

What does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to inhabit our faith? I have found this is challenging question since the beginning of lock down – but maybe it shouldn't have been.

Our lives as followers of Christ should be underpinned in our daily prayer and engagement with scripture. For some of us, myself included, I haven't had to think about this very much in the past as the bell rings each day and calls me to the chapel to pray. The structure of my life as a priest in a parish meant that my daily routine helped me to inhabit my faith often without a lot of thinking.

When we closed our churches I was suddenly confronted with the reality, that most people have every day – creating spaces and shapes to inhabit my faith in a new context and different surroundings. On the one hand this has been a great gift, as it has drawn me back to my core role to pray for all who live in our parishes. On the other hand it has challenged me to think about what is important in our worship and prayer; and how we talk about it. The heart of our discipleship.

Over the last two weeks we have heard excerpts from Matthew's account of Jesus Sermon on the Mount. Last week we talked about how being a disciple, a student of a teacher like Jesus, means that we need to inhabit the presence, inhabit the space of Jesus. This week Jesus extends this further to help us understand that it isn't just about just about what it takes to be a disciple, but what discipleship means. Discipleship isn't about how we earn the reward of God's love, but rather how we recognise God's love in our lives.

This may seem like a conversation in semantics, and in some ways it is, but it is the difference between being forced to take a stand (even if we do so freely) and coming to our own decision that we take a stand.

At one level it is too easy to know what we believe. It can often be easy to know what we don't believe as well – or even those bits of Christianity which we are uncomfortable with. It takes a great deal of determination to keep living our faith day in and day out. But we are called to not lose sight of this. And for this we need to not just talk about discipleship – we need to live it.

For the past few years in the Diocese of London we have focused on each of us being an ambassador for Christ, wherever God calls us to be. We are each called to live out our baptism, and to have courage to share God's message of love with those around us. Over the past three months we have had to find new ways for doing this. We haven't stopped being faithful, we haven't stopped helping others, we haven't stopped sharing God's message – but we have had to change the way that we do all these things.

Three months ago if you had asked me to do a 'thought for the day' on Facebook I would have run away; but now I do it regularly. And in this time we have all learnt to do things in new ways. Some people have led prayers or read in Zoom who have never done so in church. Many people have learnt how to use technology in new

ways. We have learnt how to sing by ourselves. Many of us have explored lots of new places to worship online, visiting prayer rooms, or other churches, where we might not have had the courage to go in person.

We are not the same disciples as we were on the third Sunday of Lent when we last met in church. And this is a good thing, our discipleship should always be growing and changing – in church and out!

Which brings us back to our Gospel reading. Faith and discipleship are in the end about how we serve God – but are we serving because that's what disciples do – or are we serving because we want to be disciples?

It may not feel like it makes any difference – but it will be the difference in our faithfulness and our determination to be followers – wherever that following might take us. The whole of Matthew chapter 10 is about the nature of discipleship and particularly what this was going to be like for those first disciples – though it also has relevance to our own discipleship. And as it draws to a close Jesus reminds the disciples not to get distracted, that it is often the anonymous signs of faith – the small unknown acts that witness most to the love of Christ, rather than any great missionary gesture.

Colin Yukkman<sup>1</sup> reminded us that *God's mission is as much about the unnamed people who provide a thirsty servant a cold drink of water as the familiar names that dot the pages of church histories. In fact, within the New Testament, we only have one narrative account of the church's mission -- the book of Acts -- and in it we encounter many such "minor" characters. Their hospitality and social connections were decisive for the spread of the Christian teaching. And yet they get a barely a mention in the history of the early church. This is the gift of the final few verses of Matthew 10 – a reminder that in the end so much of faith is conveyed in the unknown gestures and acts of kindness. The great act of welcoming, including and drawing in. Hopefully it is our worship of God as disciples which sustains us as we do this.*

I think this presents us with an opportunity as we prepare for some of us to return to worshipping together. Not everyone will be well enough, strong enough, or even feel safe enough to enter church just yet. And that is OK. But we need to make sure that our actions, not just acts of kindness, but also acts of worship reflect that we may be doing this now together in different places. We also need to be listening to what God is asking us to inhabit in new ways. Maybe some of the patterns we had in March need to be left in March. Maybe some of the patterns we have adapted to during the lock down are patterns God calls us to keep. And maybe there will be some new patterns God will call us to inhabit in the days and months ahead. We are getting used to the fact that things can be fluid – but what remains constant in all this is our faith – faith which will be conveyed by our small acts of kindness, welcome and love.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3333](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3333)

In the end, the inhabiting of our faith should inspire us to be everyday disciples, those armed with the courage and compassion of Christ who go out believing that God is at work in and through all we do, even the smallest acts of kindness and generosity. For it is here that we stand with Christ! It is here that we offer welcome. It is here that we build God's house and home.

I think everyone I have spoken to has felt challenged in some way by the ways we have not only needed to worship, but in the ways we have been limited in showing kindness to others. And yet, in these conversations every one of us has found a way. We have learnt to inhabit a new space, even if it has been a little uncomfortable at times.

In the weeks ahead as we return to worship in church at some point, as we begin to inhabit our faith again in more public places – we will be challenged again to find ways to generously share, and generously worship. And if this scares us a little, we can be reminded that Christ goes ahead of us, already inhabiting the space, and all we need to do is follow.

It is why I chose the hymn we just sung, it reminds not lose sight of the one who calls us and in many ways sums up all that Matthew 10 teaches us about discipleship

*In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand<sup>2</sup> Amen*

---

<sup>2</sup> In Christ Alone by Natalie Grant