

OAKRIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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## Understanding Discipleship: Jesus is the Saviour

Matthew 10: 24-27

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A man, who happened to be a minister once said to me, it's great when things are going well and you see the church growing and thriving and it feels like you are in the right place at the right time, because the people are all affirming you, ...and maybe you think it will stay that way forever... but maybe it won't, and you may find yourself on the bottom wondering what happened –

Sometimes church work can go very well and other times one might feel like it is just not going to come together or maybe it is not what God is looking for. How do we know if we have the right focus – does success or failure determine that? Who wants to fail at church work? That would be so embarrassing – that wouldn't be very good discipleship would it?

Isn't that life, though? John Prine wrote a song about that ... "That's the way that the world goes round, you're up one day, the next you're down..."

Do we understand discipleship?

Chapter 8, 9 and 10 of the Gospel of Matthew is one of what is termed 'the sayings collections'. The sayings collections are grouped by topic and a story precedes a discussion about a topic. In this case we read about the 'words and wonders' of the Messiah in chapters 8 and 9, that is, the stories of miracles and healings, and the discussion that follows is about mission and discipleship in chapter 10.

The first step is for the disciples to observe what Jesus does.

After witnessing the miracles and healings I would hazard a guess that the disciples must have been feeling pretty good about their situation in life – what an incredible experience - to see the glorious and exciting aspects of being a disciple – think about how you might feel – to be chosen by an awesome leader and teacher – to witness all the good stuff! Wouldn't they have some great news to write home about! They had made the right choice in following Jesus.

I wonder if they paid any attention to the adversaries that were speaking out – why do you associate with tax collectors and sinners, why don't you fast, how can you forgive sins??? - as *[Jesus taught] in their synagogues, and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, curing every disease and every sickness (9:35)*. Perhaps they were so amazed by what Jesus was doing that it held no weight for them.

Then to top those amazing experiences chapter 10 begins with Jesus summoning his twelve disciples to give them the authority to do the same signs and miracles, casting out unclean spirits and curing every disease and sickness.

It's too bad Matthew couldn't have ended the discussion on that happy note. After all everyone wants to hear the success stories so that people are encouraged, don't they?

But "hearing" success stories didn't necessarily change anything; it was "understanding" discipleship that was the key.

Jesus summoned his disciples, ordinary men, men who seemingly might fight each other over their world views in any other group (ie. Matthew the tax-collector, Simon the Zealot), so he could send them out on a mission. He chose these men because they are teachable, they are willing to listen and learn necessary traits so they will be equipped to carry on his work. He gave them very specific instructions on who they were to reach out to, what they could bring and what they were to say and how they should respond.

He also tells them things will get quite rough at times – why is it necessary for the gospel writer to include all of those details?

The Scripture we read this morning carries with it a warning, and an assurance that those who understand discipleship need not fear.

Matthew writes his gospel to provide clear guidance and understanding to a community of believers struggling to understand their place within the traditional Jewish family of faith – his church community is more Jewish than Gentile in its understanding of faith and religious practices.

And so Matthew places great emphasis on the Torah, as does the tradition of the Pharisees. The *Torah is the source of wisdom, the measure of righteousness, the reflection of the mind of God, the blueprint for creation, the ideal frame for humanity. Torah was eternal.* To observe the Torah was to "take on the yoke of the kingdom of heaven."

The difference between the Pharisees and Matthew's community was that the Pharisees saw themselves as the protectors of the law (Torah), and the community Matthew writes for confessed Jesus as Christ and Lord, as authentic interpreter, fulfillment of and personification of Torah, in other words the Living Word, the Word made flesh and so they were regarded as heretics or *minim* by the synagogue because of this.

Matthew is intentional about this distinction in his gospel. Matthew's community was going through some very tough times, just like those Jesus told his disciples they would face, and it was important for them to UNDERSTAND Discipleship so they wouldn't get discouraged; because "to be like the teacher or master" was "enough" –that meant sharing in the suffering as well as the excitement. That meant if Jesus was called Satan,

his followers could expect to hear themselves referred to as demons also. And that is what the community Matthew writes for is experiencing.

From the evidence gathered at one Archeological site, here is what their situation may have looked like:

In a Mesopotamian border city a Christian church house and a synagogue stand side by side. The attendees of each place of worship were close enough to compare and contrast what was happening inside. The Christian sect had been part of the synagogue until hostility between the two groups grew and reached a point where the *Birkat-ha-minim* was read – this benediction brought curses on heretics and made it impossible for Christians to pray in synagogues from approximately 85CE (85AD) on. The community was forced to find a new place of worship and so the gospel writer wants to explain so they UNDERSTAND why they had to worship there and not at a synagogue down the street. Why were the people they had been in community with for so long treating them this way?

Sometimes, as much as we try, we cannot protect ourselves or those we love from having bad experiences with ‘religious people’ – even if we try to be like Jesus

But here is the good news that Matthew writes:

Jesus says to the disciples, “Fear not! The truth will come out.”

Have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.

And remember: A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master.

What do you hear Jesus saying? Maybe we hear this: “You are not able to save them, but I can. Draw close to me and don’t give up ... You will learn from these sufferings and if you tell it in the light others will benefit from it.

<sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; - what you learn or you hear me speak to you in time of trouble or darkness share – tell in the light - to encourage others so they will gain from your experience;

... and what you hear whispered (in your quiet times with the LORD), proclaim from the housetops (proclaim the good news that Jesus is Saviour). We can be like him, but **he** is the Saviour; and as the Saviour he says, “come unto me all who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest (11:28)

When Matthew’s community understands what Jesus told his twelve disciples about discipleship, they learn it is enough for them “to be like” Jesus, to identify with him in his sufferings so they can also identify with him in his joy. Understanding he is above them because he is the Messiah they learned of in the Torah- the Messiah who brings hope and light, and gives them assurance that he is with them till the close of the age (28:20)

From their times “in the darkness” Matthew’s community learns the Torah of Jesus demands “mercy, not sacrifice.”(12:7)

Sometimes in spite of our best efforts to be disciples, things go way off track and life as we knew it is drastically altered. – how can things go so wrong when it seems everything was done in the right way?

As disciples, we have the same words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew to teach and encourage us. What is it we learn in our “darkest hour”?

As disciples we cannot “fix” everything or save anyone. All of our love and encouragement cannot take away the sadness or tears or life experiences that will batter them. Only God can do that. And so, we may begin relearning a valuable lesson. Our job as disciples is to love and encourage others, to teach them to love Jesus, and to pray; to pray for others purposefully, strategically, and scripturally.

If someone struggles with fear we might use the Scripture from 2 Timothy 1:7 *God has not given them a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.*

When there is need for guidance pray Psalm 25:4-5 and asked God: *Show them your way, O Lord; teach them Your path. Guide them in your truth and teach them, for You are God their Savior and their hope is You all day long.*

Theodore Roosevelt said this about moving forward, and I found it encouraging –

*“It is not the critic who counts;  
not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.*

*The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,  
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;*

*who strives valiantly;*

*who errs and comes short again and again;*

*who knows great enthusiasms,*

*the great devotions;*

*who spends himself in a worthy cause;*

*who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement,*

*and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly*

*so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”*

Remember that Jesus said, “It is enough to be like” but **he** is the Saviour, and that gives us all the hope we need.

*All glory be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

Focus Quote: *It is only because [Jesus] became like us that we can become like him.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Sources:**

The Bible (NRSV)(1989)

William Barclay. *Daily Study Bible (Rev. ed.), The Gospel of Matthew vol1 (1975)*

Luke Timothy Johnson. *The Writings of the New Testament 3rd Ed. (2010)*