

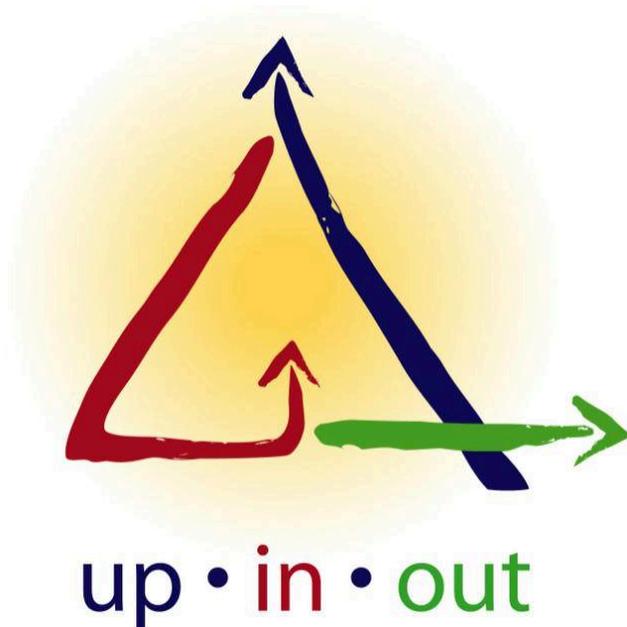
In, 'Discipleship', October 13th 2019.

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

2 Peter 1:1-15,

Mark 3:13-20

This month, we are focusing upon our core values as a church - UP, IN, OUT. 3 Dimensions.



We looked at Jesus own ministry - how he led a 3D life. A life of worship and prayer - upwards connection to the Father; a life of in - calling the 12 and shared life, a community, in which he formed them as disciples. Finally, a life of OUT - he knew he had been sent to God's damaged and broken world, he did not lose

sight of the Father's vision, he reached out and brought good news; he walked among the needy, he did not wait for them to come to him, but he went to them.

## Jesus own life



- **UP:** Luke 6 'in prayer' also his baptism, Gethsemane. 'Only do what I see the Father is doing' (John 5)
- **IN :** 12 chosen. 'to be with him'. Community is formed, as he makes disciples.
- **OUT:** Never lost sight of the Father's vision for a hurt, dark and damaged world
- **3D – 3 Dimensions to his life.**

3 Dimensions to his life. As followers of Jesus, as disciples of Jesus we want to follow him. Our lives are to be 3D. And so our church is to reflect those 3 Dimensions as gathering of his disciples.

Last week we focused on UP - upon prayer. This week, it is IN. 'In' we define as deep community and lifelong discipleship. Last month we preached about the marks of a church community - and those are on the website if you want them. Today we focus on *discipleship*.

So the word for disciple is Mathetai or Tahl-MEED (talmid) in Hebrew. In both Greek and Hebrew the word means student, pupil, learner. You see when someone becomes a Christian, they become a disciple of Jesus, what can happen is that is a positional statement. I am a disciple. Similar to saying I am a Man United fan. I am Northern Irish. That's who I am. It is right and good to call yourself a disciple of Christ. However, there is more to it. Looking at the Greek or Hebrew, to call yourself a disciple, is more than an identity, it is a *course of action* - whatever age, however long I would say I have been a Christian, I am always a student, always a pupil, always a learner.

Jesus is Jewish. His disciples are Jewish. In the times of Jesus, a disciple did not sign up for a rabbi. When a rabbi saw a promising student - a talmid - the rabbi issued the call. John 6:44 - "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." Later in John 10: "My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me..." You are a Christian, you have been called by Jesus to be his disciple, he believes in you - you can do it - even if you don't believe in yourself anymore, *he believes in you...*

After the call is accepted. The person would enter into a focused dedicated time - like apprenticeship - with the rabbi. How did apprenticeship work? Greek model - the main way to apprentice someone - was to transmit knowledge. The Jewish model - was not just to transmit knowledge but it was about transformation of life. The aim was the disciple lives closely with the rabbi, "so the spiritual lessons would be observed in daily action and not just written on a school blackboard." - the disciples are called, "to be with him" (Mark 3:14). We focused on the Lord's Prayer

(Luke 11) - where does that prayer and model come from? A question. When Jesus had finished praying, they - his disciples - said 'teach us to pray.' They knew how to pray, they had been to synagogue, they had seen their mothers or fathers pray. Yet they see in Jesus, being with him, there is something more, deeper, different. Teach us how to pray.

