

## 2023 08 27 – Bold Discipleship

**Scripture: Matthew 16:13-26** (The Inclusive Bible)

For those of you who weren't able to join us last week, I should let you know that we are in the middle of a three week series or trilogy of sermons. During these three weeks, we are exploring the new call of The United Church of Canada. The United Church's call is very short. It is just three phrases, six words. So it's easy to remember:

Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice

As members of the United Church of Canada we are being called to live our lives with Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice. So here we are trying to get some understanding of what those phrases mean.

Last week we considered the phrase *Daring Justice* and today we will be exploring the meaning of *Bold Discipleship*.

How many of you consider yourselves to be disciples? What does it mean to be a disciple (wait for answers - a follower or student of a particular teacher/master/leader)? As Christians, we are disciples of Jesus, followers of Jesus' way. So the call of the United Church is to be *Bold Disciples* of Jesus. That's why we are here.

In today's scripture reading Jesus is talking to his first disciples and explaining

that when they get to Jerusalem there's a really good chance that he is going to die. And then he gives the following description of discipleship, he says,

If you wish to come after me, you must deny your very selves, take up the instrument of your own death and begin to follow in my footsteps. If you would save your life, you will lose it; but if you would lose your life for my sake, you will find it.

Obviously following Jesus, being a disciple of Jesus, is not an easy task. There is sacrifice, there is letting go, there is change that has to happen in order for us to truly follow in Jesus' footsteps.

That being said, it's important to realize that discipleship is not the same as martyrdom. There is no expectation that we should all put ourselves in harm's way. We are not expected to die for our beliefs. We know that there have been and continue to be followers of Jesus, who have been harmed or even killed for living out their faith. But that is not what it means to be a disciple.

Everyone's call, everyone's discipleship is different. In order to understand our own personal calling, we need to understand Jesus' role. Today's scripture reading begins with Jesus asking his disciples, "What do people say about who the Chosen One is?" His disciples replied with the names of many of the Hebrew prophets: Elijah, Jeremiah and even John the Baptist. Then Jesus asked "who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter spoke up saying, "You are the Messiah" and Jesus praised him for getting the correct answer. Yes, Jesus was the Messiah, the one who was going to free his people!

Jesus was the Messiah, but what kind of Messiah was he? Just a couple of verses later, Peter is rebuked by Jesus because he actually doesn't understand, he doesn't get it. Jesus was not the warrior Messiah that Peter may have been hoping for. Jesus had not come to drive out the Romans and liberate the Israelites with force. Jesus understood that violence just leads to more violence. So he had a different plan. Jesus was a Messiah who used the power of forgiveness, healing, and love rather than retribution, violence, and hate. But the Jewish and Roman leaders of his time recognized that this peaceful Jesus was an even bigger threat to their dominance and so they plotted his death.

No, it's no surprise that Jesus was killed. What's surprising is Jesus' resurrection. The fact that Jesus' life, love, and sacrifice are still alive in the world today and that Love is what will ultimately prevail. Despite the violence and hatred that are rampant in our world today, we are being called to believe in the power of God, the power of Love. Jesus is calling his disciples, he is calling us to lives shaped by love and forgiveness and to actions shaped by compassion and hope.

<https://www.davidlose.net/2017/08/pentecost-13-a-can-you-imagine/>

So what is it that we have to let go of? What does it mean for us to deny our very selves? What we have to let go of is the idea that Jesus came to make us comfortable, successful, wealthy, popular, or even happy. Jesus came to liberate us, to free us. And freedom first means realizing that we've settled for something that isn't life giving. I'm going to say that again: freedom means realizing that we've settled for something that isn't life giving. It may be something we thought we needed, something that our society, our culture told us we need, but, in fact,

we don't. It may be a relationship, a grudge, a habit, an addiction, a hobby, a job, a house, or even a volunteer commitment. Only you can know what is keeping you from the life you were meant to live, from true freedom. Being a disciple of Jesus means identifying those things in our lives that we need to let go of, that we need to let die.

This is true in our personal lives, in our families, in our churches and even in our communities. We are being called to let go of grievances, to let go of a sense of scarcity, to let go of our need for stuff, to let go of our need for control. To let go and to let God. We are being called to forgiveness, to generosity, to trust, and to service.

And we are being called to do this boldly. Simon Peter is one of my favourite disciples, because, if nothing else, he is bold. Peter is often the one sticking his neck out, offering new ideas, answering Jesus' challenging questions, and even racing to the empty tomb. Sometimes he is the rock on which Jesus' community will be built, and other times he is a stumbling block. But Peter is not afraid to try. Being bold is about courage, it's about being willing to risk the possibility of failure.

I think that's what *Bold Discipleship* is all about. It is about identifying what needs to be changed, coming up with a solution based on forgiveness, compassion and generosity and then being willing to move forward with faith and hope and love.

May it be so. Amen.