

Romans 5:1-8, Matthew 9:35-10:8, 9-23,

Reflection 1: Discipleship

If I were to ask you now 'what is your understanding of discipleship?' what would your answer be.... How would you define your own discipleship?

A recent report says this about discipleship: 'Jesus calls both men and women to be disciples: to learn from him, to pattern their lives upon his life, to follow him. Disciples are called to a life of learning and formation in the likeness of Christ.' Disciples are also called 'to live a distinctive life of witness and service, an apostolic life, sent into the world, to follow God's call' – a life of 'sending and gathering,' and this life, says the report – is the life that leads to the great commission, that, beginning with the earliest disciples, and continuing with us, we go and proclaim the good news to the nations 'in the power of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ' (Matt 28:16-20)

So disciples are called to action – and the greatest role model for is Jesus himself, wouldn't you say?

Yes, Jesus is the most faithful of all disciples to the call of his Father. He listened through prayer, paid attention through social engagement in his community, and acted at the right time, in the name of God's call to him, to show the society and power structures of his day how to 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.'

Discipleship is a following of Jesus that is spurred on by faith and a conviction to proclaim the gospel. The 'doing' of discipleship is authenticated through prayer and it is prayer deepens faith.

This faith-filled prayer shows us more clearly how we can grow in our individual and collective discipleship, that then helps us to grow in awareness of God's call on our lives where we will be best placed to use our gifts and skills to be useful and to be fulfilled – coming to know that true 'joy of Jesus' – that joy of the resurrected Jesus that abides in us and whose Spirit works through us as we follow his call to 'go and tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

We have just read Paul's letter to the Romans when – a few verses back – Paul has just explained about how we can become right with God through Faith – justification – the term used – is not a legal term but one that means righteousness – that with the help of God's Holy Spirit we can endure all kinds of trials and tribulations – with dignity and good grace - and also deepen our relationship with God and with each other – to be holy is to be 'set apart for God – God's holy people nurtured and guided to become proclaimers of the covenant of peace and wholeness with God through the Holy Spirit so that we don't just preach about discipleship but actually live it out in all that we do – doing what many others do but doing it intentionally with the weight of Jesus behind it in the power of the holy spirit – responding to the needs of the moment and becoming mobilised to the call of social justice, wellbeing and peace – in an appropriate and authentic way.

Reflection 2: Like a sheep without a shepherd

This phrase was used in many Old Testament passages to portray God's flock neglected by its shepherd.

We hear today how Jesus feels compassion towards the crowds – this is a powerful word, not a lightweight pity but deep heart-churning emotion, like a blow to the stomach.

People were confused, angry and oppressed and Jesus felt for these lost and marginalised souls. Jesus was making the point that the spiritual leadership from the Pharisees left much to be desired – instead of offering wise and comforting counsel, rather they insinuated that all the poverty and ails of society was punishment for sins and should therefore be cast aside.

Jesus – the good shepherd on the other hand – looked on in pity and beckoned those who needed comfort and compassion and spiritual healing. Of course Jesus demonstrated much physical healing but the ultimate healing at depth would come from a deep spiritual hunger being nourished by God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today – we have much medical knowledge and treatments for physical maladies but the sickness of the soul – the aimless pursuit of happiness through wealth and power and prestige – is what Jesus knew then – and knows today – lies at the heart of the deepest sickness of the world that needs nothing less than the medicine of the Gospel to sooth and heal an ailing world.

Back then Jesus ‘went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’

Harvest is picture language to refer to that place wherein lies the brokenness of the world and brokenness of hearts and minds of humanity and harvest time is when the brokenness of the world will be cast aside to reveal the full glory of the kingdom of God.

The harvest of ailing souls – the lost, the lonely, the marginalised, the poor in spirit driven by material lures of the world. Unlike the visible storms that could be calmed – the ailments that could be healed – these spiritual hungers and fears were invisible but Jesus knew they were there...

However, the labourers are few – the labourers who can go out with the Good News of God’s love on their hearts are being called to go and work for the harvest. Notice it isn’t the most intelligent or most wealthy – or most successful – it is the common labourer – people like you and me – ordinary people being called to live out extraordinary Gospel good news – disciples being sent out – prayerfully - in the name of the Father – back then and today – to bring in the harvest in our communities – our work places and – in the present times – in the hearts of those whom we speak and meet with during our lockdown lives – encouraging, sharing and caring – loving our way back to a time of plenty – spiritual plenty –

In a time where we are being challenged and confronted by our values of today and days past – and as we reflect on life before and after lockdown – we are at a crossroads where we can take one road back to the old ways – or we can continue to work and labour to create a new normal – a more just, inclusive and more equitable society...

So let’s ask ourselves this week in our prayers and intentions – how can we be labourers of God’s harvest of kindness, of healing and wholeness for each other and for the world ...

Amen