Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

An Introduction to Discipleship – Week 42

Living the life of Jesus

Day 288. What is Discipleship?

The 39 Articles are, in effect, an attempt to define "this is the type of disciples we are." We commonly translate discipleship as "student" or "apprentice" – and while those are close, they do not have the full meaning of the word. From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disciple_(Christianity):

"In the ancient world, a disciple is a follower or adherent of a teacher. **Discipleship** is not the same as being a student in the modern sense. A disciple in the ancient biblical world actively imitated both the life and teaching of the master. It was a deliberate apprenticeship which made the fully formed disciple a living copy of the master.

"The first-century philosopher Seneca appeals to the "living voice and intimacy of common life" of the disciple–teacher relationship of many different philosophers:

'Cleanthes could not have been the express image of Zeno, if he had merely heard his lectures; he also shared in his life, saw into his hidden purposes, and watched him to see whether he lived according to his own rules. Plato, Aristotle, and the whole throng of sages who were destined to go each his different way, derived more benefit from the character than from the words of Socrates.'

"In the world of the Bible, a disciple was a person who followed a teacher, or rabbi, or master, or philosopher. The disciple desired to learn not only the teaching of the rabbi, but to imitate the practical details of their life. A disciple did not merely attend lectures or read books, they were required to interact with and imitate a real living person. A disciple would literally follow someone in hopes of eventually becoming what they are.

"A Christian disciple is a believer who follows Christ and then offers his own imitation of Christ as model for others to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1)."

A fully developed disciple would extend their imitation of the Rabbi (teacher) to becoming Rabbi's in their own right, teaching their students in the same way that they were taught.

The term "Christian" was originally given in a derogatory fashion, meaning "Little Christ's" – and the church was so impressed by it that we adopted the term as our own. All of us in the church are "Little Christ's" – people striving to explore and fully learn the ways of Christ – not only His teachings, but His very way of life – His actions and His thoughts. Knowing who you are, what would it take for you to be a model of Christ for others to follow? That is what Discipleship is all about.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 289: Practices of Discipleship

Through its history, the church has embraced specific practices as important to discipleship of Christ. We shall examine some (refer to the Course Introduction for the list we'll look at), learning how Christ or His first disciples modelled them and discerning how they may be applied to our own context. There is no order of priority that we'll be looking at them in, as all of them are important.

Before we start our list tomorrow, think through what you know of Christ, how He lived, and what He taught. What do you think His practices may have been?

Share as you like.

Day 290: Keep the Sabbath Holy

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. For six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident foreigner who is in your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy."

The Sabbath is a day of rest and worship – the term comes from the Hebrew "Shabbat", meaning "rest" or "stopping." The Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, while most Christians observe Sunday as their Sabbath – so it is a weekly occurrence. Christians celebrate on Sunday because it is the day on which Jesus had risen from the dead and on which the Holy Spirit had come to the apostles. This is the traditional time for people to join in worship, to cease their daily work, to build relationships, and to relax.

Mark 2:23 to 3:6 Jesus was going through the grain fields on a Sabbath, and his disciples began to pick some heads of wheat as they made their way. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is against the law on the Sabbath?" … Then he (Jesus) said to them, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. For this reason the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Then Jesus entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they could accuse him. So he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Stand up among all these people." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or evil, to save a life or destroy it?" But they were silent. After looking around at them in anger, grieved by the hardness of their hearts, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Jesus was criticized for doing "work" on the Sabbath – for allowing his disciples to pluck grain, or for healing a person. The Sabbath is a day of rest and worship – and Jesus extended the idea of worship beyond that of praying, singing, meditating on scripture and sharing thoughts on God's desires, to acting out God's desires through doing good – such acting out was not 'work', but 'worship in action'. Jesus also emphasized that people were not created to be serve the Sabbath, but vice-versa – so that the Son of Man (i.e., Jesus) had sovereignty and could decide what was appropriate on the Sabbath and what was not.

As you are following Jesus, how do you keep the Sabbath? Do you have a day each week which is focussed on worship (extended to 'worship in action'), building relationships, and relaxing? There has been debate throughout the years if Sabbath practices should be focussed on one day or be every day (for example, Tertullian (early 3rd century) argued "that we still more ought to observe a sabbath from all servile (*servile: like a slave, or done to please others*) work always, and not only every seventh-day, but through all time"). What is your view? This week, strive to hold Sabbath at least for one day. Then try again the following week, and the next, etc. – week by week, see if you can build this into a life-long habit.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 291: Fasting

Fasting does not mean "go quickly!" Fast is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word, *faest*, which means "firm" or "fixed." The practice of going without food at certain times was called fasting, from the Anglo-Saxon, *faesten*, 'to hold (or fix) oneself from food.' Thus, the dictionary defines fasting as "abstinence from food, partial or total, or from proscribed kinds of foods." We may define it thus: Fasting--is abstention, entirely or in part, and for longer or shorter periods of time, from food and drink or from food alone.

