

### ***I Want to Follow Jesus***

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.  
[Psalm 19:14]

Our Gospel lesson this morning from St. Matthew's Gospel is about the time when Jesus called his first disciples shortly after he began his public ministry in Galilee after he was baptized by John. Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and he saw two brothers, fishermen Peter and Andrew, casting their fishing net into the sea. Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And, as St. Matthew tells us, they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. A while later, St. Matthew tells us that Jesus saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, also fishermen, mending their nets. They too, immediately left their boat and their father and followed Jesus. These events are also recorded in the Gospel according to Mark [1:16-20].

Those were the first four disciples. There were eight more:

- There was **Phillip**, who was known as the curious one.
- **Nathaniel** sometimes referred to by his surname Bartholomew. There is not a lot written about him.
- **Matthew**, from a family of tax collectors, who was actually chosen by Andrew.
- **Thomas**, often referred to as "doubting Thomas," because he doubted Jesus' resurrection until he could touch Jesus' wounds himself.
- **James** and **Judas Alpheus**, twin brothers and fishermen who were chosen by James and John Zebedee.
- **Simon**, the Zealot, known as a fiery agitator who spoke without thinking. He was given charge of the diversions and relaxation of the disciples, and he was a very efficient organizer of the play life and recreational activities of the twelve. Simon's strength was his inspirational loyalty.
- Then there was **Judas**, who later betrayed Jesus to the authorities.

It is noteworthy that these men were not experts in the Scriptures or noted Jewish theologians. They were ordinary people; fishermen, businessmen, regular folks, who, especially considering Judas Iscariot, were far from perfect.

Anyone can be a disciple of Jesus, as disciple also means learner, pupil, student, and most importantly, follower. Jesus was not finished calling His disciples after he called the twelve, and He was not finished even after He was crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

We all can be followers of Jesus, or *fishers of people*, as Jesus described discipleship to Peter and Andrew. And, of course at Grace Church, we describe ourselves, among

other things, as *A School for Discipleship*; which means, of course, that we are continually seeking and learning how we can, by our life and work, live into our calling as Disciples of Christ.

As I was preparing today's homily, I came across an article that suggested ten practices for enhancing one's discipleship. These practices include:

- **Praying Daily:** Prayer is a way for us to engage in a personal relationship with God. Our daily prayers should include The Lord's Prayer, that prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. My grandmother had a robust prayer life, and she prayed the Lord's Prayer daily, and when she was not sure of the way forward, she would often pray: "Thy will be done." This was her way of giving it up to God, having Him shoulder her burdens, and seeking His divine wisdom.
- **Living as God Called Us:** Everyone is precious in the eyes of the Lord. God always want us to live happily and successfully. We can support that effort by reading Christian literature, engaging in regular worship, and sometimes taking a news holiday so that we are not a distracted by things negative and can focus on the positive.
- **Following Christ's Teachings:** Christ's teachings are presented to us in the Bible and through the worship services at our churches. So, we should make time to regularly read and reflect on Jesus' teaching as described in the Bible and regularly attend church worship services so that we can better walk with and follow our Lord.
- **Honoring Our God:** We should praise and thank God, and give to our fellowman; and in so doing, we honor our God. God is all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere – including His Spirit within us. We should thank God for what we are today. God is Love. He invites us to live at all times in His Kingdom life. It is our choice to accept or reject. We should kindly accept His open arms.
- **Loving Our Neighbors:** As Jesus told us, we should love our neighbors as ourselves. God's gift of Love brings happiness, success, patience, harmony, peace, integrity, honesty, friendliness and hope.
- **Sticking to Good and Righteousness:** In all things we should strive to follow Christ's example and do good by being good. When we wonder how we should best proceed, it is often useful to ask: "What would Jesus do?"
- **Reading the Bible:** Spending a few minutes each day reading the Bible so as to understand the life of Jesus and His love for the world, and meditating on the word of God, so that we can apply what we learn through our studies to our daily life and work.

- **Sharing Our Gifts:** Jesus gave his life for us and for our salvation. In turn, we should share our blessings, wisdom, wealth, out of our little or much, and in doing so, we share and demonstrate our faith in many ways. And, what we give is multiplied as a result of the example we set of Christian living for others.
- **Encouraging Others:** We have the capacity to motivate, inspire, strengthen and encourage others; especially those with whom we love and are in relationship. We should strive to do the same for those who are not family, loved ones, or those close to us; and in doing so, we become agents of God's Grace.
- And, **Cooperating with Others:** What we say may be at odds with what others may think or believe. And, what we speak may even be different than what we hear. So, we should listen, consider, and seek to understand one another's viewpoints so as, where possible, to find harmony and concord with one another.

So, in the words of Psalm 119, let us be joyful in our discipleship as we walk in the way of the Lord; diligently keep His decrees, precepts, and statutes; seek Him with our whole heart; and praise Him with an upright heart. ***Amen.***