

ROAD TRIP: WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

#1 Preparing for the Journey!

Matthew 7:13-14, 24-29

Here's something you probably don't know about me. When it comes to travelling, I have an obsessive compulsive disorder. I plan everything down to the smallest detail. Everything. How many kilometres we'll travel each day. The exact times we will leave in the morning, sightsee, stop to eat, and pull over at night. I even plan the bathroom breaks. *"OK honey, just hold on. We'll be stopping for that bathroom break in about 180 kilometres."*

But here's what I've learned when you travel. Your marriage has a greater chance of success if you stop for bathroom breaks when your wife tells you to. Can I get an Amen for that! And the other thing I've learned is that when you travel nothing ever goes exactly to plan. If you fly, you may get bumped from your flight, or your luggage doesn't arrive with you. Or if you are driving, you may hit construction, or an accident, and get detoured or delayed.

Now here's what I want to suggest to you this morning. The Christian life is like a journey. It doesn't always turn out the way you thought it would. But like our vacation journeys, despite the obstacles that we face, we keep on going because of the eventual destination. We are heading for the eternal city.

I often think of our Christian discipleship as a journey. So I ask myself pretty regularly. Where am I going? What am I becoming? Am I moving forward, standing still, or even going backwards? Am I living with a clear purpose or am I just drifting along without any real purpose in life? Where am I headed? How would you answer those questions in your own life?

Let me relate those discipleship questions to Jesus and his disciples. When Jesus began his ministry he chose 12 disciples. Let me stress, Jesus chose his disciples. This wasn't a position you applied for. Now like any other Teacher-student relationship of the day, if the disciple accepted the invitation to follow, he was making a personal commitment to go where the Master went; to learn what he taught; to model their life on his character; to do what he did; and as far as possible to be just like him. This was the relationship Jesus had with his disciples. John 15:5. ***"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."***

But here's the thing. Jesus knew, as only God could, that he would only be with his disciples for three years. He only had three years to turn this group

of tax collectors, fishermen and other assorted individuals into disciples. Here's why this was so important.

There is an old Christian legend that after Jesus returned to heaven, the angel Gabriel asked. "Lord, what plan have you made for the good news of salvation to be shared around the world." "Well", said Jesus, "I told Peter, James and John and my other disciples to go out and tell other people about me."

Now Gabriel knew how pre-occupied and self-centered the human race could be, so he asked Jesus. "And what's plan B" And Jesus responded, "There is no plan B".

That's why Jesus poured so much time and effort into teaching and training his twelve disciples. Because his mission is now their mission, and that mission is now our mission. That's why our personal discipleship is so vitally important.

So ask yourself these five discipleship questions. Where am I presently on my Christian journey? Where am I headed? Am I further along on that journey today than I was yesterday, or last month, or last year or five years ago? And, the key question, how do I know?

Now you can look at those questions from all kinds of different angles. Your prayer life. Your knowledge of Scripture. The stewardship of your time, talents and treasures. The state of your relationships with other people. How you actually practice your faith in daily life?

Here's what we need to understand. Calling yourself a Christian, claiming the Presbyterian faith, or going to Church, does not necessarily make you a "disciple" of Jesus. Jesus said. Luke 6:46. **"So why do you keep CALLING me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't DO what I say?"** James, the brother of Jesus, put it this way. (Msg. translation), **"Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?"**

If you say to your child on a regular basis, "I love you and I believe in you" but you never go to any of their parent-teacher interviews, you never help them with their homework, you never go to watch one of their soccer games, you never have time to play with them, then what are your words of love and encouragement really worth? Nothing. It's all just talk. **"Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?"**

That is the bottom line. And the honest truth is that the principal reason the church in Canada is in decline today, when the Church in many parts of the world is growing, is that we have lost our passion as disciples.