Jesus fasted, as shown by Matthew 4:1-11:
Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he fasted 40 days and 40 nights he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." But he answered, " It is written, '***Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God***.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, '***He will command his angels concerning you***' and '***with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone***.'" Jesus said to him, "Once again it is written: '***You are not to put the Lord your God to the test***.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: '***You are to worship the Lord your God and serve*** only ***him***.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.

This is a fascinating insight into fasting. While abstaining, Jesus had a scripture duel, and experiences of the 3rd Heaven. This gives hints that:

a.) Fasting is not intended to be easy, nor taken lightly. Fasting is literally depriving your body of food (and sometimes, even liquid or types of liquids). This is physically, mentally, and spiritually taxing. Fast too long or too strenuously and you can become seriously sick or even die.

b.) Fasting is a time to spiritually draw into God's Kingdom. It is a time to focus on meditating on scripture and on conversations with God (i.e., prayer).

c.) Fasting weakens one so they become susceptible to attacks – physical, spiritual, emotional. In the above example, Jesus is attacked spiritually by being tempted – "Prove who you are! Command these stones to become bread (i.e., give yourself unlimited wealth)." "Have God's Angels save you from certain (and spectacular) death (i.e., become famous)!" "Rule over the entire world (i.e., give yourself ultimate power)." To which Jesus replied in turn (quoting from scripture), "I will live only by God's Word; I will not try to control (test) God; I will worship only God – not Myself, and certainly not Satan." In His physical hunger, His human uncertainty and anxiety, how tempting it must have been to give in – and it was to His knowledge of scripture and trust in God our Father that He turned. Fasting is frequently a time of testing as well as discernment.

Jesus gave instructions on fasting:
Matthew 6:16 "When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward! When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others when you are fasting, but only to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you."

Matthew 9: 14-15 Then John's disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast."

The early disciples fasted:
Acts 13:2-3 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off.

Fasting is often natural when people are in mourning (as alluded to in Matthew 9:14-15) or seriously stressed. The appetite dries up and it can get to a point where people refuse to eat because they are emotionally distressed. As Jesus indicates above, times of celebration and joy are not times to fast! As a discipline, fasting emphasizes our reliance on God, and God alone – even beyond our reliance on food and drink, which we know we need for our physical survival. Here are some guidelines:

A.) Fast according to a doctor's guidance or knowledge.
B.) Start small. Perhaps fast from specific types of food (for example, sugar) or drink (for example, coffee or alcohol). Make it a challenge, but not a death-defying challenge (for sure not at the beginning!). To start with, perhaps fast for a couple of days at most.
C.) Use your fasting time to focus on scripture, prayer, worship, keeping sabbath, solitude, simplicity – i.e., use it to reinforce the other disciplines which the church has traditionally advocated. This is a time when you are weak, so use it as a retreat and do not try to forcefully interact with the world or be especially energetic. Instead, interact with God and learn about yourself through this experience.
D.) Write a journal of your experience. If you have a strange spiritual encounter, make sure to write that down – and speak to a knowledgeable and wise fellow-member of the church about it afterwards (someone you trust). Historically, fasting has been a time to seek discernment from God, especially regarding any extremely important or troubling questions or contemplations (just as the disciples were using it in Acts 13:2-3).
E.) Do not advertise it – the point is not to say "look how great I am!" but rather to say "God, I depend on you more than, literally, anything. Please draw close to me." No one else (other than those assisting or watching over you for your health and wellbeing) need know that you are fasting.

Fasting is a holy offering of yourself to God – and to treat it otherwise is to corrupt it. It is not intended for self-improvement (for example, weight loss), though it may cause many improvements of self (hopefully, most significantly, a deepening of relationship and identity with Christ Himself). Historically, the church has designated days of fasting and denial (Lent containing an especially long time of fasting). It was a discipline (i.e.: practice of a disciple)

embraced to reinforce our reliance on God and our independence from our material possessions, especially food and drink. In this manner, it is a direct attack on addiction of any kind – if something is threatening to "own" you (whether it is physically addictive or not), then fasting from it is a good way to reinforce and celebrate your independence of it and acknowledge your dependence on God instead. Rejection of wealth, fame, power, are all forms of fasting, just as much as stopping from smoking, drinking coffee, wearing jewelry, fancy clothes, or eating lunch. One final note: Fridays were commonly fast days, as it was on a Friday that Jesus was crucified. Sunday is never a day of fast, for on Sunday we celebrate Jesus rising from the dead, and our rising with Him. Sunday is a day for celebrating with joy the abundant life we have in Christ.

