



*Pastor's Update*

*Sunday, July 21, 2024*

## **“Discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel”**

This week’s update is a very brief survey on the theme of discipleship as it is presented in the Gospel of Matthew. The English word “disciple” is translated from the Greek term “mathētēs” which means “pupil” or “follower.” A disciple then is a person who learns from and follows another person. From this definition we can see that true discipleship is relational. It involves investing in people, and seeing them developed through that relationship, so that they may in turn invest in others. Let us explore how Matthew portrays discipleship in his gospel.

The first thing we notice is that the disciples do not appear in Matthew’s story until Jesus commences his public ministry (Matt. 4:17-25). From this point forward, the disciples are present with Jesus until their desertion of him at his arrest and trial (Matt. 26:56). Immediately after he called the crowds to respond to his message (Matt. 4:17), Jesus called two sets of brothers from their family business. He first called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (Matt. 4:18) Then he called James the son of Zebedee and his brother John (Matt. 4:21). This act of Jesus calling the brothers identifies the first trait of disciples. Discipleship begins with the call of Jesus that invade everyday life and separates disciples from non-disciples. To follow Jesus means not only to accompany him, but to be loyal participants with him in his mission.

Later in Matthew 10:1-4, the Twelve disciples are given the role of apostles. The word apostle means someone who is sent by another. This seems to imply that the disciples will play a helping role in Jesus’ ministry. Prior to choosing the Twelve, Jesus asked them to pray for “the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” The disciples then become the answer to their own prayer (Matt. 9:38; 10:1). Throughout his Gospel, Matthew presents the disciples as a group of twelve. It is important to note, however, that aside from the twelve, there were other disciples of Jesus such as Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57; Jn. 19:38), Nicodemus (Jn. 19:39), the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Lk. 24:13) and the numerous women who followed Jesus to the bitter end (Matt. 27:61; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49). All through his gospel, however, Matthew presents the disciples as one group up to the time when Peter walks on water (Matt. 14:28-31).

Also, throughout Matthew’s story, at least on two occasions, Peter acts as spokesperson for the group. First, when Jesus appeared to them before the crack of dawn while they were in a boat. As Jesus came to them, walking on the sea, they did not recognize him. Terrified at the sight, the men thought they were seeing a ghost. To calm their fears, Jesus spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Matt. 14:22-27). Peter responded immediately by asking Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matt. 14:28).

The second occasion on which Peter speaks on behalf of the disciples is at Caesarea-Philippi where Jesus elicits a response from the disciples about Jesus’ identity. In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asked them, “who do you (plural) say that I am?” Peter responded with a Messianic confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Peter’s response teaches us that in order for a person to be a disciple of Jesus they must admit the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. To sum up, Matthew’s Gospel teaches that true discipleship begins with the call of Jesus and the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the begotten Son of God.

By God’s Grace and for His glory,

Pr. Francis