

**SERMON: "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT ISAIAH 6:1-3  
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 20:20-28**

**May 12, 2024  
Churchwide Confirmation – Lesson Six**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

I didn't really pay any attention to this. Then I read an article about it  
The article helped me see what was right in front of me ... and why.

Have you ever noticed that all grocery stores are the same?  
Sure, there is some variation, but they are all set up the same way  
And they are set up that way for a reason – to help you feel okay  
about what you are buying and how much you are spending

What is the first thing you see when you walk in?  
The fruits and vegetables, the colorful stuff, the healthy stuff.  
You are led through this area first so you get the things that are good for you  
You get those in your cart and that in a subliminal way gives you permission  
to go on to the processed, less healthy more expensive stuff. Fill your cart

As we move on through this Churchwide Confirmation series of lessons,  
I'd like you to think about that journey through the store as we consider  
our own answers to the questions being asked of the confirmands.  
The question this week is ... "Will you be Christ's faithful disciple,  
obeying his word and showing his love?"

Being a disciple means being a follower, not just a believer, but a follower.  
That is how Jesus calls us. He says simply, "Follow me."  
That is what he said to his first followers and to us  
That then leads to the question ... "Follow you where, Jesus?"

I'll give you a hint. It is not a journey through the store filling our carts  
with a few healthy things and a few more not so healthy ones  
It is a journey that will turn us around, turn over tables in the temple  
and turn our carts, and our worlds, upside down

The scripture lesson from Matthew's gospel is from well along on that journey  
The disciples have seen and heard a lot. Jesus has been healing people,  
teaching profound lessons (lessons that both comfort and challenge them)  
He has also made it clear to his followers that following him is not  
exactly casual, comfortable or convenient

## WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

Tom Long in his commentary sets the scene for this passage from Matthew this way

*Now as they walk along the road that leads up to Jerusalem, Jesus predicts his death for a third time. This prediction is somewhat more specific than the previous ones, for Jesus actually names the precise events that will occur: the mockery, the flogging, the crucifixion. Once again, the point is not new information; the point is the cost of the Kingdom. This whole section of Matthew, beginning with 19:1, is constructed like a series of increasingly narrow gates, each demanding a higher toll on the followers of Jesus. Now the ultimate cost has been named: Following Jesus leads to the place of condemnation, mockery, torture, and death.*

It is after Jesus tells them this hard truth that James and John show up with their mother as their spokesperson with a request

**Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, And kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.”**

Talk about bad timing. They could have read the room, the mood and the moment better. Maybe mom was already on her way.

That is as critical as I'm going to be of the disciples and of their mother  
Here is where I ask you to be nice to the original disciples  
James and John here, Peter when he tries to walk on water, Thomas and his doubts  
Instead of thinking we'd do better, isn't it better for us,  
across the board, to just try and do better

Their question was poorly timed and self serving ... but don't we too have some of those same thoughts – what's in it for me? What about own expectations, what we expect of and from Jesus - a place of honor at the banquet table in heaven and/or a position of power here in this world?

So what can we learn from this story for our own journeys following Jesus about being faithful disciples, obeying his word and showing his love  
For one, we can be honest about our own requests of Jesus

There is a reason 'health and wealth' preachers make a profit  
We want God to bless us with the good things in life – to fill our shopping carts  
There is a reason church folk might drift toward self-righteousness  
We want to be right. We want to do right ... feel good about ourselves

## LESSON LEARNED

The end of the movie “Saving Private Ryan” sticks with me  
It’s decades after World War 2. He’s in the cemetery at Normandy  
standing by the grave of the man who died saving his life  
With tears in his eyes he tells / asks his wife,  
“Tell me I am a good man. Tell me I’ve lived a good life.”

It is an honest question, a humble and hopeful question  
That is the lesson I hear in this story about the cost of discipleship,  
about where following Jesus leads us. Jesus leads us to a humble place  
If you’ve seen the movie, maybe you hear it the same way I do  
The older Ryan isn’t demanding an answer, he isn’t boasting, he is asking

Jesus leads us to a place where we ask humble, honest questions about our place  
Where do you want me, Jesus? Where do you need me, Jesus?  
It may be any number of places throughout your lifetime - the head table,  
a table in the middle, or on your feet waiting on tables

But wherever and whenever it is a place of service  
That is where Jesus leads us, wants us, needs us.  
That is how this lesson continues ... and ends.

**When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”**

Isn’t it fascinating that Jesus’ answer to their request and the anger  
of the other disciples at their power play (with their mom as their lobbyist)  
which is a question about how we are to follow ... with an answer about how  
we are to lead, about how we use our power. Listen again to this key portion

**“You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant ...”**

Following Jesus as Lord doesn’t mean ‘lording over’ anybody  
Following Jesus means doing things differently, using our power differently  
It means going in a different direction ... literally

Where is Jesus leading you? Where and how might you be a servant leader?

## SUMMARY

Jesus led me here to ministry with you in the Cedar Valley  
Let me tell you one of the things I love most about ministry here with you  
You have given me the freedom to be very involved in our community  
You support me, challenge me (and put up with me). Thank you!

I am so very thankful for our many and varied partnerships when it comes to  
finding ways to love God and love neighbor – so many ways to serve.

Johnny and I were at St. John Lutheran Church this week  
Local churches are working together on a service of repentance for Juneteenth  
It is our nation's newest federal holiday marking the date when slaves in Texas  
learned the news of their freedom, an end to slavery. It is an honest admission  
of what has been called America's original sin – slavery and systematic racism

The service is scheduled for the actual day, Wednesday, June 19<sup>th</sup> at St. John's  
I encourage you to be part of that service and part of the work of dismantling  
systems of discrimination. Discrimination is not a Christian virtue

I had this sermon dancing around in my brain during that meeting on Wednesday  
As I often do at meetings, I stood up and walked around a bit  
I always explain I do so to stretch my back. It is not some power move

I noticed two pieces of art in their library / meeting room.  
The first piece fit our work on that service of repentance  
Especially given the news on campus at UNI with the state-mandated closing  
of the offices on multicultural education at our three state universities

That closing includes questions about pictures from the school's history,  
pictures of protests. The UNI 7 who did a non-violent sit-in in 1968  
Those pictures are being removed from that public space. Not sure where  
they will end up ... may be a box in a closet. Here is that artwork

### ***Show image of "whitewash"***

The second piece of art is the picture that was on the screen for the sermon  
It is a picture of Jesus on a hilltop. The city and the temple are in the background  
He seems to be standing there pondering which way he will go

It wasn't the depiction of Jesus that struck me though.  
It was his stance, that pondering about his next steps ... and mine  
That was captured quite well in the plaque on the frame, like the title of the piece.

### ***Show image of painting of Jesus (w focus on title)***

It reads ... "Wherever He Leads Me."

I really like that not just for this sermon but for my life

The path I feel called to follow is one where I keep both of those pieces of art  
in my head and heart ... a whitewash of our honest history, my honest history  
and a picture of Jesus of Nazareth, my Lord and Savior  
with that heading, "Wherever He Leads Me."

Wherever He Leads Me!