Try a simple fast, one which you know you can handle safely. Spend your time of fasting in meditating on scripture, worship, and encouraging deep encounters with God (this may be through prayers, singing, walking outdoors, or any number of gentle activities). Take notes and report on your experience.

Share your experience with your fellow disciples.

Day 292: Ongoing Prayer

The disciple Paul wrote:
1st Thessalonians 5:17: …constantly pray.
and
Philippians 4:6: Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.

Jesus said:
Matthew 6:5-15 "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward! But whenever you pray, go into your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So pray this way:

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored,
may your kingdom come,
may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

"For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins."
and
Mark 11:22 Jesus said to them, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if someone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. For this reason I tell you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins."

Be constantly talking to God. One of the prayers I use most constantly is, "God, save me from myself." This is second only to "Help!" and "Thank you!", which I think are tied for most commonly recited. You are surrounded by God – He cannot help but hear you. So, tell Him everything. Do not make a show of it, but directly in your mind or with your words tell God what is concerning you, and know that He hears you. Honour God with your prayers.

The Bible is full of prayers, and in most cases they are not explicitly referred to as such. Every psalm can be a prayer. Colossians 3:12-17 is a prayer. Every conversation where you ask for something to be done or give thanks for something can be a prayer. Include Christ in your mind with whatever you are thinking, whatever you are saying, whatever you are doing. You can use pre-conceived prayers (such as the one Jesus gives above) or make up your own. Record in your journal every prayer you say today.

Share your experience.

Day 293: Holy Scripture

The Bible is our foundational document – so, a key discipline is to know the bible and let it form us. As was shared in looking at the 39 Articles:

6. *The Bible contains everything needed for salvation. Anything outside of holy scripture is not needed for salvation.*

7. *The Old Testament is not contrary to the new. In both testaments, everlasting life is offered by Christ. The moral commandments in both are binding to Christians.*

A most surprising claim throughout church history though is not that we interpret scripture, but rather that *it interprets us.* As the writer of Hebrews wrote (Hebrews 4:12-13),
For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart. And no creature is hidden from God, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

The effort to encourage scripture to interpret and influence our own lives is captured in an ancient form of reading the bible known as *Lectio Divina*, or "divine reading." It is a way of prayerfully meditating on the words of scripture. It can be an intensely personal experience, with the following steps:

1. Preparation. Find a quiet place and say a simple prayer, such as "Holy Spirit, open Christ's will to me in this reading." Sit quietly for a few moments.
2. Read the selected passage of scripture out loud. Listen for any words or phrases that jump out at you. Don't force things, but let come what may. Note the words or phrases.
3. Read the selected passage of scripture out loud again. Ask yourself, "What is Jesus trying to say to me? What is in my life right now that needs to hear this Word?" Reflect on where your thoughts lead you – it may be to events in your life, something in the news, or a deeper reflection on the sights, sounds, and feelings embedded on the scripture. You may imagine yourself in the scene depicted in scripture – for example, in the audience at the Sermon on the Mount, sitting on the dusty ground with the sun beaming down, listening to Christ talk directly to you. What is He saying to you? How does it connect with your life experience?
4. Read the selected passage of scripture out loud a third time. Ask yourself, "What does Jesus want me to do?" Allow prayer to flow spontaneously from your heart as fully and as truly as you can. Share with God your feelings (love, joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, desire, need, conviction, consecration) as well as your thoughts, in complete honesty – especially if you have felt sensitive areas of yourself probed. Note the thoughts that come to you – you may find it helpful to write them down.
5. Closure. Spend some time in contemplation, thanking Christ for spending this time with you. Rest in God's presence. As you emerge from this place of personal encounter with God to life in the company of others, carry His Word with you, to live it out in the context of your day. Continue to meditate on His Word throughout the day, being led

deeper and deeper into its meaning until it begins to live in you and you "enflesh" it in the world in which you live.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from his book Life Together, *"The Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all… Do not ask 'How shall I pass this on?' but 'What does it say to me?' Then ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you."*

This exercise can be done individually, or as a group. Gospel-based-discipleship (https://www.anglican.ca/im/introgbd/) is based on Lectio Divina and intended to be shared together in a group as well as individually. People have changed how they live their lives due to insights gained during repeated sessions of Lectio Divina (https://www.pilgrimsofcontemplation.com/blog/2018/7/16/i-didnt-know-what-to-expect-but-lectio-divina-changed-my-life, .

Read the Gospel of John, 14:18-26. Follow the Lectio Divina outline given above and write down what comes to you.

Share with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 294: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.