

Sermon July 8, 2018

Disciples – Apostles Cara B. Hochhalter

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 and Mark 6:1-13

Maybe you are not exactly sure why those people who hung around Jesus are sometimes called “disciples” and other times “apostles.” Our Spirit of the Seasons writers explain that “disciples” are those who followed Jesus. ...and there were many who “followed” Jesus...literally and theologically....both men and women and probably children and youth, too! According to the Oxford English dictionary, a disciple is ‘a follower or pupil of a teacher or philosopher.’

“Apostle” is defined as ‘a vigorous and pioneering advocate of a particular policy, idea or cause.’ So...disciples *followed* Jesus’ teachings.... *apostles* were sent out to advocate for those teachings! In the Greek roots of these words, disciple means *student* while apostle means *messenger* or *sent one*. So one could be a disciple but not an apostle, but all apostles were also disciples! Get it?

Who are you? Would you say “follow” the teachings of Jesus...as a kind of disciple? Do you “follow” a sense of God leading you? Might you add in some others who inspire you...Rumi, the Tao....I might say Walter Brueggemann and William Herzog whose interpretation of scripture is keyed towards justice and peace-making. I also might say I follow Ann Lamont, whose quirky style inspires me through humor but also a deep personal faith.

I am inspired by many of you...whose faith motivates you to feed those in need in our hill towns, to take actions opposing injustice for the poor in our nation, to stand up to racism and discrimination of any kind...and so many of you who reach out in compassion and caring ways....even when it is hard.

But maybe “following” is something a little deeper than just being inspired by... perhaps it means “devoted to”.... Continuing to learn from...? What does it mean....to be a *follower* of Jesus....and are we being called to be apostles?

Let us be in prayer: Gracious and challenging God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Jesus displayed deep spiritual wisdom, performed healing miracles, and merely had to say the words, “Follow me,” and people jumped to their feet leaving all behind. BUT when he came to his hometown the people said, “Wait a minute. Who do you think you are? Aren’t you the one my sister babysat for...the one who was always getting

into trouble, the one who ran away from your parents? How could you whom we KNOW...possibly be....inspired by God, even teaching in our synagogue?" (I wonder what it was Jesus preached to his hometown that day.)

Megan McKenna describes Nazareth as "a backwater village where perhaps 120 to 150 people lived at the time of Jesus and many were members of his extended birth family." You can imagine how they felt...one of their own had returned with a new sense of authority. Who WAS this guy, Jesus!?

Jesus calls himself a prophet...one who is honored everywhere *except* in his hometown...even among his family. I wonder if he is angry about this...or bemused? But we get it, don't we...perhaps you know people from your childhood who have gone on to become great...for some it makes perfect sense and for others....we scratch our heads a bit.

Now, here comes something that I think is key. *Because* the people in his hometown doubted him, he was not able to perform miracles...other than healing a few sick people, scripture says. Because of *their* unbelief....even Jesus was limited. This is huge....we are so influenced by the attitudes of those around us. Our expectations of others can allow them their full potential...or limit them. Teachers, parents and grandparents...we know this so well. We literally watch a child bloom with positive encouragement...or wither from criticism.

I think we do this to ourselves, too...our own attitudes give us the confidence to live more fully...or limit us. Perhaps our own attitudes can limit God in our lives?..... But Jesus had self-confidence that he got from somewhere, God perhaps --- and he was able to brush off their doubts...

Off he goes to other villages and he begins to send his disciples out...making them *apostles*. "Vigorous and pioneering advocates!" Jesus sent them out, with nothing but themselves. No need to carry laptops with power point presentations, multiple sets of clothing, pamphlets or even ancient texts.... They are empowered by his teachings, they are inspired by the visible examples of God-at-work in the world....and presumably they simply go out to preach through their own stories and by their acts of compassion and faith.

Jesus told them that if they encounter people who reject them...just brush them off like dust from their feet and move on....just as he had done in his hometown. Whoa, these stories are so great!

You may be skeptical just as the Nazarenes were skeptical of Jesus...you may be doubtful that God/Christ/Spirit might be trying to send you anywhere. Perhaps it is a physical "sending" out...I seem to feel this kind of calling....or perhaps it is a sending out of your comfort zone...a "sending" to love your neighbors in some new ways....

Is it enough to be a disciple of these teachings? Perhaps it is..... Or do you, like others, think perhaps we need more intentional sharing of these faith ideals? That our society has turned away from the kind of faithful living that has kept our country together....

The Poor People's Campaign is all about this, making us pay attention to the moral narrative of our country. There is also a document circulating by a group of pastors, Walther Brueggemann and many others from different denominations have signed on; it is called "ReclaimingJesus.org"... It is calling people to the Gospel over the internet! Otis Moss III calls it "Ipod theology" -- more mobile and more effective than waiting for people to come to church, which begs us to think about how Jesus would have sent his apostles out...in a technological age such as ours!

Here is, very briefly, a summary of what the "Reclaiming Jesus" document is putting out there.

- 1) All human beings are made in God's image...one that confers dignity, worth and equality. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God and denies the truth of the Gospel.
- 2) We are of one body. In Christ there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class.
- 3) How we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. How we treat those on the margins is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love.
- 4) Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into current society and rejecting the practice and pattern of lying. To seek and respect truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.
- 5) The way of leadership is servanthood and not domination, thus we encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials.
- 6) Jesus tells us to go into all nations making disciples---we in turn should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants.

This is a very brief sketch of this document... You can see more at ReclaimingJesus.org.

Think of what you know of Jesus' teachings...what do you feel called to "put out there" through your words and your actions that can impact our world? I think we are all called to be apostles, by the way we "live it".... And I am preaching to myself, too! I have to ask myself if I am a "vigorous pioneer" for the love God and the teachings of Jesus?

I will close with a story told by the wonderful preacher Tom Long. He told of a commencement event at Emory University when honorary degrees were being awarded with long speeches made by highly educated recipients... the students in the audience chatted, not paying a whole lot of attention. Then a man named Hugh Thompson got up to speak, and everyone became silent. He was probably the least educated there and yet he had a story to tell. He said that instead of finishing college, he enlisted in the Army and became a helicopter pilot. Here is what he told them:

"On March 16, 1968, I was flying a routine patrol in Vietnam when I happened to fly over the village of Mai Lai just as American troops, under the command of Lieutenant William Calley, were shooting at dozens of unarmed...villagers...old men, women and children. I set my helicopter down between the troops and the remaining...civilians. I ordered my tail-gunner to train the helicopter guns on the American soldiers, and ordered them to stop killing the villagers...I was almost court martialed for this act...it was thirty years before the Army awarded me the Soldier's Medal."

"You see," Thompson said, "My parents taught me to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'"

The students gave him a standing ovation.

So in this world that seems so polarized, not just politically but even within our Christian denomination... might we be called to be "vigorous pioneers" advocating for these teachings through brave and sincere actions? Of course most of us don't have helicopters to land between warring parties...but we can express through words, letters, and acts of love and compassion.

May God bless each one of us on this journey of faithful living...

Amen.