

A Discipleship Overview [10/9/17]

Mark 1:16-20

Today we kick off our series on discipleship by focussing on what we mean by the term - and what better place to start than by looking at the calling of the first disciples.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be focussing on six aspects of discipleship (essential ingredients if you like):

- Intimacy
- Affirmation
- Identity
- Authority
- Destiny
- Obedience

We'll be challenged as we re-look at how we are growing as disciples - and we'll see that each of the six aspects are areas of discipleship that we don't just pass through and tick off as we are on our faith journey, but growth means that we often need to come back to the truth that we already know - but as we come back to them, we allow ourselves to experience them more deeply. And our growth in discipleship is our personal responsibility, but it does impact on our corporate life together - such is the nature of discipleship.

As we explore what we mean by the term 'discipleship' and consider how we are growing, we should, perhaps, think of this series as a big conversation - within congregations, between individuals, within GIFT groups. It is through our conversations that we all develop and grow.

The series builds on week-by-week, but if you miss a week, we'll be publishing the sermons on the website - please bear in mind that whilst everyone preaching is following the same 'themes', because all those preaching are individuals, they will all approach the theme in different ways. There is no central 'script' that has been written for people to deliver. And also, please download the sermons in the spirit with which they have been offered. When you bullsh on the web, you place yourself in a vulnerable position. Those who are preaching have been willing to embrace that vulnerability because they care passionately about seeing the church grow in discipleship.

So, looking at the passage as Jesus calls those most unlikely of men to be his disciples, what is actually going on and what is he calling them to?

Just before Jesus calls those men, he announces that 'The time has come and the kingdom of God is near.'

We pray each time we use the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.'

We are praying for the conditions of heaven to come to earth.

And - amazingly - as Jesus called those disciples, he was calling them in order to involve them in what he was doing. God works in partnership. In Mark chapter 3 it says Jesus called the disciples 'that they might be with him and that he might send them to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.'

So, as Jesus calls the disciples and says 'follow me and I will make you fish for people' - he's actually inviting them to be mission partners with him. And the disciples are instructed to do what Jesus was doing in terms of signs and wonders.

That's an instruction that is repeated in Matthew 12 when he sends out the 12 on mission, and again he repeats it in Luke 10 when he sends out the 72 and again it is repeated in the Great Commission after his resurrection where he is addressing all disciples of all time.

Our basic, fundamental calling as a disciple is to become like Christ, to do what Jesus did.

And in that way, perhaps a much more helpful word we could use is 'apprentice'.

We spent part of our holiday in Waterford (Ireland) and we went to see the Waterford crystal factory and learnt how they made the most amazing items. We also heard about that training that is involved. It's years of training, watching the master craftsman, listening to them, trying the craft themselves.

The role of the apprentice is to learn from the master, to copy the master and to become like the master.

An apprentice is also allowed to get things wrong, to make mistakes and is always under the watchful eye of the master.

The problem is that most of us struggle with the idea that we are called to do what Jesus did, to become like him. When we look at what Jesus did in the gospels, when we read how he engaged with the marginalised, challenged the injustices of the time and cared for all, we can struggle to believe that discipleship is about being like Christ and doing the things that he did. But Jesus said "I tell you the truth, whoever believed in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these." [John 14:12]

As we explore what discipleship, or being Christ's apprentice, involves, let us be open afresh to his call and to follow and become fishers of people.