This closeness to the rabbi was praised in Jewish thought. There was a writing: "Let your house be a meeting place for the rabbis and cover yourself in the dust of their feet and drink in their words thirstily." (Mishnah Avot 1:4, attributed to Yose ben Yoezer (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC saying) . The image is that the disciple physically follows the rabbi so closely the his dust would swirl around them, be on them, as they walked together. Maybe like if you are biking so close to someone and you get their mud or water flicked up at you!

So in Jesus day, when called, this was about a literal following, travel with, live with, and so imitate. We see, often where Jesus is eating, the disciples are there, (see for example Mark 3:20). Now in the past I would have thought - this is pretty intense. You aren't just teaching, they are following you around, eating with you. I saw it only about teaching. No, this was natural for a rabbi, for a disciple called. They would learn what he said, but also learn what he did, how he reacted, as well as how he lived. They didn't just listen to what he said, to the woman with internal bleeding, they watched how he spoke to her, the time he gave her, the tone.

Another word that is connected to discipleship can be discipline to do this or that - we do this, don't do that etc etc. But what is the goal of discipline or spiritual disciplines? We need discipline but the end goal of discipleship is not to lead a merely

disciplined life. *It is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus - how we act, think, internally, externally, in our mind.*

As parents, in many areas of life, we seek to have our children imitate us. This is maybe how they learn to fix their bicycle tyre. This is how they maybe learn to score an overhead kick! But also in other forms of education, we can be taught others to imitate them - how to approach a legal case, a sensible approach to an experiment, how to take change your car wheels. We think back to how and maybe still do imitate people of how they taught us. But don't we all still have a tendency to imitate? We can be very flexible at times can't we? We read a stream of negative information eg about Brexit or something and we become cynical. We are with a group of gossips at work and we perhaps notice we start talking about things that we normally wouldn't? That is why Psalm 1 warns us where do we walk, stand with, sit with. Who influences us? Who or what do we want to shape our lives? Our culture wants to 'disciple us' - if we do not put ourselves under the transforming influence of Jesus.

So how are we doing as disciples?

Now, for some of us, we will naturally say 'I'm not doing very well' 'I'm trying to be a Christian'. Our image of a disciple really is the all conquering disciples of the period of Acts, or the amazing Christians we have known, the church leaders, the great leaders of the past. But consider these disciples of Jesus. He calls them. Would you agree there were different stages in their relationship with Jesus?



Stage 1 - beginnings? Jesus calls them from the tax collectors booth, from the boats. They leave all. You could say - lots of enthusiasm, lots of confidence - this is the right thing, not much experience what Jesus and the kingdom is about, , and little skill in the area Jesus has in mind - he will make them fishers of men, he says. But you know as he called them, he saw promise, he believed in them.



Stage 2 - it's hard. You can maybe see this in Luke 9-12. They are sent out in pairs - to preach, heal, cast demons out as Jesus did. Much goes well. But despite two steps forward, then they soon after cannot cast another demon out. They argue about who is the greatest. They also see and know about the opposition against Jesus = from all sides. He isn't the popular man he once was. And he shares he isn't even the Messiah they expected - namely he will suffer and die and the people's leaders will reject him. Not the plan they grew up with. You can see these are

becoming issues for example as Jesus, when discussing opposition tells them not to be afraid. He still sees promise, for he had called them.

Their enthusiasm, confidence as a disciple is dropping. It isn't what they thought it would be. Some mistakes. Personal challenges. Ever had that stage as a follower of Jesus?



Stage 3. Vision, Values, Promises. Now what does Jesus do? Does he try to get them enthusiastic and all confident. Well, he wants to grow that but what he does, he shares vision - of what it means to follow him and how valuable they are to him. And this process, goes on until his ascension. Growing their confidence and enthusiasm so it is based on God's promises, his grace, his power, who they are to him... Jesus for example shares in the power to come in the presence of the Spirit, his love for them - no love has not man than this than he lay down his life for his friends - friends he calls them. Of great value.

It is striking as someone noted. We see Jesus perform many healings and instantly people are healed, restored. Yet he never waves his hand over a issue or an ugly truth in a disciples life. Rather he takes time teaching, correcting, helping, moulding.



