

Sermon from 01/27/2008



Without Hesitation
Texts: Isaiah 49:1-7, Matthew 4:12-23
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And so we arrive at our second inquiry into what being a disciple is all about.

The call of these first disciples follows directly on the heels of Isaiah's very large prophetic vision about how the light of God will powerfully shine upon the Gentile people-groups, *ta ethnos*.

And in God's plan, He was going to use His chosen people—the Jewish nation—that cradles Messiah—to reach us!

Why, because we are not the original people of promise.

The Jewish nation is.

Right. The promise was given to Abraham—not to the Indians of North or South America, not to the Africans, not to the Celts, not to the Persians, not to the Egyptians, not to the Chinese—but the promise was given to Abraham.

And from Abraham would come a great nation.

This promise was given to Abraham so that his nation—God's people—could reach the Indians, the Africans, the Chinese, the Celts, the Persians, the Egyptians, etc.

Biblically, that's how God's plan flows.

God's plan does not begin with the universal...down to the particular.

Rather it flows from the particular (Abraham) to the nations, (the universal or cosmic).

Even we silly Christians believe this—in fact, we believe in even greater particularization.

For we believe that from the Jewish nation, in Bethlehem of Judea, will come a tiny babe—an infant—who one day will hold the whole world and every life ever lived within His hand.

Pretty mind blowing isn't it.

Hey, if I can fly from 2332 Sherwood Lane right up into outer space—right from the convenience of my own laptop using Google Earth, what's to stop God from doing the same...or having such a view.

In fact, with Google Earth, I can jump from Zion Church to your rooftop and your rooftop and your rooftop—and I am just a mere mortal!

But the reason God engages in this exercise of particularization where He begins with One and then spreads the brooding wings of His Spirit over the entire earth is because like the mother hen who protects her chicks, God wants to bring us back to Himself again.

Today, more than ever, people need to be brought back to God again.

Why? Because they're gonna get their butts thrown into hell?—well that might be the case.

But a more compelling reason is because life with God is better than life without God.

How do I know...because I've sat in the darkness myself and sittin' in the darkness is never any fun.

You grope, you bang your head, you injure yourself, you desperately long to find your way around—being in the dark generally stinks.

Isaiah's prophecy goes a little further.

He says that darkness leads to death.

He calls it "living in the land of the shadow of death."

It's kind of like that place that the character, George Bailey, found himself in the movie, *"It's A Wonderful Life."*

Obviously, this is not God's preferred will for creation and humanity, at large.

So Isaiah spells out the Divine Vision of God that includes this key feature: illumination!

And Messiah takes up this work of bringing this illumination about.

Now if Isaiah says that darkness equals or results in death, then light—it stands to reason—will produce life!

And we see this within creation itself.

Without the light of our star shining down upon this little third rock from the Sun, we'll we might be like some of the other planets in our Solar System where there is no life and only stormy, turbulent, poisonous, acidic atmosphere where nothing can survive.

I am continually bemused with our repeated attempts to find amoebas on Mars.

Think of the price tag—I think around 1.3 billion over three years¹—we’ve waste on these excursions.

Even if there once was life on Mars that life never planted a vineyard...

...that life never built a city...

...that life never made a friend...

...that life never dreamed a dream.

Amoebas are great—God love ‘em—He created them, but God has bigger plans in mind than our discovery of one-celled organisms in space.

If anything tends to be true, and we don’t need to go to Mars to observe this, it is that we, as God’s creation, love to—or become accustomed—to ignoring Him.

Sure we spend billions to find amoebas on Mars, but to find God...?

We love to be distracted by anything that comes our way because it prevents us from getting close to God.

But God has chosen to get close to us—hasn’t He?

And so the very first step in discipleship is paying attention.

How often did you hear your teacher or your coach say, “*Johnny...Susie...you’re simply not paying attention.*”

But discipleship is not as simple as waking quickly when the teacher snaps their ruler on the desk.

