

Community Church of Issaquah

March 3, 2024

Your Cost of Discipleship

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Before I begin the message today, I'd like to ask a favor. Today marks the first anniversary of my being called to be Community Church of Issaquah's part-time permanent pastor, following my 4 months as your interim. I'd like to ask you this: What memory do you have that you would like to share of the last month here at our church? Perhaps I should ask, "What is your take-away from the last 12 months?"

Now the message. When Jesus began his ministry at the age of 30 in the Jewish world centered around Jerusalem, one of his first tasks was to find and enlist the assistance of men who would assist him in doing God's will. In the 4th chapter of Matthew verses 18 to 22, we are told about the calling of the first disciples.

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

If nothing else in those verses impresses you, this should. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, they came at once and James and John came immediately. Their response to the calling of Christ has always amazed me.

There were other disciples that were called until the number reached the Jewish significant number of 12. They were with Jesus for the remaining three years of his earthly ministry, even until his death. Have you ever wondered what happened to them after Jesus ascended into heaven and left them to carry on his work? Let me give you a brief history lesson:

Peter, along with the **Apostle Paul**, were both martyred in Rome about 66 A.D. when Emperor Nero persecuted Christians. Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down at his request since he did not think he was worthy of dying in the same way as Jesus.

Andrew ministered in what we know to be Russia, Turkey, and Greece where he was crucified.

Thomas ministered in what is now Syria and is reported to have been killed by the spears of four soldiers.

Philip had a powerful ministry in North Africa where he converted the wife of the Roman proconsul who retaliated by having Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

Matthew ministered in Persia and Ethiopia where he was said to have been stabbed to death.

Bartholomew traveled extensively through India, Ethiopia, and Southern Arabia where it is not known exactly how he died as a martyr.

James, the son of Alphaeus not Zebedee, ministered to Syria where he was stoned and then beaten to death.

Simon, the Zealot, ministered in Persia and was killed after he refused to offer a sacrifice to the sun god.

Matthias, the disciple chosen to replace Judas ministered in Syria with Andrew and died by being burned to death.

And **John** is perhaps the only disciple to have died of a natural death while in exile on the island of Patmos where he is credited for writing the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

For each of these chosen disciples, the cost of following Christ came with a significant price, often martyrdom. You and I do not have that type of price of pay for our commitment to being followers of our Lord Jesus. However, there are some costs related to our own discipleship which most of us don't consider that often. Like the original disciples, we too are called by Christ, but in a very different way. Jesus personally enlisted these men to accompany him as he engaged in the work of his Father, our God. There are certainly many unanswered questions about this aspect of the Gospel.

Did these men know Jesus personally or had they only heard about him? Did they make some promise or commitment to him when he called them to be his disciples? How did this new life fit into their own personal faith? Had they been baptized before or after knowing Jesus? Unfortunately, the Bible nor I can answer those questions for us, but it gives us something to ponder and pray about. These questions are not asked of us usually because our calling as a disciple happens in an altogether different way. And yes, we are not likely to be martyred for our belief in Christ and our desire to be his disciples, but there is a cost for us that does come with this relationship. I will call these the Three C's.

The first C is your conversion. Though we seldom use that word to describe our faith journey now, our entire life with Christ begins with this one act. The moment we accept Christ as our personal Savior, we begin a conversion – changing from where we were in our life to where we are going in faith. What did you call it when you became a Christian? Your profession of faith? Your acceptance of Christ as your personal Savior? Each of us has likely had a different experience traveling down that road of faith.

Being born in an Italian Catholic family, my spiritual journey began when I was an infant and continued without my control for years to come. As an infant, I was baptized into the Catholic Church and as a youngster, I followed the teachings and after training engage in my catechism, or my acceptance into the Church. None of this required my approval, and none of it had a deep meaning for me. My grandfather, the patriarch of the family had already committed me to the priesthood since I was the first male child, so I assumed that was to be the life that was chosen for me by others. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I rebelled and left Roman Catholicism and became a Protestant. When I made that change, I was allowed to make my own profession of faith and become a practicing Christian. This was my conversion. Each of you has your own story of how you came to know Jesus Christ and accepted him as your personal Savior. Perhaps one day we should have a Story Telling Sunday and let each one tell your own story. I know that would truly inspire me.

There is a second C at the center of our own discipleship, and that is our Commitment. When the first disciples followed Jesus, they each made a personal commitment to him. Peter, Andrew, James, and John gave up their life work as fishermen. Matthew gave up his very well-paid position as tax collector. They each made the commitment to do what was required of them as a disciple. Today, Jesus doesn't ask us to give up profession or anything of that sort to follow him, but what he does ask is that we make the commitment to live the life he asked.

As Christians, we are asked to commit to practicing the teachings of Jesus and to build for ourselves a life that focuses on Christ. Parts of that commitment include studying his teachings, communicating with him in prayer, walking humbly as he did, gathering as a faith family to worship our Lord. It would be easy to say you are a disciple of Christ, but you could choose to worship as one of my seminary friends used to

call it when he skipped church on Sunday – ‘worshipping at the Church of St. Mattress.’ We must be committed as a body of believers to practice what Jesus preached. From time to time in my prayer times, I must talk to God about how strong my commitment to him is as his disciples. I want, of course, to think I’m doing perfectly well, but I know that there are times when I fall short of that. I’ve chosen to be a disciple and I must remain committed to doing his will and his work.

The third C in this series represents our Compassion. When we make the choice to be a disciple of Christ, we stand in his shadow and are called to continue his work. Feed the poor, minister to the sick, pray for sinners and so much more. Much of that compassion is also the work of any church. I grieve when the news, even religious news, tells stories of congregations that seem to have no compassion. I once had a conversation with the minister from one of the large Evangelical churches that we call ‘box churches.’ They have thousands of attenders and large sums of money flowing into their budgets. I asked him, “Your church really has great income. How much does your church give to local charity?” His response was, “Oh, we don’t do that. We invest it back in building and improving our facility so we can grow.”

That would be very sad if it were only one experience, but I fear it is more and more common. It leads us to ask the question, “If we choose to be disciples aren’t we required to show compassion for all in our world?” Churches. Individuals. We all have the calling of following Christ when we become disciples and if we fail to reflect the compassion Jesus taught each of us, are we truly living the life of a disciple?

So, what is the cost of being a disciple? Conversion, Commitment and Compassion are three things that I associate with the life of a true follower of Jesus Christ. I chose to be a disciple and I am sure you did as well. In doing so, we must accept the reality that it does not come

without a cost. I doubt I'll be stoned or beheaded simply because I'm a Christian, but I know something even more serious will be a part of my discipleship. At the end of life, I will be judged by how I have followed the teachings and the example of Jesus. The desire of my heart is simply to stand at that time of judgement and hear someone say, "You did well, thanks." Those words will make my life as a disciple have my desired meaning. I hope that is your life goal as well.