

08, May 18

“Go and Make Disciples” Mt 28

In the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," King Arthur and his knights are seeking the Holy Grail. They have to cross an abyss. A bridge keeper allows people to cross, if they can answer three questions. One wrong, and you get tossed into the pit.

Lancelot goes first. The keeper asks him, "What is your name?" "Lancelot", he replies.

"What is your quest?" "To seek the Holy Grail."

"What is your favorite color?" "Blue."

"Right," says the bridge keeper, "off you go." Lancelot crosses the bridge, amazed this was so easy.

The second knight also states his name and quest. But the third question is now, "What is the capital of Assyria?" "I don't know that." And he is hurled, screaming, into the abyss.

The third knight, Sir Galahad, is nervous as he's asked his name and quest, but he manages to answer correctly. "What is your favorite color?" He panics. "Blue...no, yellow--Aaaaahhhh," he screams as he is hurled into the pit.

Finally, the king steps up. "What is your name?" "Arthur, King of the Britains."
"What is your quest?" "To seek the Holy Grail."

"What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?" "What do you mean," asks Arthur, "an African or European swallow?"

"What? I don't know that," answers the bridge keeper, who immediately is launched into the abyss. Arthur and all his followers then cross the bridge.

Some people imagine that Christianity is about getting the answers right – saying “yes” to the right set of beliefs. And to make disciples is to teach these right beliefs.

Jesus didn't come to tell us what to say so that we can get into heaven when we die." He came to call us out of all the dark pits we have fallen into, and to show us how to walk in the light, and to empower us to do so.- Christianity is not a set of beliefs, so much as a way of living.

In today's scripture, Jesus sends out his first disciples to make more disciples, teaching everything he's commanded them. And his commandments are about how to live this life- not judging others, forgiving, loving those who want to harm us, trusting God, making God central in our lives, praying.

The word, “disciple” actually means a student, a learner, a follower, one who patterns his or her life on that of the master. In making disciples, we introduce others to the master, so that they may learn from him.

There is only one master, Jesus, and we are ALL learners, helping one another to learn. None of us is perfect.

I didn't understand this at the beginning of my Christian journey. When I started going to church, I expected to find people living as Christ taught. And so I was critical of what I saw: judgmental attitudes, lack of love, failure to care for the poor, and so on. Like so many, I saw the church as "hypocritical."

I didn't understand yet that being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, is to be a learner, a student. And we never cease to learn until the day we die. We don't achieve perfection this side of the grave.

The first disciples were not perfect either, and yet, Jesus gathers them and sends them out with this incredibly high calling- to make disciples of others.

I picture them standing there and looking at one another blankly, saying, "does he mean US?" Certainly we don't hear any hoops and cheers- I don't sense any hoops and cheers in OUR midst either- I wonder how many of US are saying, "Surely Jesus doesn't mean US, when he says, 'go and make disciples'?"

Surely he means someone more advanced on their Christian journey?" Thing is, if we wait until we've mastered Jesus commandments, we will wait forever.

Jesus promised his first disciples he would be with them – to the end of the age. And the age has not yet ended. His promise is for us too.

So how DO we make disciples? We begin by inviting- inviting others to join us on this journey. And then we all do as the first disciples did- we hang out with Jesus – which TODAY means spending time with Jesus WORDS in scripture. And we pray and include Jesus in all we do. And we learn from one another on the way.

Which does, of course, mean that we need to be willing to SHARE with one another what we know and have experienced.

We don't do this easily in the United Church. For numerous reasons: We don't want to be disrespectful or impose on another's beliefs. If we're honest, we'll also admit we're afraid of appearing foolish. And we find it a little squirmy to share stories of how God has graced us- it makes us appear too special.

And possibly, and most importantly, we fail to recognize the deep NEED that others have to know God, the deep hunger they have for words of faith, grace, hope.

Brian McConaghy is a Canadian who has dedicated his life to rescuing children trafficked for sex in Cambodia.

He doesn't stop there. When he's rescued them, he shares with them his faith in Jesus Christ. He offers them some healing for their shame. He teaches them that in God's eyes they are of infinite worth, God loves them, they're precious, no one can take that away from them.

One little girl he'd rescued was stolen back into slavery. For two years Brian searched for her. His greatest fear was that she would lose faith, that the experience of being enslaved again would just tell her that God and God's love was not real.

When he did find her and rescue her again, he was stunned to learn that the only thing that had gotten her through this terrible experience was her faith in Jesus, her remembering that she was a person of value, a child of God, loved and precious.

Isn't this why we want OUR children to have faith- we don't know what life will bring them. We can't protect them from the evils that may happen. But if they know the one who was anointed to BRING us out of darkness, to SET the prisoner free, they will have someone to turn to, to trust in, to get them through the worst trials.

