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Jesus and the Call of Discipleship **Scott Powell**

Hello everyone, my name is Scott.

Today we're going to be talking about Jesus and the call of discipleship. You know, discipleship is kind of one of those words that we kind of toss out as Catholics and as Christians it's almost a buzzword. Discipleship. We talk about discipling.

But sometimes I wonder if we really know what that means. What is Jesus' view of discipleship? All Christians are called to be disciples. But what does that look like?

I want to begin by telling a quick story. And then I want to look in the Gospels themselves to see what Jesus says about discipleship and what it means to us. How do we do it? Before we do that, though, I want to begin in a prayer. So, join me if you would...

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus, thank you for the gift of your Word. The gift of the call that you've given all of us to follow after you, to be your disciples. Please give us the grace and understanding and courage to do that.

Please, we thank you so much for the gift of this retreat, for all the people listening in the video or the audio. Thank you for the gift of Advent as we prepare for your coming.

Please be in my words, Lord, and help me to not say anything that is outside of your will. And we pray all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Discipleship. You know in the ancient world "discipleship" had a very simple meaning. It simply meant to follow after a teacher. A follower of a teacher. That's what a disciple was. Which means that there's all sorts of different sorts of discipleship that aren't different. There are all sorts of different types of teachers that we could follow. But we as Christians are called to follow one teacher, Jesus himself.

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You know, there was a saying in Jesus' time in the Middle East, that what it meant to be a good disciple was to be covered in the dust of your rabbi's sandals. Covered in the dust of your rabbi's sandals.

You know in the ancient world, in the Middle East, it's a very dry, arid, dusty environment. So, the idea was you could tell if someone was a good follower or disciple if they followed their discipler so close that the dust that was kicked up from their sandals actually covered the student, covered the disciple. That's how you knew they were following close.

That's what our lives should look like. We should be covered in the dust of Jesus' sandals. We should be so close that the world looks at us and can see that.

I want to begin with a story because I think sometimes we overcomplicate the idea of discipleship. We make it too complex or too heady or out there for us. But when I was in high school, I was kind of a punk and I was a punk high-schooler, I think I was a freshman and somebody invited me to come to a youth group with them. And it was this girl and I kind of thought she was cute so I said yes.

So, I decide to go to this youth group. I had no real interest in going to it. I didn't really want to be there. But I remember my dad dropping me off. I didn't have a car at the time. I couldn't drive. And I went into the room and it was this big room and it was really crowded. It was really loud music. It was hot. It felt claustrophobic and humid and stuffy.

And I remember walking in the door and instantly wanting to leave. I did not want to be there. I didn't like it. And I looked around and I didn't see anybody I knew. The girl wasn't there and I just wanted to go. I didn't have a car so I had no way home. So, I was kind of stuck.

And I remember standing there trying to figure out what to do when this guy across the room spotted me. I remember he had these long dreadlocks. He had mud all over his t-shirt. He had his mountain biking shorts and shoes on and he saw me. And after years of working in ministry I understand now that he gave me the "youth minister eyes". He had the "look".

He knew that I was a new kid because he had never seen me before and he was going to outreach to me. So, he saw me and I saw him with the kind of tractor beam eyes make contact with me and he started to move in. Now, I wanted to be

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cool and I wanted to look cool. So I didn't want to tell him that, in fact, this guy was like the embodiment of what I thought was cool. I wanted to be like this guy. But I couldn't show him that. He was this university student. I was a little high school kid. So, I had to play it cool.

So, he came over and he started talking to me and he was like, "Hey! What's up man? My name is Adam. What's your name? I've never seen you before." I said "My name is Scott" and we made small talk for a few minutes and that was that and he moved on to someone else and I kind of hung back by the door the whole night and eventually it ended and I left and that was that. I didn't really think about it again.

And it wasn't until about a year and a half later that I ended up finding my way back to that youth group. I was kind of in a different place in my life. I realized that the things that I was looking for to fulfill me weren't doing it. And so I was ready for something else. I needed more in my life.

So, I went back to this youth group to give it a shot. And it was about a year and a half later and I walked in the door and there's Adam and he spotted me. And he made a beeline for me. And he walked up and he said, "Hey! Scott, right? Great to see you again. Welcome back." And that moment was one of the pinnacle, one of the climactic moments of my life.

