

Discipleship - An Overview

1 Peter 2:21-25

Mark 1:16-20

During this year the PCC and the leadership team have made Discipleship a priority.

During September and October the Yare Valley Churches are going to focus on Discipleship.

Before we look at how we start with all this, we felt - like Julie Andrews in The Sound of Music - Let's start at the very beginning because it's a very good place to start.

I suppose I've narrowed my talk today down to 5 key questions:

What is a Disciple?

Do I want to be one?

What is Discipleship?

How do we do it?

When do we start?

When I was a child, adults used to ask me 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' 'what do you want to do when you get older?' Funnily enough I'm not asked these questions any more but in my head I like to think that I haven't grown up that much since way back when.

As a child I didn't say - I want to be a disciple!

As a child I didn't know what I wanted to be then as I grew I wanted to be a librarian but that was because I helped out in the school library and enjoyed helping people find what they were looking for.

And as a teenager I wanted to be a journalist, it sounded like an adventurous job but it boiled down to me wanting to listen to people and hear their stories. Sometimes it was about wanting to give their cause, their problem the air time it needed to get it sorted out. Fight injustice, seek a better way for people.

But even then I knew it wasn't what I was called to be. There was still a space - and at that point I hadn't realised that God had a plan for my life, a desire to see me fulfil my potential - whatever that might be.

As a young person at school we had to do work experience.

My eldest daughter did some two summers ago and has done another week this year.

It is a chance to immerse yourself in a workplace and understand what the working world is like. If you're lucky you get two weeks to try out the work that interests you - I had a week in a newspaper office at the Cambridge Evening News.

If you're not as lucky you just have to work wherever they put you and not get paid - my second week was sweeping sawdust for a week whilst watching the men make toilet roll holders for bathrooms.

In both those places I watched. I watched and observed. I listened to the conversations and the language. I watched how people acted and reacted. I tried to remember the questions that people asked that got the best answers. I listened to the stories and noticed how they were recorded and shared.

Rather than doing a day a week and hoping that we caught on, we spent a week of full working days talking the talk and doing the business and it showed us enough to know what we were in for.

I can imagine an apprenticeship feeling a lot like that.

Watching, observing, talking in the right words, asking the good questions, trying to catch on to what was going on and what was being made, what was being built up.

And I think that is what being a Disciple is like. Being an apprentice to the faith, being a learner and a trier and a sharer - readying yourself to be like the one that's teaching you.

Now apparently - Art historians can look at a painting and see which Great Master painted it. They can also look at an apparently identically styled painting and see the style of the Master but with the individual personality and character of the one that has learnt from them the art of painting. The spirit of the master in the work of the apprentice.

So in our Mark reading we see, as we can see in the other gospels, Jesus calls the disciples. The ones we see here are fishermen and he calls them using an example they will know about - come and I will make you fishers of men - and they leave their nets and follow him. They have heard that he is offering to train them in his way and they leave their family business. They take his personal offer of an apprenticeship to his faith and his ministry and they follow him immediately.

He gathers fishermen, zealots, a tax collector. He gathers liars and cheats, shouters and fighters. Proud people and those who shy away from the limelight. And he calls them - without any thought of starting qualifications or a trusted work ethic - He just calls them.

And the apprenticeship, the discipleship that he calls them to...what of that?

They watch, they listen, they learn. They question, they answer, they try. They go with him, they go by themselves, they go together. They catch people, they catch interest and they catch trouble. They learn what it is like to be a bit like Jesus, to talk a bit like Jesus, to love others a bit like Jesus.

And that is what being a disciple is. And what discipleship is.

It's not how you think - but that is a part of it.

It's about how you think and feel as one of God's own disciples.

It's not how much you know, it's about how much God can work with you to help others to know.

It's not how much faith you have or how long you've been a Christian, it's about having the faith to say 'Lord, what do you want to do through me today?' It's about saying 'Today I am a new creation, what can I learn about the Lord today?'

It's not only how much you can learn about the Bible or God but it's also about how you can share all that God has done for you and through you to bring yourself and others closer to Him.

Learning, seeing, listening, trying, doing.

Belonging to the church, belonging in the community, belonging to God.

Learning, seeing, listening, trying, doing.

So how do we do it? or is it something that just happens to us (like getting older!)

The easy answer is - like learning to run a race or learning a skill - we have to work at it. And the harder we work at it the more straightforward it will become.

So we are apprentices to Jesus - we need to learn to be like him, we need to live in ways that help us to be like him and we need to learn enough that we can share the good news that we have discovered, bring people closer to knowing God, like we know him and be watchful for the ways that God is moving in our lives and in our communities so that we can follow in the wake of his spirit.

Now the traditional view of being a disciple is that you learn parts ABCD and so on, then you get more responsibility and move on to the next step and so on. The more you know the better you are. The better you are, the more people you have brought to God and so on. Like a Christian pyramid selling scheme.

But it doesn't always work like that. In fact it rarely works like that and here is where the next few weeks will help us.

Over the next 7 weeks, minus the harvest celebrations on the 24th, we are going to look at discipleship being a spiral towards God, towards strengthening our faith and understanding of scripture, towards knowing God more and knowing how others might know him more.

We're going to consider what we believe and what difference it makes to our lives.

We're going to take time to think about how the gospel, God's good news has effected us and so how we might share that impact with other people.

And we will consider ways that we makes spaces - both in our individual lives and as a church - to learn more about God, to strengthen our faith and also create spaces to learn new skills to share our faith with others.

Now you might be sat here today thinking - 'well I've been learning about God all my life and I don't know what new stuff there is to learn'. Or you might be thinking 'that's all very well but going through a glorified God Bootcamp to train to be Billy Graham is really not me' or even 'that sounds interesting but I just don't think I could ever get that far'

I'd ask you a bit of time and an open mind ready to say 'God what of all this do you need me to hear today'.

Discipleship is not necessarily learning new stuff but it might be making real connections between the things we know and the things we feel. Discipleship is not an A to B trip but a lifetime journey where we think more, talk more and do more like Jesus.

Discipleship isn't all about being the best evangelist in the world or a preacher-factory pumping out street proclaimers but it is about getting closer to God and sharing how that feels with other people through conversations and relationships and friendships - and that goes for those who already believe but haven't had the experiences you've had or the not-yet-believer that wants to know what difference Jesus makes in people's lives.

So,

What is a Disciple? An apprentice ready to learn about God, get closer to God and share their experiences of God in their lives.

Do I want to be one? I find it exciting and as Jesus invites us to be one then I think we need to accept the invitation.

What is Discipleship? It's all those things that help us to learn more about God, that helps us to understand what God in our lives does for us and what it could do for others. And its about learning more about Jesus, trying to be more like Jesus and sharing more about Jesus.

How do we do it? Slowly, purposefully and through the sermons over the next 7 weeks - most of which will be available to read on the website.

When do we start? We start today by asking God to help us on our journey to get closer to him and saying that we are ready to be apprenticed to him.

Let us Pray

Heavenly Father, your son showed us the perfect model of how to be apprenticed to you. May we follow in his example and be more like Him.

And all God's people said Amen

Lord Jesus, you called your disciples and that call invites us to be disciples too. May we be challenged to follow you, to get closer to your likeness and to be inspired by you.

And all God's people said Amen

Holy Spirit help us in our thoughts and actions to be active disciples in Christ who are ready to share the good news message.

And all God's people said Amen

Praise be to God.