When we know the power and grace of Jesus Christ, we WANT to share that blessing with those whom we love. We don't do so from arrogance. But as people who have stumbled, and who know the grace and restoration of God in Jesus Christ.

I'd like to read to you a wonderful poem by Maya Angelou where she witnesses what it means to be a Christian. She says,

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not shouting "I'm clean livin'."
I'm whispering "I was lost,
Now I'm found and forgiven."

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I don't speak of this with pride.
I'm confessing that I stumble
and need Christ to be my guide.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not trying to be strong.
I'm professing that I'm weak
And need His strength to carry on.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not bragging of success.
I'm admitting I have failed
And need God to clean my mess.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not claiming to be perfect,
My flaws are far too visible
But, God believes I am worth it.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I still feel the sting of pain.
I have my share of heartaches
So I call upon His name.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
 I'm not holier than thou,
 I'm just a simple sinner
 Who received God's good grace, somehow!

Many of us here have stumbled and been restored. We too have stories to share that can feed people who are hungry and yearning for something more.

Perhaps it's the words in today's scripture that stick in our throats. The word, "MAKE", for example. Ugh! "MAKE disciples". We think of forced baptisms, the Inquisition, some missionaries destroying native cultures. And rightly, we turn away from all of that.

The ENGLISH word, "make" has a connotation of force- we MAKE someone do something. But the original simply has the connotation of create- grow disciples.... It's an invitation to the first disciples to be part of God's new creation.

Jesus is sending the first disciples to fish for people, to be his instruments in drawing people out of the pit into the light, teaching them how to walk in the light, in love, peace, forgiveness.

And the truth is, it's simply not possible to IMPOSE our faith on another. We can TRY- anyone here who has tried to persuade another to believe what we believe will KNOW that actually we do not have the POWER to create faith in another.

Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the HOLY SPIRIT who causes a heart to leap, who awakens a hunger to know God. It's the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin, of what is wrong in our lives, and who creates in us a yearning to live in a better way.

It is the Holy Spirit who sets us free from our old ways, who empowers us to walk in a new way, when we make the decision, when we say "yes, I choose to walk in the light, I choose kindness, I choose love, I choose gentleness, I choose humility, help me, Lord God, to walk in these ways."

The Holy Spirit empowers and enables us. WE do not make disciples, the Holy Spirit does. What WE do is pray, and invite, and walk together, and share what we know, and try to live it ourselves.

There is a deep mystery here. It's a mystery of how God includes us and uses us in making the world new. It's a mystery contained in what we call the Trinity.

Jesus sends out his first disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We're baptized in the mystery of the Trinity. The mystery of the Trinity marks and blesses our journey as disciples.

So let's look at the Trinity and what it can unfold for us about discipleship.

Many centuries ago, a group of Desert Fathers understood the three persons of the Trinity to interact with one another, in a kind of eternal dance, where they poured themselves out in love INTO one another:

The Creator into the Redeemer, the Redeemer into the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit into the Creator. And so on. Like an eternal wheel of self giving love, which is the essence of God- self – giving love.

Jesus came into the world to teach US that same self giving love, He came to teach us to do as God in the Trinity does- to pour ourselves out in love.

And here's the mystery: As we pour ourselves out in love, as we live Jesus' commandments, we're instantly connected with this eternal wheel of love. We've aligned ourselves with the very essence of God.

And it's like a spiritual explosion. - Power is added to this eternal wheel of love. Power is added to our actions.

Whether our self giving love is huge , like dedicating our life to rescuing children from slavery, or whether our self giving love is as small as an act of forgiveness, there is a spiritual impact in the world. Jesus actually teaches this in the gospel of John. When he breathes Holy Spirit into the disciples, he says to them- "what you bind on earth will be bound in HEAVEN, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in HEAVEN."

Our smallest act of loosing, of setting free through forgiveness, has a impact in the heavenly realm.

It's through being disciples of the Lord, through living Jesus' commandment to pour ourselves out in love, that the world is made new.

To God be all the praise, the honour and the glory, Amen.

*¹ Citation: John Ortberg, "True (and False) Transformation," Leadership (Summer 2002), pp.101-102

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- I'd like to draw your attention to the announcements flier. There is a panel inside inviting you to share stories of your Christian journey for our church anniversary celebration. Today I'll be talking about the importance of doing so, as part of our calling to be the church, and I'd urge you to consider what you may have to share that will encourage others on their journey.
- Please pick up your Runnymede News from the cross aisle if you've not already done so
- And now today, the week after Pentecost we celebrate Trinity Sunday, where we consider the mystery of how God is many and yet one.

TRINITY INVOCATION

COMMISSIONING

Christ within you, hope of glory to come.
Christ beside you, Christ before you and behind you
You are the light of the world
Shine your light so that others may come to know
the living, loving God

And God be with you,
Amen