That's where everything began to change. Because this guy that I thought was really cool, who loved Jesus, remembered my name. He had no reason to remember my name or reason to remember who I was. But he did. And that act of kindness, of knowing really began to change everything.

That was my first step on the road toward discipleship because whatever that guy had, I wanted it. And it turned out what he had was Jesus. And so I wanted to follow after that.

Sometimes the beginning of discipleship is that easy. Sometimes it's just making eye contact. Sometimes it's introducing yourself to the person you've never seen before at church. It's asking a friend to come to mass with you, a co-worker. Sometimes it's all somebody needs to begin that long road to follow Jesus.

I want to talk a little bit about what Jesus himself said about discipleship. I want to look at, specifically, the Gospel of Mark because the Gospel of Mark more than any of the other Gospels is really the discipleship Gospel. It's really a great

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Gospel. It's really short. It's really action-packed. Things move really quickly. And really the idea of discipleship is getting up and doing something. Following after that teacher.

So, Mark is perfect for this because it encourages the person, the listener, the disciple, the follower of Jesus to get up and go and start moving. But, I want to read something that happens really early on. This is in chapter 3 of Mark and it's when Jesus begins to call his first apostles. The twelve apostles, the first disciples. And it says this, it's in Mark chapter 3, verse 13:

“Jesus went up into the hills and he called to him those whom he desired and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. [And then it names them] Simon, whom he named Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew [and the rest].”

Mark is cool because he gives you a step-by-step instruction manual for what discipleship is supposed to look like. He gives you the top three things that constitute true discipleship. And if you listened closely you might have caught them.

The first step of discipleship is just what Jesus does here. It's a call. He goes out and he calls to him those whom he desired. I believe that all of us as Christians are called to this. But, we don't always hear that voice. We don't always respond to the call. But Jesus calls and these twelve respond.

And in other gospel accounts there are other dramatic versions of, you know, people jumping out of boats and swimming to Jesus. Leaving everything behind and coming after him. Sometimes it's very dramatic.

And there's this theme throughout the gospels of those who listen to the call and those who don't listen. And that brings us to step two of discipleship. Once you are called the good disciple follows. To respond to the call, to follow the teacher, that's what these twelve do.

So every discipleship has a call and every good discipleship should have an act of following the response. But then, Jesus says a little bit more about what discipleship entails. These particular twelve (again, if you were listening closely you might have caught it).

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What is he going to go and tell them to do? It says he's going to send them out to be with him and to preach and to cast out demons. And for many of us our minds automatically jump, when we think of the job of a disciple or these apostles, we jump to the casting out of demons and the preaching.

And we think to ourselves, "Oh boy, I don't know if I have it in me to do that. I can't stand up and preach. I don't have a theology degree. I don't have this expertise. I can't cast out demons, that's for sure!" We get freaked out! And we missed what the first step of discipleship is here.

After we're called, after we follow, then what? Well, what it says is "He called them to be with him". That's verse 14. He called them to be with him. Step one of discipleship is to be with Jesus. And for most of the gospels that's literally all these apostles can do.

They are just trying to hang on. And even by the end of the gospels, most of them have failed to do that. They've abandoned Jesus. They've run off because it was scary. Jesus knows the world is a scary place. He knows we're up against a lot and he asks us, as disciples, to cling to him. To stay with him.

Now, there's another principle about discipleship that's kind of imbedded in all this. Right before Jesus goes out to call these twelve to him, there's an interesting scene that happens. It's right before that. It's in chapter three [of the book of Mark]. And it's this scene of Jesus entering a synagogue, maybe you remember the scene.

At the beginning of chapter 3 Jesus goes into the synagogue and he sees a man with a withered hand. And all of the Pharisees and the religious leaders are kind of watching him to see what he's going to do about it. And this guy with the withered hand wants healing. He wants to be made whole! And Jesus recognizes that they are all watching him to see what he's going to do and he heals him. He performs a miracle. Jesus literally suspends the laws of nature to heal this guy's hand.

And the religious leaders and the people standing around are mad about it. Not because he healed a guy. Not because he performed this profound miracle, suspended the laws of nature, but because he did it on the wrong day. They were mad he did it on the Sabbath. And the Sabbath, for them, was supposed to be the day set aside for rest because God rested on the 7th day and we're supposed to be like God. So the idea was, yeah, you can't do work. You can't do miracles. You can't suspend the laws of nature on Saturday.

