

On Thursday my brother, his wife and two children arrived from Australia. Yesterday my youngest niece, Matilda, turned 9 and so on Friday we went to Harry Potter Studios as a birthday treat – it was my third visit – and I still love it.

What I notice every time I go however is how amazed I am at the movie maker's attention to detail. How they fully embraced the world that they were trying to create – it wasn't just a things collected together – they actually built the world that these stories were taking place in. The movie sets are Hogwarts, are a world of fantasy – and show all that is possible with imagination.

The attention to detail at the Warner Bros studio is amazing, it was like that they not only created a world of make believe – they actually became that world – a state of being for all those who worked on created the 22.5 hours of movies.

In Jesus time to be a disciple was also a state of being! You were a student which meant that you went and lived with the teacher you were seeking to emulate. It wasn't just about how they live, or the decisions they make, not just the things that they believe – it is the state of being. Rowan Williams in his book *Being Disciples*¹ reminds us that at the beginning of John's when the two disciples of John the Baptist come and ask Jesus where he is staying, he tells them to come and see; and they spend the rest of the day with Jesus. Later in John's Gospel he remind the disciples that they must stay with him, abide in him always. In other words they must inhabit fully the world of Jesus. Discipleship literally means being a student, but not as we might understand student as a person who turns up once a week or day for a lecture, rather a student is one who commits to living in the same atmosphere and breathing the same air, so that you might not miss any pearls of wisdom or learning that they might offer.

We need to understand this concept of discipleship and even being a student, if we are to get the most out of our readings today – where Jesus is explaining how the disciples are called to live. Disciples as Rowan Williams puts it are those who 'are looking and listening without interruption'.

In the preceding section of today's Gospel in Matthew Jesus names the 12 disciples and then outlines their mission in the world. In today's section he continues the theme of disciples imitating their master. This time the parallel appears not just in what they will say and do, but in what they will experience in the mission field: rejection, suffering, and for some even death². Matthew is recording how Jesus prepared the disciples for the mission they are called to – one which will call on them to imitate Jesus in many, if not all, ways.

It is actually an incredibly challenging passage. It is not that we can choose to engage with the bits of God, or the life of Jesus which are comfortable or palatable –

¹ *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian life* By Rowan Williams

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3303

but rather that we let God inhabit, and deal within each part of our journey. On the counter it is also about how we too inhabit God's journey in the way that we live.

Last week we reflected on a poem of Theresa of Avila, and the acknowledgement that God has no hands but ours. This exploration of discipleship takes this once step further – God inhabits our hands and we inhabit God's. How else will we be active learners – how else can we fuller embrace what discipleship means?

But how can we do this? We can no longer like the disciples leave our nets and just follow Jesus around Galilee; but we can make time to inhabit our own life conscious of God's presence, and also seek out times to inhabit God. That may all sound abstract, but it is in essence about the time we set aside to pray, read the bible, and also reflect on the work and tasks that we do and how God is present within our lives. Disciples are called to live their lives in turn in ways that help others too, to then encounter the same.

And like the disciples we will learn of course, that this isn't always easy, or comfortable or even straight forward. That is what the writer of Matthew is trying to spell out in this passage today. When you seek to live with personal integrity, when you seek to reflect the teaching of another, when you seek to inhabit an alternate space to that of the community in which you live – there will at times be discord. But Jesus is not saying that it has to be this way – or that we need to create divisions – but he is preparing the disciples for the fact that sometimes, even with all the best intentions of peace in the world, divisions occur. This was important for the disciples to hear because they were in such a 'Jesus bubble' sometimes they might forget to hostile community within they live.

I don't know if you have ever had that experience – maybe when you have been to a movie or a concert – or even to Harry Potter Studios! Where you have so entered into a new world, that you have so enjoyed the story and the journey of movie, or even a lecture – that when you step back out into the street you forget that this wasn't your reality. Jesus had to remind the disciples that not everyone would embrace his teaching as they had.

We cannot ignore that at times Christianity causes discord, or even that at times in history Christians, or those saying they are Christians, cause division. But at the same time I don't think that this passage of Matthew gives us permission to go out of our way to cause or advocate division either – rather in an entire passage on discipleship – we have one section about some of the dangers a disciple may encounter.

David Lose, whose blog on the readings I read each week had a solid warning about the way that this passage might be interpreted as an excuse for conflict – rather he says we have a responsibility to recognise that our situation is very different from the one that Matthew is addressing. He suggests that we speak the truth as we believe we've received it and to advocate for justice as we perceive it. But precisely

because we know that truth is something we can confess but never possess, to do so in a way that doesn't shut down other voices, refuse to listen to other opinions, or cut off folks who believe differently³.

We do have a responsibility to share our faith, to live as solid witnesses for God in Jesus Christ, to inhabit Jesus each day – or as we described it last week – to allow Jesus to surge through us as a result of our shared communion together. But we also have a responsibility to keep our ears and eyes open – to be aware of the opinions of others and to show respect.

The second part of this passage is about hope. Whatever we inhabit, whatever face – we never do it alone. *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* *“Do not be afraid” – the hallmark of the Gospel and words we cannot say too frequently in a world so marked by fear. “You are of great value” – the promise of God in Jesus and words we need to say and hear again and again in a world that values us more for what we can buy than almost anything else.*⁴

Whatever we fear – and there is much fear around us at this time – we need to remember God is with us. We also need to hold fast to the fact that while there is much discord in the world, some of which is avoidable, and some of it as a result of those the well-meaning, we are called to live as people of faith with integrity. And like the disciples that means we inhabit the teachings of Jesus.

The reality of course is that we don't always see things as others see it. On Thursday when my 10 year old nephew arrived from Australia he was really excited to see a squirrel in the first 10 minutes, but then he said – but what's wrong with that pigeon – why are the pigeons so big here. As we walked through the park he kept laughing at the size of the pigeons and seagulls which he thought were bizarre. To him they were the wrong size and shape – they are different from how they look in Australia.

Sometimes when we inhabit a new space, or even the same space with new eyes, we see all sorts of things we didn't notice before.

No matter how familiar the world around us is, or how surprised we are at the current state of our society, or the level of violence in the name of faith we are witnessing. God reminds us to not forget who we are.

Matthew Gospel reminds us that as we inhabit new places, as we encounter our changing world - there will be things to embrace and things to be wary of – but whatever we face we are not alone – and whatever we face we need to do so with integrity and with our eyes open with the eyes of Christ. Amen.

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/06/pentecost-3-a-two-timely-truths/>

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2nd Sunday after Trinity – 25th June 2017
Genesis 21: 8-21; Romans 6: 1b-11 and Matthew 10: 24-39