

Lent 2: THE CROSS

Mark 8:31-38 [MW18-07]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 25 February 2018

Last week we began Lent with a “D” word

- anyone remember what it was ... ?
“Desert”
- this week, as we continue our journey through Lent
another “D” word, based on the reading from Mark's gospel
- can you think what word beginning with “D” it might be ... ?
“disciple”

A while ago, I came across this:

The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian - especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way ... [the disciple] stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God. (Dallas Willard)

A disciple is not the top-of-the-line GLXi Ghia with all the extras

- a disciple is the basic, entry level, fleet vehicle
discipleship is not about being a specialist, experienced or highly skilled
it is for everyone
- keep that in mind

‘Discipleship’ was a well-established institution in Jesus’ time

- it was the only way to become a Teacher of the Law
all good and respected teachers had disciples
- and in that sense Jesus and those first twelve disciples fitted right in

Discipleship includes the word ‘disciple’ which itself comes from the same root as

- a similar sounding word: ‘discipline’
which is at the heart of discipleship

The name Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, will forever be associated with discipleship, because discipling others became the passion of his life. It happened like this. One day early in his ministry Dawson was driving along and he saw a young man walking down the street on his way to caddy at the golf course. Trotman often picked up hitchhikers, for it gave him a chance to witness.

The hitchhiker on this day swore as he got into the car; Dawson reached into his pocket for a gospel tract and handed it to him. The man glanced at the tract, then looked at Dawson and said, “Haven’t I seen you somewhere before?”

Dawson looked at him closely. As it turned out, the two men had met on the same road the previous year. Dawson had witnessed to him, led him to Christ, and had “sped on my merry way” confident that another soul had entered the kingdom.

But now, a year later, there was no more evidence of the new birth in this young man than if he had never heard the gospel.

“After I met this boy the second time on the way to the golf course, I began to go back and find some of my ‘converts.’ I want to tell you, I was sick at heart.”

Motivated by that experience, Dawson Trotman began working on follow-up, on developing ways of mentoring those whom he was winning to Christ.

“Before I had forgotten to follow up on the people God had reached through me,” he later said. “But from then on I began to spend time helping them.... You can lead a soul to Christ in anywhere from twenty minutes to a couple of hours. But it takes from twenty weeks to a couple of years to get him on the road to maturity.”

Nothing worthwhile just lands in your lap!

- you don't just get up one morning and say, 'I think I'll run a marathon today'
you don't get a gold medal for turning up at the start line
you can't suddenly decide to offer your services as an architect or engineer
- long before all of this, there's a whole heap of coaching
training, exercises, practice ...
- all of which involves discipline
this is how Jesus did it for those first disciples
- this is what it involves for us

We are to learn as the original disciples learned

- Jesus firstly taught them by showing
they watched him and listened to his teaching
- through the Gospels, we can do the same

The Gospels give us close-ups of a number of Jesus' miracles

- and help us realise what the disciples learned from them
for example, when Jesus healed the person with leprosy in Mark 1:40-44
which was our Gospel reading a couple of weeks ago
- Jesus actually reached out and touched that person
now in most cases Jesus performed his miracles by saying a word
- in that instance, sensitive to the fact that this person was "unclean"
isolated even from his own family ... Jesus reached out and touched him
giving the acceptance that only comes by the touch of another's hand
- so the disciples were shown that compassion is vital
in ministering to anyone in need

Jesus further taught by telling - instruction

- the twelve disciples listened to all of Jesus' public teaching
then had the further benefit of being able to ask questions
and receive private instruction
- for example when Matthew records Jesus explaining the parables
just to the disciples (Matthew 13:36, 15:15)

Discipleship today means keeping up our instruction by being involved

- responding to opportunities to learn specifics
through seminars, speakers, Bible studies, home groups
- discipleship today also means being part of a Christian community
through the prayers, worship, teaching
Jesus is able to speak to us as disciples
- it was good enough for the first twelve disciples
so how could we do without it ...

So far this is all normal practice for disciples and teachers

- however there was one practice which marked Jesus and his disciples
as very different
- it was definitely unusual and raised a few eyebrows:
Jesus sent his disciples out to represent him in the very early stages of training
- kind of like a garage letting an apprentice mechanic of three months
work unsupervised on a Ferrari
- or a builder giving his apprentice of a few weeks some plans and saying
I'm off to Fiji for a month, build this house while I'm away

For Jesus, discipleship = DO IT!

- there's the task, get out and do it!

Jesus gave the twelve the power to perform the kinds of miracles he himself was doing

- healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, casting out demons and they were to do this without charging anyone
- "Freely you have received," Jesus said, "freely give"

Jesus was also preparing the disciples for the day they would be on their own

- they would need to depend on the Lord and on God's people to meet every need

This is perhaps one of the few instances where it may not be as scary for us

- as it was for the first disciples, because we know how they got on we can read it in the Bible

When the seventy-two followers returned, they were excited and said, "Lord, even the demons obeyed when we spoke in your name!" (Luke 10:17)

- we know too that disciples today have the guidance, teaching and empowering of the Holy Spirit

What it boils down to is:

- it doesn't matter how short a time or how long a time you have been a disciple Jesus is sending you out in his name

Disciples back then represented their Teacher/Master

- what a disciple did reflected on the Master for good or ill it's the same today
- Jesus sends us to represent him what you and I do, or don't do, shows Jesus
- a pretty sobering and powerful thought

For in the end, discipleship is a choice, a decision

Let's reflect on that for a moment from our reading in Mark's Gospel, chapter 8

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34)

Does this mean giving up anything we enjoy doing or wish to do, if we are Jesus' disciples?

- in a word, no to deny oneself is simply to reject our own will in favour of God's will
- disciples realise they are no longer in charge of their own life and give control over to the Lord

You must take up your cross and follow me

The 'cross' Jesus speaks of as ours is not suffering and death

- rather it is exposure to ridicule and rejection as experienced by one carrying their cross through life
- to openly identify with Jesus as his disciple is hardly the key to popularity and honour in this world

Note also that it is our cross, not Jesus' cross, ours

- here the cross is a symbol for God's will
- God has a will and a plan for each person's life
- the decision to take up our cross and do God's will is a decision we must make daily, hourly, even moment by moment
- in choosing the will of God as our will we fulfill Jesus' call to "follow me"

If you want to save your life, you will destroy it.

But if you give up your life for me and for good news, you will save it.

Jesus says, we can live our lives as we choose, following our own will

- and lose the transformed person God can enable us to become
- or we can live our lives for Jesus' sake, committed to God's will
- for what is the point of gaining the whole world yet losing the transformed self that will fit us for eternity?!

Discipline. Do it! Decide!

- there is nothing valuable enough to take in exchange for the person you can become by choosing God's will

When Jesus talks about 'giving up', he is once more demonstrating that 'Eastern' thinking

- when we give something up for God we don't lose, we gain!
- we deny what we might have chosen for ourselves in order to receive what God has chosen for us and provide for us
- it's a no brainer, there's really no contest is there who knows best ... ?
- God ... or us???

Clarence Jordan, author of the "Cotton Patch" New Testament translation and founder of the interracial Koinonia farm in Americus, Georgia, was getting a red-carpet tour of another minister's church. With pride the minister pointed to the rich, imported pews and luxurious decorations. As they stepped outside, darkness was falling, and a spotlight shone on a huge cross atop the steeple.

"That cross alone cost us ten thousand dollars," the minister said with a satisfied smile.

"You got cheated," said Jordan. "Times were when Christians could get them for free."