



Making Disciples

Small group Bible Study

Session 3 from Living Faith.

Adapted, with permission, from Living Faith in Burghfield by Rev. Gill Lovell Diocese of Oxford

Making disciples

Aim: to walk in God's way as disciples trying to learn from and follow Jesus; to lead and encourage others into following Jesus.

Bible passages: John 1:35-51

Reflection

Input: Making disciples is the core task left to us by Jesus (Matt 28:19-20), the great commission for the first disciples, but also for we who continue to call ourselves Christians. As Bishop Stephen Cottrell has pointed out, Jesus didn't tell us to go and make churchgoers, or converts, he told us to go and make *disciples*.

Two questions: a) Why do you go to church? and b) Why are we *here* as church?

The answer to the first question of the catechism which would once have been learned by rote by all children and candidates for baptism:

Q What is the chief end of man?

A Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Yet nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus ask anyone to worship him. He only asks that people follow him, that we walk the way of faith with him, that we become his disciples, ones who follow and learn from a master. And in the story of the Emmaus Road encounter (Lk 24:13-35) Jesus walks with two of his disciples and reminds them and us again that the way of faith is a journey walked with our Saviour at our side.

I suppose if we were to think of a modern equivalent of discipling someone, we might use terms like *teaching, leading, counselling, coaching* or *mentoring*. Mentoring is an increasingly popular area of expertise within the workplace - advertisements for mentors and lifestyle coaches abound in certain professions - and many people pay large sums of money to spend time being led, encouraged and enabled by a person of greater experience and wisdom. There's a huge market too in fitness coaching, paying someone to literally walk, run and exercise alongside you to encourage you out of your couch-potato inclinations.

Christians have been there, done that and got the T-shirt, because the supreme leader, encourager and enabler of people is Jesus, as we see so often in the gospel stories. The problem is that many Christians lack the confidence to rely on our master to lead, encourage



us and enable us. We worship rather than follow - because it's easier. Being a disciple can take us where we don't really want to go, because Jesus went to the difficult places of suffering, ridicule, betrayal and death. Who in their right mind would want to follow anyone on this path? Who would want to be a disciple of a man who ended up being executed as a criminal? But this is the path of disciples of Jesus (Matt 16:24).

It is not an easy path. But then life isn't easy either, is it? We don't have a choice about the walk through life, but we do have a choice about whether we allow Jesus to walk through it with us. He has been there before us, though all the pain and suffering, the misery and disappointment of life, and he chooses to walk our path with us if we will be his disciples and learn from him the way of life.

The question is: will you?

Questions for reflection (or discussion in a group):

- Do you think of yourself as a disciple of Jesus? In what way is that made clear in your life?
- How does your church make disciples of people within the regular congregation, and those outside or on the fringes?
- How *can* Jesus disciple your church?
- Have you ever helped someone along their Christian journey? Tell the story.
- Tell the story of how you were helped along your Christian journey by someone.
- How would your church look if you allowed Jesus to lead you more fully?

Bible study

Input: Five people are called by Jesus to be his disciples in the bible passage for this week - Andrew and an unnamed disciple, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael. The call comes to each differently

- Andrew and the unnamed disciple (perhaps John, the writer of the gospel) are first disciples of John the Baptizer, until they encounter Jesus and are told by John to follow him. When they follow Jesus, he turns to greet them and tells them to 'Come and see' - very reminiscent of the words of Psalm 'Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 38:8, see also 1 Peter 2:1-3)
- Andrew's reaction to his call is to go immediately (after spending the day with Jesus) to his brother Simon Peter to share the good news with him, "We have found the Messiah" - and it is this evangelism that leads to Peter's call to be Jesus' disciple
- The next day there are more disciples, first Philip, who responds to Jesus' call to 'Follow me', and then Nathanael in that wonderfully comic moment where he proves himself to be rather blunt ('Can anything good come from Nazareth?) and Philip, using the same words as Jesus ('Come and see'), brings his friend to meet the one spoken of by the law and prophets.

Each one is an individual, each call is different, each one's response is different, but the result is the same - they become followers of Jesus.

It was nothing new, of course, for a great rabbi to have disciples. But a disciple in first century Palestine would normally choose the rabbi he wanted to follow, rather than the



other way around - Rabbi's had no authority to select their own disciples. The potential disciple would usually listen to the teaching of various rabbis, making the decision about who to follow based on the Rabbi's interpretation of Torah and Talmud (the Hebrew scriptures). What the Rabbi taught was called his 'yoke', and to follow his teaching and become his disciple was to 'take his yoke upon yourself'. If the Rabbi approved of the potential follower, the disciple would then dedicate the rest of his life (and they were always men, because women were not permitted to study Torah) to imitating the chosen Rabbi, leaving their home, work and family to live with the Rabbi. And the training was rigorous. Disciples had to memorize the scriptures, much as students of Judaism and Islam still do, and obey the Rabbi absolutely. So, to make it as a disciple one had to be dedicated and able.

But Jesus bucked the trend. He didn't wait to be chosen by likely students of Torah, Jesus chose his disciples (John 16:16 and Matt 11:29). The ones he chose were the misfits, rather than the gifted students, he chose ordinary people with ordinary lives because he saw something more in them. Jesus claimed the authority to choose disciples, just as he taught with authority (Matt 7:28-29), challenged the religious authorities and performed signs and wonders with authority, yet without revealing the source of his authority (Matt 21:23-27) to any but his closest followers (John 14:9-14).

Jesus' work with his followers all led to one command as he parted from them for the last time: "Go and make disciples of all peoples" (Matt 28:19-20). He had given them some practice when he sent them out in pairs (Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-12); he welcomed back his disciples from their practice run and gave them more authority (Lk 10:17-20); he admonished them for their lack of faith (Matt 17:17) and reminded them that his way is fraught with difficulties (Matt 16:24-25). Yet the command was to be disciples and to make disciples. Not a question, not an invitation, but an imperative: Go.

It is in this authority, and with the words of Jesus ringing in our ears, that we, the modern day followers of Jesus see our core task as being disciples and making disciples of those who need to come away from the world and see the goodness and love that Jesus has for them. Come and see. These are the words we must use to invite others, these are the words we must live to the very core of our being.

Questions for reflection (or discussion in a group):

- How have you heard the call to follow Jesus? Tell the story.
- How have you helped others to hear the call of Jesus to 'come and see'?
- The E word (evangelism) is frightening for many Christians. What do you understand by the word *evangelism*?
- How does our church evangelize you and others?
- In your experience what is the best way to share faith with another person?
- How could your church most effectively make disciples?
- How could you be part of the God's mission, through the church, to make disciples of all peoples?

Action



- Plan how you will continue in your own discipleship
- How can you help disciple others at your church?

Prayer

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Attributed to St Richard of Chichester