

Sunday, JUNE 25 2023 *"Discipleship in Jesus"*

Genesis 21 8-21 Romans 6:1-11 Matthew 10:24-39

How many of us worry about what other people think? The answer is all of us. We worry about what we wear to go shopping, to the gym or even to church. We get angry with ourselves after meetings because of what we did or even did not say. Many people take several 'selfies' before posting anything that looks like the real us. And what is most concerning is that we live in what others' think. All this does is make us look in the mirror and judge ourselves more harshly. It makes us uncomfortable to be us. We often feel the need to be apologetic because we think we must live according to the perception of other people's standards. And if we don't look at who we are—as God's children we will feel inauthentic, anxious, judgmental, not good or likable or smart or pretty enough. The truth is, other people's opinions of us are none of our business. Their opinions have nothing to do with us and everything to do with them, their past, their judgments, their expectations, their likes, and their dislikes. But how does one stop caring what other people think of us?

Our Gospel reading from Matthew 10 continues Jesus' instructions to his disciples prior to their first mission as we shared last week. Jesus has been telling them about all the dangers and hardships they may have to put up with and ends by saying that yes, you will have some bad times. Not everyone will like you and what message you are sharing about me and the Kingdom of God. But realize this, Jesus was given a bad time too! "What do you expect? A disciple is not greater than his teacher. If the world gives me a bad time, it will give you one too" (Matthew 10:24-25).

So what does Jesus do? Sell them life insurance? Give them bullet-proof vests? Teach them how to diffuse conflict? Hardly. Instead he says, "Don't ever be afraid of your enemies and critics. Even though it's not obvious now, the truth will come out finally. So, speak up be yourself; shout it out; stand and deliver. (10:26-27). Don't be afraid.

People have lived in fear as they tried to live faithful lives for God. This is true even at the time of Abraham and Sarah. Prior to the birth of Isaac, Sarai had told Abram to be with Hagar a slave girl. She eventually gave birth to Ishmael. Sarah did not like what occurred and sent the woman and the child away.

But God restored her place within Abram's household. Eventually we know that Sarah does have a son, Isaac. Again however, Sarah sends Hagar and her son away because she does not want Ishmael to inherit what Isaac will. But God told Abraham that he would make a nation of him also because he is also your offspring. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away with food and water. They went into the wilderness and not too long after the water and food was gone. She was afraid of what was to happen. She did not want to see the boy suffering and starving. She watched him from away and cried. The boy also cried. God heard their cries and tells them not to be afraid.

An angel of God calls to them that God will make a great nation of him. God then opened her eyes and she sees a well of water. She went and filled their container with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with this boy Ishmael as he lived in the wilderness and became an expert archer. Both Hagar and Ishmael were afraid. But God tells them not to be. But how often do we listen to the fears we have and worry about what other people think? What good does this do?

Jesus tells us the disciples don't be afraid. You are valuable for who you are. But it is our nature to worry and of course to worry about others' opinions of us? SO how might we stop? These are 5 ways:

1. Know your core values and which ones you value the most. Jesus tells the disciples- don't work about what you are to say- it will be given to you at the time. This is because the Spirit is speaking through you.
2. Understand the three types of business in the world. a) God's business- weather, births, deaths, who you are by nature. You have no control over this. b) Other people's business. What they do and think is their business thinks of you is their business. c)Your business- how you respond to other people's actions/ inactions whether it is feelings or thoughts . Therefore you only have your own business to concern yourself with. What you think and what you do are the only things you can control in life. Tend to your situation itself. It is you that matters.
3. Know that you have full ownership over your feelings. When one gives up ownership of our feelings to others, we give up control over our emotions. The fact of the matter is, that the only person that can hurt your feelings is you. Be strong in your feelings and in your faith. Sarah, Hagar and Abraham believed and trusted God and showed God what they felt. Do you under all circumstances?
- 4 Know that you are doing your best with the information you have at any given time. This is ll anyone can do. God knows you for who you are and what you can do. No need to be afraid because you are valuable to God.
5. Know that everyone makes mistakes. Yes you will make mistakes. The only productive thing you can do with them is learn from them. And don't give up.

But Jesus did not quit. He taught the disciples what they needed to know and prepared them for the time when he ascended to heaven. He tells them: "Stop being afraid" Yes people will hurt you but this is only temporarily. Life comes from God and it is God who gives us life and He will raise us again. "Don't fear people; fear God" (the one who can kill both body and soul) (10:28).

As we consider Jesus' intentions for discipleship we also turn to Paul's letter to the Romans where he states that if we have been baptized into Christ, we were with him in death so that we now walk in new life. Yes we will sin as we live this earthly life, but are we truly believing that it is because of Jesus' resurrection we have hope.

Jesus calls people to him to be his disciples. The first disciples were to proclaim Jesus' story and his purpose of saving people and proclaiming the kingdom of heaven was near. Jesus knew it was not an easy task for these people and he was still with them!

Today we know the story of Jesus – his life, his death and his resurrection and we believe he did this for the sake of our future- our eternal life. But to be Jesus' disciples beyond these walls where we are safe is not an easy task. Maybe you have felt hopeless at times in trying to do what God has called you to do. Maybe you have experienced the Spirit interrupting your hopelessness and disparity. Only to later realize that your faith has called you to trust again that you are in God's care. But, as the gospel reminds us, God's care comes from Jesus who challenges and confronts us just as Jesus dares you to lose our life in order to find it.

To answer Jesus' call means to do what he teaches- share of oneself, talk of love and increase faith and hope. It is to come to His table; to taste the bread and drink from the cup of the New covenant. The covenant which leads us to knowledge and to have hope for tomorrow. This is why we come together as the body of Christ- it is why we need to be strengthened and offered anew the promise of life eternal.

WE have nothing to fear; we need not worry, we all need to just realize again that we are alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Here, now and always. Thanks be to God.

LET US PRAY:

Holy God bless us we pray as we worship you and prepare to receive the sacrament of communion. Enable us to eat and drink as faithful disciples of Jesus. Bless us for what we are to do in Christ's name. Enable us also to realize that your faithfulness to us exceeds all expectations. Renew our call to serve as your Spirit moves amongst us. Bless us o God as we are your disciples ready to respond to your call. Amen.