

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 recently 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 much thinking.

When we closed our churches I was suddenly confronted with the reality, that most people have each 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 that 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 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.

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.

In this time we have all learnt to do things in new ways. 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 Matthew's Gospel. 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?

Colin Yukkman¹ reminds 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, the only account of the church's mission in the Acts records many such "minor" characters. It is the hospitality and social connections of these characters that were decisive for the spread of the Christian teaching, 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.*

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.

I think everyone I have spoken to recently has felt challenged in some way by the ways we have had to worship and even show care for 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, 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. Amen

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3333