

In his book, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*, Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, explores what it is to be a disciple of Jesus. He notes:

“...being disciples’ means at least two things: It means very simply asking whether what we do, how we think, speak and act, is open to Christ and Christ’s Spirit. We practice developing the skill of asking ourselves the difficult questions about our consistency and honesty in our relationship with Christ, about how seriously *we* take what we say. And, discipleship is also about how we as a Church continue being a *learning community*, how we grow in depth of relationship with each other and God. The invitation, he says, is to go on growing in the life that Jesus shares with us, so that we can become signs of life and hope in our world.”

You see, “Discipleship is a state of *being*. It is about **how** we live; not just the decisions we make, not just the things we believe, not just the tasks we do.” (1)

Our gospels, and certainly, that of St. Mark through which we’ve been journeying this year, emphasize this —that discipleship is more than action, more than ideas. That it is deeply rooted in being: who we are, how we show up, and all that it takes to stay the course so to abide in Christ and Christ’s love and thus become beacons and bearers of his love to all we encounter.

“In the Greek, “discipleship” means “being a student”, but that doesn’t mean showing up once a week for church, or bible study (although these are excellent practices that can make a difference in your life!). What I’m trying to say is that to be a disciple of Jesus asks something more of us: to have an ongoing relationship with him, one that is not intermittent, or occasional, or that arises solely when we “need it”, but that continues to evolve and grow, one that in times of struggle has the ability to enter and ground us in hope, especially when hope seems lost.

In ancient times, to be a student was much like what we see of the disciples in our gospels. To be a student of Jesus was to hold tightly to his every word, to follow in his footsteps, to go wherever he went so not to miss any pearls of wisdom he might offer or any acts that might enlighten. To be a disciple was to listen and watch closely, and to learn from how Jesus conducted himself at the table, in the streets, in the synagogue, and with others, friend and stranger alike. Today such behavior might suggest that one

is part of a cult, and would send up warning signs. But in the ancient world, to be the student of a teacher was simply to commit yourself to living in the same atmosphere and breathing the same air. And this is the relationship and state of being into which Christ calls us, inviting us to grow and become. (2)

There is a story told of novice monks striving desperately to understand. They would occasionally say to an older monk: "Give us a word, Father." After a long while, the older monk might respond saying something really profound like, "Weep for your sins", which was then followed by six more weeks of silence.

Many years ago, I experienced several bad dreams. In each, there was a sense of falling, or that I was going to die. Fighting back against them, I would bolt up out of a sound sleep, heart racing, terrified as I sat in the dark, wondering if I had indeed died. Once I even ran from the bedroom to see if Peter and our son were ok, only to find that they were both just fine. One day after church, as Peter and I were headed for our car, our Rector came walking by. Peter said out loud, "Maybe you should tell Paul about it!", causing Rev. Paul to stop and look at me, waiting for me to say something. As clearly as I could, I told him of my bad dreams, to which he responded quite seriously, "Have you considered that you need to die to self?", and then he turned and walked away.

His words, like those spoken to the novice monks, failed to provide an answer but instead invited me to step into the silence and to ponder the question. It would take many years, and much study and prayer, before I began to understand what Rev. Paul was saying to me that day: *That in order to become who God was calling me to be, I had to be willing to shed some part of who I had been.* But letting go of who we have been, especially when it is comfortable and safe, can be terrifying. So terrifying, in fact, that it might cause one to have nightmares and to think one is dying.

Yet, Jesus reassures us that losing ourselves for him, that letting go of who we have been to become the disciples Christ is calling us to be, while perhaps scary, promises us more than we can ask, or imagine.

In our Gospel today, Jesus is leaving Jericho. Along the way he has healed the afflicted and taught lessons through story so that those present might understand what discipleship is, what God asks of us, and what God offers in return. Three times he has shared his passion and what is to come. Although Peter, James and John saw and

recognized Jesus as the anointed one, as the “Messiah”, each failed to fully grasp who he was— clinging instead to what Jesus would call an “earthly” view of the messiah. A warrior who would save Israel; a King with a throne at whose side they could aspire to sit; a holy yet human being who would never voluntarily leave them. Perhaps they sensed the immensity of what being a disciple would demand, and they were afraid?

But here, just as they set off for Jerusalem, we bear witness to the last story of miraculous healing in Mark’s Gospel. As the large crowd passes by, there is Bartimaeus, a blind beggar and outcast, sitting under his cloak at the side of the road. Hearing that Jesus of Nazareth is among them, he calls out to him for help. They try to keep him from Jesus and to silence him, but Bartimaeus with persistence and nothing to lose, cries out even more loudly, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus “Son of David”, He shouts, a title reserved for the promised Messiah whom the prophets foretold would be born of King David’s royal lineage. With this title he openly declares who Jesus is. hearing him, Jesus stops, Calls the man to him, and asks: “What do you want me to do for you?” <pause>

What do you want me to do for you?

It’s a question worth pondering. A question that Jesus asked not only of Bartimaeus, and James and John, but a question He asks each of us, again and again.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

It is a perfect prompt for prayer — a question to consider as one walks alongside the Carmel River or the shore of the Pacific, as one sits in silence or by candlelight, when one rises and before one falls asleep. Jesus himself said, “Seek the kingdom of God, and God’s righteousness. Ask and it shall be given you. Knock and the door shall be opened.”

So, What do we want Jesus to do for us?

And most importantly, does our request align with what it means to follow Jesus? Are we asking Jesus to do for us that which will help us to live out our faith more fully, consistently and authentically, That will aid us in loving and serving our neighbors? That will help us to embody **being** disciples?

Bartimaeus also saw Jesus as a “teacher”, or translated, a “spiritual instructor”, a title that stands in contrast to the 1st century idea of a mighty warrior Messiah, and one that I think resonates with us today, for Jesus has so much to teach us.

Jesus sees, and perhaps we see too, that Bartimaeus not only understands Jesus to be Messiah, but also seems to understand what that means. Jesus is the one sent by God to liberate God’s people, not through violent power and aggression, but in humility, in service, with sacrifice, and with profound love, and it is the use of this authority and mercy to bring forth his healing that he most longs for.

Answering Jesus, Bartimaeus says simply, “Teacher, let me see again.” But what is it to see?

By his faith, Jesus tells him, he has been made well. His sight restored, this son of Timaeus takes his place in the family of God as Christ’s brother, just as the bleeding woman who touched Jesus’ cloak in faith, took hers as Christ’s sister, just as you and I have been called to take our place in the family of God.

Faith in Jesus has the power to change our lives, and to transform our states of being. As modern-day disciples, we must let go of our preconceived notions about who Jesus is, or what we think liberation should look like, or even more, who is or isn’t deserving of it. When we cry out to Jesus, our spiritual instructor and guide, asking for what we need, boldly and with integrity, we are assured that we will find in him everything necessary to be disciples who live, serve and love as he has taught us. We will find in Christ the compassion, guidance and love we need, and which God desires to give us.

So, I ask you: **What do you want Jesus to do for you?** Take a moment in silent prayer and let your needs be made known to God.

*Sources: (1) Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life, Rowan Williams
(2) Trinity Church, New York City, Sunday Reflection*