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee” (*Confessions*).

And when they saw Jesus, the Lamb of God, something stirred their hearts to cause them to exclaim (verse 41), “**Eureka!**” which means, “I found it!” This expression, *eureka!* is from the Greek in our text, *eurisko*, an expression said to have been exclaimed around the year 200 BC by the Greek mathematician Archimedes when he discovered a way to determine the purity of gold. And so Andrew used this same expression when he told his brother they had found Jesus Christ, who was the answer to the longing of their hearts. They had discovered someone far more precious than gold.

Jesus continues to ask those who are empty and dissatisfied, “What do you want?” And He is able to satisfy the deep eternal longings of every heart. For Martin Luther it was peace with the one whom he perceived to be an angry Christ. The woman at the well rejoiced to find in Jesus the one who understood her, forgave her and gave her the satisfaction she had sought for so long. For CS Lewis it was an elusive joy. Jesus meets us at the point of our need. And the discovery causes us to say, “I’ve found it!”

The disciples of Jesus are those also who are following Jesus. In our text there are words used for discipleship, such as “to follow” (verses 37, 38, and 40). These first disciples of Jesus took the first “baby steps” of discipleship by following Jesus by leaving the past. They had been forgiven of their sin and now they were ready to follow. Not as perfect men, but as forgiven sinners.

There can be no halfhearted commitments that lead to salvation. Jesus must be Lord of all or he will not be Lord at all. Matthew (Levi) at once left behind his dishonest tax collecting profession in order to follow Jesus (Mk. 2:14). And, as we grow in our relationship with Jesus and in our understanding of His word, He will often bring to light other areas of our life that demand to be either transformed or forsaken. And He will lead us to a new and greater understanding of our Christian calling/vocation. Philip was one of the first deacons chosen to oversee the fellowship and ministry needs of the Jerusalem church, but soon became a traveling missionary and evangelist (Acts 6:5; 8:4-40). He too left the past as he continued to follow Jesus by lingering with Him. Lingering with Jesus means to be with Him

A disciple is one who spends time with his teacher and who desires to be with her/him. What joy must have filled the hearts of Andrew and John when Jesus invited them to come and see for themselves where He was staying. What a day that must have been when they stayed with Him. Actually, it was the afternoon and evening hours beginning at four in the afternoon. Andrew and John had only a rudimentary acquaintance with Jesus and His claims as Messiah. But the more they were with Him and talked with Him, the more they began to realize this man just might be the one announced in Scripture as Messiah.

A disciple is first of all a worshiper of Jesus as King of kings. In fact, this is the reason the Father sought us, so we might become His worshipers (John 4:23). How can anyone claim to be a Christian who does not long for and cherish the opportunity to worship with the people of God the one who is King of kings? And, even in our secret place, we want to linger in His presence in our personal worship and quiet time with Him. The more we are with Him, the more we are absolutely convinced He is all He claims to be as Prophet, Priest, and King.

I know how easy it is for us to get off track as disciples of Jesus who must linger with Jesus and cherish our uninterrupted time with Him. Walking with Jesus means we want to find times of personal worship, even if these might be of necessity somewhat irregular. And as disciples of Jesus we long for our essential times of corporate worship with the family of God.

After Andrew and John had spent that first day with Jesus, Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus. Of course Simon was to become a more famous follower of Jesus. We note how Jesus “looked at Simon and said, ‘*You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas, which, when translated, is Peter, v. 42.*’” When God changed names He did so to indicate a changed life, as with Abraham, Jacob, and Saul of Tarsus. Here Jesus gives a prophecy that Simon would some day live up to his new name, Peter. This Greek name *petros* is the word for “rock.” (Kephas, or Cephas, is the Aramaic). A closer English equivalent would be our nickname “Rocky,” which would be an apt nickname for a championship heavyweight boxer like Rocky Balboa.

Jesus, in renaming Simon as Peter, or Rocky, is saying that to linger with Jesus in a personal relationship of being in His word is to become like Jesus. We all know how Simon Peter failed miserably at first to live up to his new name. He showed himself to be good-hearted but also immature in his understanding of the way of the cross (Matt. 16:22-23; 14:22-36), resorted to carnal measures as he tried to behead Jesus’ captors (Jn. 18:1-11), and then denied the Lord three times before the young maiden (Jn. 18:15-18; 25-27).

I think of John, who was probably one of these two disciples who were the first to follow Jesus. John and his brother James were the pair whom Jesus called “the Sons of Thunder” (Mk. 3:17). They were the two disciples who wanted Jesus’ permission to call down fire from heaven to consume the unreceptive Samaritans (Lk. 9:54-55). Yet, after Jesus’ cross and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, John the volatile disciple became the Apostle of Love. He wrote this beautiful Fourth Gospel, received and wrote *The Revelation*, and also wrote the tender epistles that feature love as one of the necessary graces of the Christian life (1, 2, and 3 John).

How good it is that Jesus takes us as we are and continues to believe in us, that we will someday become what He saved us and is making us to become! He is making His disciples to become like Himself. Jesus himself said that one who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Lk. 6:40). In the ancient Greek world, disciples (learners) followed and learned from their masters and teachers, such as Socrates and Plato. And the

follower/learner's ambition was to become greater than his master and to have followers of his own. But we who follow Jesus know we can never surpass our Master, and our goal is to lead others to follow Him and aspire to become like Him.

Jesus told Simon Peter, right before his denial of Jesus, that He had prayed for his restoration (Lk. 22:31-32). There is hope for all of us. To follow the pattern of Jesus' dying and rising is to become like Him. That's why Jesus said if we would come after Him we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him. He said we must lose our life (our self-centered life of personal ambition and even our character traits that displease and dishonor Him) in order to find His abundant life (Matt. 16:24-25). Jesus made it clear that there is no way to follow Him and avoid the cross.

In the Book of Acts, we read that "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). May it be true of us, that it is obvious that we are His disciples who have been following Him.

And, disciples of Jesus are those who are finding others. We read that "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (vv. 41-42). When we like Andrew find salvation in Jesus, we desire to tell others. Andrew found significance in being a disciple of and an introducer for Jesus. He wasn't one of the "up-front" disciples who became a leading Apostle. He never expressed jealousy or even discontent over his brother's fame. He didn't scheme, as did James and John, to have a position of power and prominence in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28), but seemed to have the spirit of a servant.

Andrew didn't simply tell Simon about Jesus. He "brought him to Jesus" (v. 42). He followed through on his intentions until his brother was also committed to follow Jesus. Notice, he didn't just tell his brother. He brought Simon to Jesus. Likewise, we seek every opportunity to engage those in our area of influence with the intention of bringing them to faith in Jesus. We need to invest in the lives of others with true friendship, sharing in the deepest level of care, trust, and faithful love. When we truly love with the love of Jesus, we naturally lead them to see Jesus for themselves.