

## Disciples – an introduction

### Foundations for the disciple

Christian discipleship has a very long tradition, spanning over 2000-years of history. For me, 21<sup>st</sup> Century discipleship is based on two aspects of the Christian faith. I believe,

1. Firstly, that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ on his cross, where we find forgiveness of our sins and new life that leads to eternal life.
2. Secondly, from that foundation we learn to be disciples by living Jesus' number one commandment: describing discipleship in a nutshell he says,

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment.<sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’** (Matthew 22:37-40)

I suggest that the three points below are a way of fulfilling this commandment above and can form a foundation for discipleship today. Over the coming weeks, we will build a vision of discipleship from this foundation.

- 1) Being present to our Master.
- 2) Being attentive to our Master's invitation to follow.
- 3) Being open to our Master's challenge.

### Being present to our Master

Jesus' first words to the disciples in Matthew's Gospel were **'Come and follow me'**.

Jesus didn't give them a textbook - 'the dummies guide to following Jesus' - nor 'A very short introduction to becoming a disciple of Jesus'; he just invited them to join him.

**Jesus called them,<sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

These Galilean fishermen entrusted themselves into Jesus' care, left their life and followed. They went and lived with Jesus. Rowan Williams writes,

***“If we are going to understand what he has to say to us about discipleship, we have to understand about abiding and sharing, this ‘non-intermittent’ quality in being a disciple”.***

In John 15, Jesus invites and urges his disciples to stay with him.

**<sup>9</sup> ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.**

If you have ever tried fishing you will know that you cannot cast a baited float and hook into the water and then walk away, you must remain attentive to what will happen.

Following Jesus requires attentiveness that Rowan Williams says is ‘non-intermittent’ – please don’t take the fishing analogy too far, in one sense we cannot be attentive to Jesus all the time. If you crash your car because you were praying with your eyes closed the judge will not take kindly to the excuse that you were being attentive to Jesus. ‘Non-intermittent’ or as the NIV translates ‘remaining’ in Jesus, means constantly returning to Jesus just as we return home, or as we return to the dining table, or as we return to our bed each evening. Likewise, we continually return to Jesus and learn to remain with him.

- We will look at some of the ways to practice this over the coming weeks.

### **Being Attentive to our Master’s invitation to follow**

Jesus’ calling of brothers Simon and Andrew has a kind inviting tone.

**<sup>18</sup> One day as he was walking along the beach beside the Lake of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—out in a boat fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen.**

**<sup>19</sup> Jesus called out, “Come along with me and I will show you how to fish for the souls of men and women!” <sup>20</sup> And they left their nets at once and went with him. (LB)**

The tone of Jesus is often encouraging, he can even tell the disciples off in a jovial way, ‘o you of little faith why do you doubt’ he says to the sodden Peter after his walking on and sinking in the water.

But Jesus is also the Master and we shouldn't forget that he has every right to call us even to command us to follow. In Luke's account of Peter's calling he says **'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'** The Koine Greek 'Epistates' which we translate as Master here can also be translated as teacher, chief, or commander. It's a strong noun and indicates Jesus' rightful authority.

With this in mind, we shouldn't presume on the grace of God, *'I will follow tomorrow'*; none of us know what tomorrow will bring. Today is the day, the Apostle Paul quoting Isaiah reminds the disciples in Corinth,

**As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says,**

**'In the time of my favour I heard you,  
and in the day of salvation I helped you.'**<sup>[a]</sup>

**I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:1-2)**

Jesus invites us to be his disciples to follow, and we shouldn't take that invitation lightly but respond immediately.

### **Being open to our Master's challenge**

Jesus was perfect, therefore he was able to lead us in a perfect fashion that included his ability to challenge and correct the disciples.

Jesus said some frightful things to his followers, like this

**<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)**

Embrace an instrument of torture? Life is hard it certainly was for Jesus' disciples in occupied Judah. Jesus taught them to accept that life could be demanding and even outright unpleasant at times, but despite this, we are called to live well before God and people.

Even if the whole world is going wrong Jesus asks us to go right, and Jesus is willing to challenge us.

- Again, we will discover more of this over the coming weeks.

Mike Breen has written and taught extensively on this he says.

***'He (Jesus) was able to create a discipling culture in which there was an appropriate mix of invitation and challenge in the way that he related to them'***  
(Mike Breen)

As disciples we expect to be challenged; he is the Master and Commander of our lives.

### **Conclusion**

As we set off on this new series, we begin with three aspects of discipleship to consider and practice.

- 1) Being present to our Master.
- 2) Being attentive to our Master's invitation to follow.
- 3) Being open to our Master's challenge.

### **Questions for Connect Groups**

- 1) Write a single sentence definition of discipleship and share it with the group, discuss what are the similarities and dissimilarities between them.
- 2) How do you practice remaining with Jesus?
- 3) What does it mean for Jesus to be the Master of your life?
- 4) How might we best respond when we are challenged?