Finally, the last stage. Obvious one. He has called them. He has been the one in charge. He has delegated but then they returned

to him for more teaching, to spend more time with him, to learn and see more to imitate, as he faces opposition. But now he sends them out. He says - you have been my disciples. Now, go make other disciples. You have seen me healing, casting demons out, preaching, now you go. And yet you will not do it - and cannot do this in your own power - I will send the presence of God, through whom the world was made, to you - the Spirit.

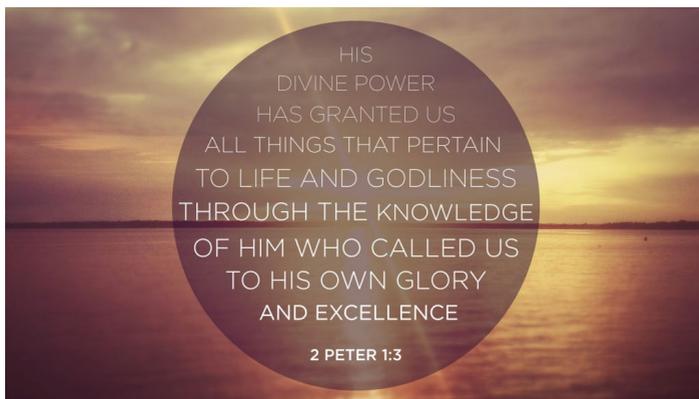
So to ask. To be honest which one of them resonated with you as to where you are at the moment? Or perhaps that may be general. Or you may feel, one area, like how you get on with other believers, you are green light good to go, but living out faith at work, is not going well... But this moment, where would you say - it is a time of enthusiasm and confidence - it is going well, you are enjoying that part of your faith. Hey you know you have loads more to learn and imitate in Jesus but it is great!

Or could you be in a place where generally you feel you have lost confidence or enthusiasm. Things have gone hard. There are sins you just can't get a hold on. It is much tougher being a Christian where you work or live now. It is not working out as you hoped or expected or people told you. You may feel that generally or in an area of your Christian life? To be in that place is okay. The first disciples of Jesus were.

If you are there. Can I suggest two steps. It is okay to tell God you are. I don't have it Lord. I have lost confidence. Remember Jesus ministry - he is there for the unsorted and who know they aren't. Secondly, if you haven't already, tell a trusted Christian friend. At times we create this great expectation that we should not struggle or perhaps wonder what will people think. It becomes a shadow over us. And the devil will try and turn that into shame. Now if you have a loved one or a friend in this place,

look at Jesus, how he devotes extra time to his disciples and he draws them to the fact they are valued, the vision of what this is all about. As a disciple, imitate Jesus as he walks alongside those of his followers as they struggle. Remember, he has called you to be his disciple, he believes in you, he has called you.

Perhaps you are in place where confidence is growing, enthusiasm, as you see how you have come to stand more and more on the power and promises of God, as 2 Peter says. You have come to trust and believe "his divine power has given you everyrthing you need for life and godliness, and you have come to trust and believe his promises." (cf 2 Peter 1:3-4).



You went in the wormhole and came out. You had a difficult time and now, you are there, your faith more rounded, or deeper, you can describe it. Again, you are following those first disciples. And I believe share your story in home groups or over coffee or cake next week. Encourage your fellow believers. You know I had that this week. We visited a friend. His wife of 42 years died in May. In deep pain. Yet as he shared with us, his enthusiasm his standing on the promises of the gospel, of the hope of the resurrection. You know I found it really moving,

inspiring, that is why, I thought, I need to get around more Christians like Joop, they have come out the other end and their faith glows and have so much to share...

Finally, the last stage. You could say Ready for Action. And you know if you are. To be honest. You are ready to be sent out, to get stuck into things. You are in the door in the plane, ready to go. You may not want to, but you know you are ready. You may not know what that is. But you want to get out there or in here and get stuck in for God and his glory. What to do? Well, if you aren't clear how grab me or a warden or a member of council by the arm, get a cup of coffee and let's talk. Or a beer during the week.

Where are you at? But remember:

you are a disciple - always a learner, student of the Lord. Walk in the dust of the Lord.

you are a disciple - it isn't only about knowledge it is about being transformed into the Lord's likeness in all his ways.

you are a disciple - his divine power has given you all you need and he has given you great and precious promises.

You are a disciples - he called you, you are a person of promise and he believes in you.

Shall we pray...