Now I believe that God's call to discipleship today is different in many ways than it was when many of us were growing up. Back then we lived in the "*Christendom*" era, where the Church had a huge influence in society. In that paradigm, the discipleship process went something like this. You were baptized as an infant. Attended Sunday school as a child. Were confirmed as a teenager and became a church member. You attended worship regularly. You were married in the church, and had your children baptized there. You died in the faith, and were buried, probably from the church, and you looked forward to eternal life.

Now I know I have exaggerated that process but since I'm in that more reflective stage of my life here's what I've realized. In the Christendom age, we assumed that a Christian, a church member, and a disciple of Jesus, were one and the same thing. And because we did that, often we didn't challenge people to make a personal commitment of their life to Jesus Christ. We just assumed that if they called themselves a "*Christian*" they had done that.

We taught people how to say the Lord's Prayer, but we never really taught people how to pray. Since everyone had a Bible in their own home, we assumed they read it, but we didn't actually teach them how to study and interact with God's Word in their daily lives. We taught people how to be a good "member" of the Church, but we didn't teach them how to identify their spiritual gifts so they were able to serve God as effectively as possible. We assumed that "*if we built it, they would come*", and so we sat in our churches and waited. And it did work. But that strategy doesn't work anymore. And since we waited for people to come, we now struggle in how to engage our communities that are filled with people who do not come.

The point I'm trying to make is, that in the Christendom model of church and discipleship, it was assumed that once you got into the "Church" you would find your own way. But as we all know, *Christendom* has mostly disappeared and increasingly the Church, the Bible, and Christian values and morals have become alien in our culture. This time we live in demands that we are not just "*Christian*" in name, but that we are vigorous, radical, passionate, and fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said, Luke 6:46. **"So why do you keep CALLING me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't DO what I say?"**

Here's what we have to remember. Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a process, it is not the end of it. Discipleship is a lifelong pursuit. If discipleship is only about a name, or about being on the membership roll of a church, why did Jesus spend three whole years - Teaching his disciples;

Training them; Mentoring them; Sending them out on mission trips; And answering their questions? It was because he was training them to be the kind of disciples who would carry on His ministry after He returned to heaven. Why is training to be a disciple so important? Well, as baseball legend Yogi Berra famously said, **"If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else"**.

So listen to Jesus again. He's telling us to take our discipleship seriously. Matthew 7:13-14. This is in *The Message* translation. **"Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with sure fire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention."**

So "Where Are You Headed?" Here's this week's challenge. On a scale of 1-10, if 1 represents your initial decision to follow Jesus and 10 represents you receiving from God the blessing, **"Well done, good and faithful servant"** where would you put yourself right now? And whatever that number is, how do you know that's where you are? What's your evidence for that conclusion?

Don't worry if that's a hard question. It was meant to be. But every journey begins with a starting point and a first step.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God,

Your Spirit accompanies us on our journey of faith,
and your Son Jesus, directs our footsteps.

Help us to understand discipleship as a personal commitment of our lives to the person of Jesus and to his mission in the world.

May our discipleship be marked by courage, and generosity, service and sacrifice; may we live it out vigorously and passionately; and may our witness be heartfelt and effective.

Be today with the persecuted church: with Christians who risk everything in order to follow Jesus, and who daily face persecution, imprisonment and threat of death. Inspire us by their example, to live as those who take very seriously our calling as followers of Jesus.

We pray for the ministries of our congregation that reach out into our community.

We thank you for the children and volunteers at our Vacation Bible Camp last week. May the seeds of discipleship sown, result one day in a bountiful harvest for your Kingdom.

May the seeds of friendship, and the good news of Jesus, bring hope to those we come alongside in our Boarding Home Ministry.

May our Loaves and Fishes project with the Canadian Food Grains Bank, fill the stomachs of the hungry and give hope to their hearts.

Be with those in fire ravaged British Columbia and especially with the exhausted firefighters and with those who have had to leave everything behind and flee to safety. Send the needed rains we pray to help extinguish these fires.

And may all those who face any kind of adversity in their life – the sick, the dying, the mourning, those in chronic pain, the addicted, and the fearful, draw strength from our prayers, support and acts of kindness, all given in the name of the Master, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.