

Discipleship Theme: Giving of Time and Talents

January 26th 2020 Epiphany 3 Matt 4: 12-23 (Irene)

Gospel Reading

¹² Now when Jesus^[a] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned.'

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'^[b]

¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³ Jesus^[a] went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news^[a] of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Sermon

Already we have come to week four of our sermon series on Discipleship and I hope you have managed to hear them either live in church or, like me over the last two weeks, by accessing them on the church website. If you are following any series, whether they be TV programmes or radio plays, it's annoying if you miss any, to get the best out of any series, the point is to start at the beginning and continue to the end, and so it is with this series of sermons.

I was at a Curate training day in Peterborough last Saturday and in the short lunch break I visited a Christian Bookshop near the Cathedral, I really miss Manna House in Northampton for browsing around. Anyway, while I was there I came across a postcard with these words: I asked God, "How much do you love me?" He said, "This much – and he stretched out his arms, and died."

I stood for a few moments and read it over again and the more I read it the more awesome I realised the words were. God, in the form of Jesus, his arms stretched out on a cross died for me. What have I done to deserve that sacrifice? Sadly, the answer is not enough.

God, in the form of Jesus, died for all of us irrespective of our actions.

Then the words of a Christmas Carol came into my head:

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise man I would do my part; Yet what can I give him, Give Him my heart.

Great, I thought, that verse is my sermon for this week!

But hard luck – you are going to get more!

A shepherd, a wise man, a vicar, a housewife, a farmer an accountant. Whoever we are, whatever way we earn our living we are all loved and valued by God. We have one thing in common, we are human beings, created in God's image, yet we are all completely different, we all have our own gifts and talents.

Just close your eyes for a moment and think about what you are good at. Can you paint, or arrange flowers. Can you sew? Are you a good gardener? Have you got good ears to listen, and more importantly a good mouth, not to speak of what you've heard?

Perhaps you find opportunities to do a good deed in any situation. We all have gifts but some people keep their gifts hidden or need encouragement to bring them out, but whatever talents you have – God is behind them, they are God's gift to you and you should thank him by sharing them with others, continually working to build his kingdom of love and peace here on earth.

Over the last weeks we have been hearing the stories of people reaching turning points in their lives beginning with John the Baptist, whose talent was to take the emphasis away from himself and point others towards Jesus.

We have seen Jesus calling his disciples Andrew, Peter, James and John, he is beginning to build up his close band of followers, all of whom are different, in appearance, character and all possess different talents. They willingly accepted the invitation of Jesus to follow him and took the opportunity to reshape their lives; move in another direction and focus on different concerns.

Simon became Peter, with his gift of forthrightness and love for Jesus, he became the rock on which God built his church. Andrew brought other people to Jesus, his gift being his desire to share him with others, not keep him for himself. The brothers James and John, nicknamed Sons of Thunder because of their tempestuous nature, used that nature in staunch support of Jesus and became two of his closest friends.

Being the humans we are, when any group of people come together, there will be disagreements and we see exactly this in our reading from Corinthians, but disagreements can be overcome by perseverance, and by using all our talents, we can together do God's work in the world, we can make the body of Christ complete.

So using this sermon series, think about your life. I wonder what part the church has played in helping you to realise what gifts, blessings and talents you have. Do the Gospel stories inspire you to commit wholeheartedly to being a disciple of Christ? Does being with fellow Christians encourage you in your journey of faith? Like me, are you humbled that Jesus died for you, and what does that make you want to do for him?

If you are unsure about the answers to any of these questions please speak to me or Rev'd Eddie, but remember that you are here because God has called you here. Give thanks that you have found the gift of faith and can recognise Jesus in your lives. You too can be like the early disciples and take up the call to follow Jesus, let him re-shape your life for the good of others. You may not yet fully know what God's purpose for you is, you may have closed your ears to his call, but with time and prayer he will show you. God never gives up. He has plans for us all, plans where our talents can be used for good to further God's Kingdom on earth.

Back to the verse of the Christmas Carol I read at the beginning of the sermon:

"What can I give Him poor as I am?"

I suggest you give him your commitment to use your talents and time to reach those who don't know God - and award him the credit.

Don't keep your faith as private and personal to you.

Don't hide away and only take it out on Sunday. Share your faith with others by your words and actions and talk in an ordinary way about what it means **to you** to live with the love of Jesus in your heart.

I apologise to those who have heard this anecdote before:

A friend was buying wine for Communion, the lady on the checkout asked if she was having a party. "Yes", my friend said, "every Sunday at 10 o'clock in church, why don't you come and join us?"

Now you may think that's frivolous, but it started a conversation which others' joined in. Perhaps they didn't come to church the following Sunday, perhaps they won't come at all, but in a simple conversation my friend planted a seed, and it's up to God to make that seed grow.

Be ready and willing to give your time, talents, money and love in God's service, through your giving in church and your actions outside.

Give your **all** to God in return for **all** he gave for you, and while doing that remember to pray for those yet to know God.

So many people are searching and it is our responsibility as followers of Christ, whatever age you are, not to let Christianity die.

Amen