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But Jesus said, “No, there’s more to it. I came to bring life”. It’s kind of a climactic scene in the gospel of Mark. It’s the moment when Jesus, you know he began here in chapter 3 by going to the religious leaders. He went to those who had influence. He wanted to reveal himself to them and show himself and invite them. But they reject him wholeheartedly.

There’s an interesting moment here. Jesus went to those who had power and authority. But the ones who had power and authority rejected Jesus. So, Jesus leaves those who have power and authority and he goes to those twelve. The ones who have no power and no authority and he gives them power and authority. He leaves those with authority. He goes to those with no authority and he gives them authority.

Again, if you feel a little bit scared about this discipleship, inviting people into the faith, proclaiming the gospel, encouraging and inviting people to follow Jesus with me. [And you think] that sounds freaky! Well, if you feel like you’re not up to the challenge, that’s perfect because that’s exactly who Jesus is looking for. He’s looking for the lowly so he could lift them up. It’s what Mary says in her Magnificat. Remember when she’s told by the angel Gabriel that she’s going to have this child she says, “My God has lifted up the lowly. He has sent the rich away empty and he has filled the hungry”. If you feel hungry, if you feel inadequate; Jesus is here for you! You’re exactly who Jesus is looking for.

So, he calls these twelve and they begin to go with him. They are trying to do his will and things are moving along in the gospel. But there’s another key moment I want to look at in chapter 8 [of the gospel of Mark] and that’s where everything begins to go bad.

The disciples, you get a sense that they aren’t all the sharpest knives in the drawer but here’s a moment where things get really difficult for them because these disciples who are trying to stay with Jesus have a big problem. And the problem is blindness.

I want to read a passage from Mark chapter 8, one of my favorite healing stories of Jesus. And again, you’ve probably heard this before, but it’s Mark 8:22. It says,

“He and these disciples [who he is traveling with] they came to a place called Bethsaida and some people brought to him a blind man and they begged him to touch him. And Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the

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village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him he asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ The blind man said ‘I see men but they look like trees walking.’ Then again Jesus laid his hands upon his eyes and he looked intensely and everything was restored and he saw everything clearly.”

That is, I think, one of the weirdest miracle accounts in the Bible. Why? Because, particularly in the gospel of Mark but in all of the gospels, there is a sense of immediacy of what Jesus does. He has authority.

The only reason why he can give authority to his disciples is because he has authority and Mark wants you to know that. So, when Jesus says something it happens. When he performs a miracle it’s done right then and there.

But this guy, this guy is something different. He is a blind man. He goes up to Jesus and he wants healing. Jesus lays his hands on him put spit in his eyes and says “Ah ha! Did it work? Can you see?” and the guy is like, “Well, kind of. I see men but they look like trees. I’m kind of confused”.

At this point in the story you should be thinking to yourself, “Wait a minute. Did Jesus’ miracle just not work? Did it just not take? Jesus does things immediately and this one took two rounds”. And Jesus is like, “Oh, let me give it another try”. And he does it again. Lays his hands on his eyes and then that time he’s restored.

You have these two movements and mark doesn’t explain it to you he just leaves you there. These two movements of Jesus trying to heal this guy, not quite doing the job and then having to do it over again. And then he fully does it.

After the first time when he does it he says, “Do you see anything?” and the guy says, “I see men but they look like trees”. I mean, is this guy blind or is he seeing? Well, he’s kind of somewhere in the middle. You wouldn’t necessarily give him a driver’s license but you wouldn’t call him fully blind either. He can see things but he can’t understand what he’s seeing. He can see but he can’t understand what he’s seeing. And then eventually he’s made whole.

Mark leaves you there and then he goes into another scene right after that and that’s what I want to look at. It’s in verse 27 [in chapter 8 of the gospel of Mark]. And it says,

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“Then Jesus went on with his disciples to the village of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ and they told him, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, others say one of the prophets.’”

(This is like the first public opinion poll. Right? 25% say Elijah. 32% say undecided. You know? But he’s like, that’s fine. That’s what they’re all saying)

“Who do you say that I am?”

And it’s Simon Peter who stands up. It’s the first time this happens in the gospels, the first proclamation. He says,

“You are the Christ”. Matthew’s gospel adds, “You are the Christ son of the Living God”.

