

Back to Basics: Discipleship
Luke 14:25-33
September 8, 2019

What is involved in becoming a disciple of Jesus? Is it demanding? Will it mean I have to change my attitudes or behaviour or my priorities? Or is it something I can add to my life without changing too much? Is becoming a follower of Jesus kind of like moving into a new home with the same old furniture? It looks different and yet the same. Life goes on just about the same as before. Or would becoming a disciple of Jesus look more like moving out of my old place, ditching my old furniture and setting up with a whole new look? Or is it possible for us to be a follower of Jesus so that we think of ourselves as religious, but without changing too much in my life? What I mean is can I simply be moral, kind, and honest, and keep my religion private so my faith really has little influence on my politics, spending, or indeed any part of my public life? What do you think?

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God and he told us it had arrived with him. Brian McLaren in his book, **The Secret Message of Jesus**, identifies this message with the coming of the kingdom that Jesus preached, lived and demonstrated in his life, death and resurrection. Too often in the church we have clouded this message with talk about ***“escaping this world and going to heaven.”***

Certainly Jesus points to a hope that looks for a life beyond the grave in a resurrected existence. But when he talks about entering the kingdom, being born from above into the kingdom, he’s not talking about some future, disembodied existence in heaven. Rather, as Brian says, he is talking about a present reality that will turn our lives upside down.

Too often the portrait of Jesus that we learned in Sunday school, and dare I say it, even in church, was of a “nice quiet, gentle, perhaps somewhat fragile guy on whose lap children liked to sit. Or he was a fellow in strange robes who held a small sheep in one arm and always seemed to have the other raised as if he were hailing a taxi.” (McLaren) In fact Jesus was far more revolutionary than this pastoral image. He was so upsetting to the powers that controlled the lives of

first century Jews living under the rule of Rome that they ended up killing him.

The kingdom of God that Jesus invites us into is similar in meaning to the phrase “eternal life”. Several people, including the rich young man, ask Jesus how they can inherit eternal life. They don’t mean by that question the future life in heaven after they die. They are asking how they can have a more meaningful, full life here and now. Jesus’ answer is that eternal life or entering the kingdom is to experience life to the full by being in an interactive relationship with God through his Son Jesus Christ.

Even the religious Nicodemus, the man with all the religious credentials, had to be told that he had everything wrong. Jesus told him he would have to go back to the beginning and rethink and relearn everything he’d learned in seminary about God’s kingdom and how to enter it.

It was the same message to the woman at the well. Jesus has to turn her world upside down for her to find her way into God’s kingdom. He told her that if she knew who he was she would be asking him for living water, the kind that bubbles and enervates life. She would no longer be content with this well water which, soon after you drink it, you need more. My water is alive and lives in you, he tells her. Her life will be changed radically and her social relationships will be the first to be altered as she steps into her life in the kingdom.

For the rich young man seeking eternal life Jesus lets him know that this will have huge implications for his financial status. He is so addicted to his wealth and the security it provides that it is the last thing he would part with. Jesus reads him perfectly. So if you want to enter God’s kingdom, Jesus informs him, you need to give it all away. The young man turns away in sadness.

Entering the kingdom of God is a radical step out of our comfort zone and our attachments to the status quo. It forces us out of the safe places we inhabit into a life that is radically different from the one advertised in our society. Any time we hear from the media that the good life is this or that you can usually bet it is not the one advocated by Jesus. So naturally, you can see that following Jesus is a big step.

How big a step? Here in Luke we read Jesus response to the enthusiastic crowd that is following him. They have no sense that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. They are caught up in the enthusiasm of a miracle worker who may in fact be the one Israel has been waiting for. Perhaps soon he will mount his white charger and lead the nation in revolt to Rome and defeat them. None of this was in Jesus' plan. He was on his way to die. So he issues a warning to them. They need to count the cost.

But first he issues what appears to us today a rather harsh demand. We are to 'hate parents, siblings, and even our own lives" if we want to be followers and participate in the kingdom. What can he possibly mean? Surely he doesn't mean that we are actually to hate our family, or ourselves. We know that in other places Jesus says the very opposite. We are asked to keep the law which demands honouring parents. We are to love our neighbour in the same way we love ourselves. So what does he mean?

The Greek word used here is conveying a Semitic expression that means, "to detach oneself from." What Jesus is demanding of us here is that of all the network of loyalties in our lives the claim of Christ takes priority. In fact, being a follower of Jesus will mean that all of my relationships will be redefined. In some cases that may mean a turning away from, or "hating" as it is expressed in our English version here.

I remember vividly to this day a choice I had to make in my early relationships. My fiancé and myself are visiting a family for dinner. We went out into the back garden and noticed how clear the stars were in the night sky. I remarked to her that surely there must be a creator God behind this amazing universe. I'll never forget her response. "Why does there have to be a God", of something to that effect. In that moment I knew in my heart that we would never be a couple. And soon after that is what happened. Even if at the time I had strayed from my faith I still knew in my heart that I belonged to Christ.

For example, we all have a number of relationships: family, friends, work, sports, and professional. It may be that the kingdom values that

I live by through my relationship with God through Christ may run counter to the values that define some of these relationships. What am I to do when these conflict? It may be that my priority to Christ and the values of the kingdom will force me to make a choice on some occasions.

If, for example, the values of others treat the Sabbath like any other day then I as a Christian will have a problem. Scripture teaches me that the Sabbath is the Lord's and that for my well being and spiritual health it is necessary for me to set aside some time on the Sunday for worship and service. But society tells me a different story. Which has priority? Is worship important for me as a follower? Should I set this aside weekly to be with God's people to praise the God who has saved me and called me? Or is the cost too great?

Jesus is speaking here about counting the cost before starting a project. There is a cost to becoming a disciple. Are we willing to meet that challenge? Listen again to Jesus' words:

Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters-yes even one's own self!-cannot be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple...

Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it goodbye, you can't be my disciple. (Luke 14:33) Strong words indeed!

Amen