

A Few Ways to be a Disciple...

Matthew 10:24—39

Proper 7 Year A (Sunday between June 19 and June 25)

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Jesus is in a mood today. And to be clear, he doesn't seem to care, that some 2000 years later his words, "*I have come to set a daughter against her mother, and a daughter in law against her mother-in-law, a man against his father, ...*" He doesn't care that these words might be a tad bit troublesome for us nestled next to Father's Day. (But here we are...)

In his words today, Jesus is neither sappy nor palatable. He is clear in laying out what it means, to the ones he is commissioning to go, out and about preaching and teaching and healing every sickness. He gives them a packing list, emphasizing what not to take: don't take two shirts, leave the backpacks behind, no extra sandals or even walking sticks. (Matt 10:10)

"Beware," he says, "*You will be like the sheep among the wolves, therefore be wise as snakes and innocent as doves,*" (Matt 10:16b). "*But don't be afraid of those people, because nothing is hidden that won't be revealed, nothing secret that won't be brought out into the public,*" (Matt 10:26). But that doesn't mean that their task is easy.

Jesus is not, nor has he ever been, about market-tested platitudes. He is formidable and fierce as he lays out what it means to be disciples. He says, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword,*" (Matt 10:34).

Biblical Scholar and theologian Emilie Townes says that, "Volumes can be opened up concerning this passage if the focus is on discipleship, that is what does it mean to follow the way of Jesus." She goes on to say that discipleship is a journey that involves learning, it is distinct from being an apostle who is offering a message, but rather the focus on discipleship is for us to learn from Jesus. We need to pause and learn from Jesus, "Who we are to be, and what we are to say, and then how we communicate all of this to others," (*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3*, p 166).

How do we do this? How do we learn from Jesus?

We need to go deep into our scripture. I say to myself and to you, reminding us all in this perilous time in our country, we do well to go deep into Scripture, immersing ourselves in The Word, by ourselves and with each other. And we need to be connected with our communities, our traditions and sacraments, so we will know how Jesus wants us to his followers. What he wants us to care about. What he wants us to say. What he wants us to do.

Scripture. Sacraments. Community.

And then what??

How are we disciples in the world? This world, this time this place?

I've recently come across a stunningly practical theological book. A book upon which we will be doing a Diocesan book study of in the Fall. This book, *For Such a Time as This: An Emergency*

Devotional, by Hanna Reichel, offers an accessible means for people of faith to be disciples in 21st Century America. This short book offers a stark contrast to the virulent, toxic ideology of Christian Nationalism, that we see increasingly present in our country right now. In a series of daily devotionals, using their extensive research of Nazi Germany, Professor Reichel offers ways that we might be disciples of Christ in this perilous time in the United States of America as we see a rise of authoritarian tendencies and a decreasing regard for attending to the needs of all our neighbors.

Allow me to dip into this powerful book for a minute. Professor Reichel writes,

“What difference does belief in God make in such a time as this? Belief in God, Reichel writes, is not a comfort in affliction; if anything it makes injustice and suffering more acute. Belief in God is not a special talisman that will keep you safe, or a miracle weapon that will save the day.

Belief in God is a commitment to stand where God stands.

Because this is where we have found God, this where God will find us: with our eyes to the cross, staying with the suffering, regardless of our own strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears.” P 33

Reichel says, *“Protect the weak. The good shepherd goes after the one sheep instead of the many. The lost sheep is not the person who hasn’t had their ‘come-to-Jesus’ moment. The lost sheep is the one who, unprotected by the group, will be torn up by the wolves. Don’t abandon the few for the supposed good of the many.” P 34*

In another chapter Reichel talks about, standing firm and not giving up spaces. Reichel goes on to explain,

“Any space you give up will be used in ways you can no longer influence ...Your world will become smaller...withdrawing into spaces that are safely like-minded is not gathering strength; it is retreat...As much as you can, remain “out there” in spaces under pressure...Don’t give up relationships with people whose opinions you do not share. Doing so will be uncomfortable...but your discomfort is not yours alone: It generates friction. You might not change people’s minds, but you might be a spark for those who already harbor doubts and second thoughts. Your physical presence will be an obstacle to complete assimilation and un-thinking like-mindedness. Sometimes that makes all the difference. P 35

These are just two tidbits from Hanna Reichel’s book, *For Such a Time as This*. I cannot recommend this book enough for those of us longing to be disciples of Jesus and not exactly sure how to do it, or what it might look like in today’s world. This book is a way to start.

Discipleship is a journey. One that we can choose to undertake every single moment of every single day. It is a journey, for which we have 2000 years of precedence, history and tradition. It is a journey that will not be easy, but it will be transformative, for us and for our world. It is a journey best experienced with others, two by two or with many more. It is a journey that you and I are called to begin again today.