It’s a huge proclamation! Does Peter see who Jesus is? Well, it sure seems like he sees. He has eyes to see Jesus for the Christ that he is, the king, the messiah! But then it moves on and something weird happens. In verse 31 then it says,

“Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said this plainly. But Peter began to rebuke him.”

“Peter began to rebuke him.” Rebuking is a word that the gospels like to use for what Jesus does to demons. You don’t want to rebuke Jesus. Peter’s making a pretty big mistake here. And it’s where he says no. It’s never going to happen to you. That can’t be. You’re the king. You’re the Christ. You can’t suffer. And Jesus turns around and rebukes Peter and he says,

“Get behind me, Satan. For you are not on the side of God but on the side of men.”

It’s a pretty harsh accusation! What is going on here? Well, the story from the previous couple lines explains Peter. Just like Jesus went and healed this blind man, after the first attempt the blind man could see but he couldn’t really see what he was seeing. And then, eventually, he could see fully.

Right after that, you have Peter who sees Jesus but he doesn’t understand what he’s seeing. He sees that Jesus is the Christ. He sees that he is the king. But he doesn’t understand what that kingship means because what Peter cannot see is the tree. He

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can't see the cross. He can't wrap his mind around that. He can see but he can't understand what he's seeing.

It's really from this point in the gospel on that Mark makes a point of pointing out to you how blind and deaf these disciples are. They don't see. They don't hear. They don't get it! All they're doing. All they can do is to stay with Jesus. So, they are still doing the job of a disciple. They don't understand. They can't see. They're confused. They're getting called out and corrected by Jesus. But they are hanging on which is all they can do.

The last one I want to look at, the last little story from Mark is in chapter 10 and it's my favorite healing story of Jesus. He heals a lot of people and this is one of my favorites. I don't know if it's my favorite but it's one of my favorites. And it's at the end of chapter 10, verse 46 and it says,

“The disciples and him [Jesus] came to a town called Jericho. And he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a multitude [sizable crowd], Bartimaeus, who was a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.” And many rebuked him, telling him to be quiet. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

It's the first step of discipleship, isn't it? Jesus stops. He sees this blind man and he is crying out for healing and he says, “Call him.”

[Quote continued] “And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; arise, he is calling you.’ And throwing off his mantle, sprang up, and came to Jesus.”

This guy, when he's called doesn't just follow. He springs! He throws off his mantle and he runs to Jesus! He follows with a vengeance!

[Quote continued] “And he came to Jesus and said, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

“What do you want me to do for you?” That line actually showed up less than a chapter earlier when Jesus was walking with his blind and deaf disciples (spiritually that is). And two of them come up and say, “Hey Jesus, we want you to do whatever we ask of you because you're the king and you have power and we

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want you to do stuff” and Jesus says, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they says, “Well, we want thrones at your right and left hand. We want power and authority.” Jesus says, “Well, that’s not mine to give.”

It’s the only other time that that line is used. “What do you want me to do for you?” And here Jesus says it to this blind man,

“‘What do you want me to do for you?’ and the blind man said, ‘Master, let me receive my sight.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has saved you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus.”

Every other person who is healed in the gospels goes on their own way. They go home. They go tell their friends. They do whatever they’re going to do. This is the only one, that I’m aware of, who follows Jesus. He says, “No. I’m going to stick with you. I’m going with you.” He is the true, consummate disciple. He is what all of Jesus’ other disciples are not. What they are supposed to be! He is the ideal.

When James and John go to Jesus and ask for the gold thrones, Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” The proper response for a good disciple should have been, “Let me see. Let me receive my sight. I don’t understand and I’m having trouble following you. I’m afraid. Help me to see.” You know, guys, the good news about Jesus is that if you ever feel blind and deaf in your faith. If you ever feel like you just can’t do it. You don’t understand where God is leading you! You don’t understand what the next steps are. You don’t understand how to get through the next phase of life. If you feel like you can’t make it from day to day all the time. You got good news because our God, our teacher, our rabbi, is a God whose specialty is healing the blind and the deaf. That is what He does. He heals blind and deaf people. So if you feel blind and deaf, this is very good news.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Guys, my last word to you is if you really want to be a true disciple ask Jesus in prayer, “How do I stay with you? Help me remain with you. Help me walk with you. Help me be covered in your dust. And when I don’t understand; help me to see. That’s the prayer of a disciple.

Thanks so much you guys! We’ll talk to you soon.