The ‘paying attention’ is for the purpose of overcoming the fear we have about God getting too close to us.

And please, make no mistake this morning; religion, with all its trappings, is the stuff that keeps people from getting too close to God.

You see if I’m religious, then I’m in control.

But this is the antithesis of *faith* that declares we are never in control—God is.

Isn’t this what Jesus said to Satan in the wilderness? *God’s in control!*

But Jesus never came to found a religion; He came to create a relationship!

¹ <http://www.spacepolitics.com/2007/06/21/mars-is-under-attack/>

And the reason we harbour this fear of getting too close to God is because most of us believe that God's first obligation—when He comes into our lives—is to judge us, to condemn us, and to punish us

But this isn't what the God's Word says.

Doesn't it say that Jesus' journey to earth was predicated upon this notion: ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”***²

If we could fully grasp that love, mercy, forgiveness, and freedom (i.e. the Gospel) go before harsh judgment and condemnation—well not only would we be better disciples, but also we'd be better human beings.

Don't get me wrong, judgment will come, but too many believers miss their chance, up front, to be followers because they are frightened of being judged or they fear that God has 'rules' that no person can live up to.

But that's because most believers see discipleship as a one-time deal.

Boom—I'm a disciple—that's it.

That's it? That's it?

Oh, no—we're not disciples with one quick shot.

Discipleship is your life's work.

Yes, it has a beginning point.

The problem with some mainliners is they just aren't all that bothered about discipleship.

We'll leave that to those super-spiritual people up the road, we think.

Mainliners often love just keeping their head down, staying outta' the way, keeping a low profile—all for the sake of preserving the 'quiet life'.

You know more people have gone to hell desiring the 'quiet life' than all the murderers, rapists, arsonists, and thieves put together.

Discipleship has a beginning point.

Yes, you must have a deep moment of decision-making where you and I must stop our fussing, our arguing, and our petty philosophical debates.

Yes, there comes a time where we must stop hating ourselves and disliking God—as if God is against us.

² John 3:16.

Yes, there comes a time where we must shift our thinking to say, God's love and grace, and mercy ARE MEANT FOR ME!

Yes, there comes that radical moment of dropping your nets (or whatever), breaking from your past (which you only imagine has some false power over your life), and moving forward into the unknown, trusting that—come what may—God is going to hold your hand and never, ever let go of it.

So, essentially, I can sum up the entire process of discipleship in one simple phrase—I know, you didn't think it was theologically possible to do such a thing...but I've done it.

And here's the phrase: ***You gotta keep lettin' go!***

That's your part to play—that's all you have to do.

You have to keep letting go of having a mixed up brain.

Now you're insulting me, Pastor.

Listen, if I once had a mixed up brain—and you're no different from me—you probably had one once, too.

You have to keep letting go of the complicated schedule.

You have to keep letting go of the complex life.

You've got to stop crowding your life with gadgets and fill your life with people.

You have to turn it down, shut it off, power it down, and mute the materialism.

But, Pastor, I like my 'net'—all the things I am attached to: they bring me a sense of comfort and security.

They might bring you comfort and security, but they'll never bring you peace.

If Jesus' temptations in the wilderness—which immediately precedes this passage in Matthew's Gospel—teaches us any one thing it is that we are to reject: Selfish sufficiency, pseudo-spirituality, and being consumed with chasing more and more power.

In the wilderness, Satan wants Jesus to begin His ministry upon the premise of "If."

That is, he wants Jesus to begin with just a subtle smidge of self-doubt...ya know.

But discipleship never, ever begins with an "If"—it begins with "Follow Me."

So now that you know that your part to play in your own discipleship is that of letting go—Let Go!

And now that you know that discipleship can never be predicated upon doubt—believe!

The only question that remains is what is being a disciple for?

Why is it important?

What use is it?

You know what we reclusive mainliners are like—if we can't answer, *What use is it?*—well we just give up and go home, don't we?

