

Discipleship = Stewardship

[Matthew 4:12-23](#)

Today we take a second look at discipleship. Last week we heard the call of the first disciples as told in John's Gospel – two of John the Baptizer's disciples intrigued by John's description of him, asked Jesus where he was staying to which he replied, Come and see. They went and stayed with him. I reflected on what it means to stay with Jesus the Christ and in fact to **be** the Body of Christ.

Today's reading from Matthew again starts with John the Baptizer, but this time it is John's arrest that seems to spur Jesus into his ministry and he is more actively involved with calling his disciples. "he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him."

So what does it mean to be Jesus' disciples? Clearly for these fishermen there was an immediate change. They left their nets and followed him. Yet later in the gospels there are stories of them fishing again, so they did not leave it completely behind. It wasn't that they never fished again, but there was a radical discontinuity between their lives before they became disciples, and their lives afterwards.

Jesus clearly expected that his disciples would have a difficult time and face persecution like he did. In the gospel reading set for St. Benedict's day we hear about the cost of discipleship, that passage which always seems ironic given how we have struggled and still are struggling to

complete this building, where Jesus says that before building a tower a man should see how much it will cost and not start to build unless he knows he can finish. Discipleship he implies is costly and not to be taken lightly. Unlike many Christians in the past and in parts of the world today, persecution has not been my experience. For most of us the cost of discipleship is less outwardly dramatic.

The cost of discipleship for us is in living counter-cultural lives and doing so day after day. The culture around us is like a great river and it is easy for us to get swept along in the current. As we are pulled down the river it is easy to get caught up the detritus which is flowing down - the negativity and divisiveness which is playing out in the media and in our national leadership; the fear and concern of our neighbors; the self-aggrandizement and desire to take care of number one which is endemic. Swimming upstream is difficult and that is for us the cost of discipleship.

We live in a throwaway society where things are easily used and then tossed. But we disciples are called to be the stewards of all that we have been given, not counting our privileges as the result of our own effort or the evidence of some special blessing, but humbly recognizing that everything we have and everything we have been given comes from God and is ours to use in furthering God's reign – a reign of peace, reconciliation and equality. That is counter-cultural. That means swimming upstream and it takes work.

Stewardship of our minds means remembering who we are – marked as Christ's own forever – and noticing when we are falling into the habits that we have learned not from Christ but from the culture- worry, judgmentalism, anger, cynicism and divisiveness.

Stewardship of our time means finding the balance that St. Benedict advocated. He talked about balance between prayer, study and labor, but since we are not monks we might see it differently. Perhaps balance between spirituality, service, community and self-care. (This is, as you know, a particular challenge for me.) We live in a culture where there are many opportunities and very little time. Someone has described it as a time desert. But there is nothing in the values of the reign of God that say we should run ourselves ragged all the time. In fact, the story of Martha and Mary would suggest just the opposite.

Stewardship of our gifts means thinking about the abilities and the privileges that we have been given and using these for the benefit of others, not just ourselves and our immediate family. And also the things that we have – living simply enables us to have more time for the reign of God. Hoarding stuff is a cultural inclination- you have all seen the bumper sticker, “He who dies with the most toys wins” which is patently absurd but has a ring of truth. A life of acquisition may mean material wealth but rarely brings spiritual fulfillment.

Stewardship of our money means living simply so that we may give generously. Generosity is a mark of God’s people because we know that there is always enough. We know that our God is supporting us and as we give to God’s work so our gift comes back in blessings that we cannot imagine. We express our gratitude in giving to further the reign of God. The Biblical standard of a tithe works well. St. Benedict’s tithes the income from the Abundance Shop to local organizations, and tithes our overall income to the diocese for the wider work of the church.

Stewardship of Creation is the Great Work of Christ’s disciples in our time. The very first instructions that humanity was given in the great stories of Creation was to care for the land and the other creatures who live here. Paul tells us that the whole of creation is waiting on tiptoe to

see the daughters and sons of God come into their own. There is a deep intrinsic link between the health of this part of creation – planet Earth - and the enlightenment of humanity. The two go hand in hand. And stewardship of creation is also working for social justice since climate change affects the least privileged first and most powerfully.

It is easy for us to say that individual attempts to reduce our carbon footprint are useless because what is needed is structural change which has to come from a governmental level. But what we learned from the second wave of the feminist movement in the 60s and 70s is that the personal is political. As we change our own behavior, our own consciousness, so we change the culture.

And this is true of every aspect of discipleship. As we swim against the current so we change the flow of the river. But it means constant vigilance, constant attention. On Friday I went to pick up the Annual Report which was printed at ASAP Reprographics in Morro Bay. I know that they recently moved to Quintana Rd. But I found myself driving down Morro Bay Boulevard where they have been for as long as I can remember.

I was not paying attention and I just followed a pattern in my brain. That is the difficulty of being a disciple today. We just start thinking about something else, we just take our eyes off Christ and we are being carried down the cultural river once again, forgetting gospel values of openness and community and stewardship.

One of the functions of faith community is to help us stay conscious. To help us remember our values. To help us remember the one we follow.

I am deeply grateful for this community of faith. I am grateful to each one of you who shares your life with us, your glimpsings of God, your ideas and your inspirations. I am grateful to each one who makes this

congregation part of their stewardship practice and I invite you to join us for the Parish Meeting after this service which is an important part of our joint practice of intentional stewardship, our practice of discipleship.