In other words, what is the role or job of a disciple...and Jesus answers this question: it is to be 'fishers of men/people'.

Well, how do we do that?

Again, Scripture tell us: 'And he went about all Galilee teaching, preaching, and healing.'

Yes, there is a 'get-off-your-butt' factor involved with discipleship, as this verse indicates, but there's something greater and more purposeful than even that!

You see, the preaching, the teaching, and the healing is for what?

What's it for?

It's to bring people into God's new community; to draw people from this broken, shattered and sin-stained world to include them in Yahweh's new community of love.

It is a community that is devoid of "If".

You see, the "If" community is the Devil's community, but it's not ours!

We are a community without "if".

We are a community that disregards sex, race, color, and ethnic background.

It is a community where love, health, and wholeness—in Christ—are found to dwell—not just on Sunday, but everyday of the week.

You see, church is for Sunday, but community is for everyday. Amen?

Disciples build (they fish for) communities of love where God and Christ are at the centre and people can become fully human.

Our job isn't to become divine.

There's only One who's divine!

Our job is to become fully human and to lead others into this experience of what it means to be fully human.

So where are you in this: still full of fears, spiritual superficiality, and false obligations; still attached and encumbered?

Have you let go yet, or are ya still hangin' on?

Maybe you're 'off-your-but', but are you building His community?

You see, I'd love to say that preaching, teaching, and healing were wholly and completely the sole work of Jesus alone.

But the Gospel never says that.

It tells us He put His disciples out there.

He called them, not so that they could 'sit about' and listen, without end, to His parabolic pronouncements, but he called them so that He could send them.

He sent them to preach, teach, and heal, too.

And to be purveyors and agents of the salvation that only God can offer.

You see, at some point the lessons and the teachings STOP because learning can go no further.

The only way for the lesson to be properly learned is to go out and do it.

I don't want to shake anyone's faith, but you know in the sum total scheme of things—this is not your (or even this church's) most important hour (err 1½ hour) of the week.

Oh, we think it is because we mainliners have been spoiled for a generation (or two) thinking that this is the most important hour—it's not!

Jesus could raise up stones to praise Him,³ if He wished.

Our most important time are the other 167 hours (okay, I'll let you off for sleeping)...111 hours of the week.

It is the hours where we are out there being a Beacon of Light, demonstrating love, offering prayer, loving people authentically and sharing our faith immediately.

To all this, and more, we are called to respond without hesitation. Amen.

³ Luke 19:40.

T I Y N A V N S P Q R F G A X
 J H P I L I H P A V Q D T U O
 U I A U L Q E G C M V I T Z A
 D I X D J A M E S E O O J N P
 A S F S D K S A M Z I H D Q U
 S M M D L E I U A A O R T N Q
 J G Q Z M J U O T F E L Z M Y
 B Z L A O O B S T W Q Q L D N
 X I J H U Q J T H K N U L L J
 Y J N X M C S P E I B R B V O
 A H T D K G D I W U N E Z Q D
 B A R T H O L O M E W T Z G I
 W K I G W T T B S O S E P I N
 N S U Z S P X N N Y N P S Y G
 F V A Y O X T J Y C I F N Y A

Peter	John	Phillip	Thomas
Andrew	Matthew	Bartholomew	James the Less
James	Simon	Thaddeus	Judas

Questions For Reflection:

1. What is the role that Israel is to play in relationship to the nations?
2. What, in your opinion, is the reason that people need to be brought back to God?
3. What is the very first step in discipleship?
4. Why are we so harsh in judging others or ourselves and so reluctant to be soft, and accept God's love, forgiveness, and mercy?
5. What one phrase can be used to sum up the entire process of discipleship?
6. What does beginning with self-doubt or with "If" do to your discipleship?
7. Why is Sunday morning the least important hour of our discipleship?
8. What are Christ-centered communities of love for?
9. Are you willing to preach, teach and heal as a reflection of your discipleship?
10. What happens to a hesitant disciple?