We have a very special worship today as we kick off our Live Stream service and in anticipation to our soon in-person re-gathering on July 11th. You will probably notice some different feel from our previous pre-recording services. Special shout out to the Worship team, A/V team, and the Production team for their labour of love. We will continue to learn as we move forward and thank you for your prayer and support!

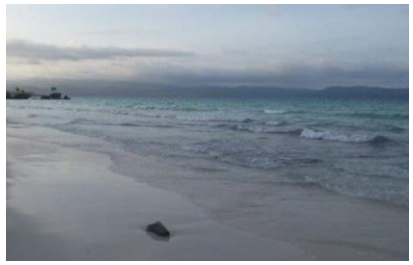
We are in a new series "Discipleship Four Perspectives," learning from the four unique voices on discipleship found in the four gospels.

For Matthew, discipleship is ***Obeying the Ever-Present Master***; for Mark, discipleship is ***Serving as Christ Served***.

This morning we will look at Luke's understanding of discipleship, ***Following the Way of the Cross***.

Libby and I attended my nephew's destination wedding 8 yrs. ago in Boracay, one of the most popular vacation spots in the Philippines.

I was honoured to be involved in the event and we stayed in two pretty posh hotels, one up the hill and one right at the beaches, all your-can-eat breakfast – it's like our vacation and all expenses paid for!



[Response Moment: *Yes, I want an all expense paid vacation!*]

The nature of this free trip is completely opposite to Luke's unique depiction of what it means to follow Jesus. While Luke focuses on Jesus' identity and what His mission is in chs. 1-8. Reading from Is. 61, Jesus says in Lk. 4:18-19 (NIV),

4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Shortly after He says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." (Lk. 5:31)

So Jesus the Liberator embodies God's kingly rule in restoring all the broken aspects of life in this world – spiritual, psychological, social, intellectual, and physical.

Jesus is clear about the WHY of His mission.

Luke uses 10 chapters, 9 – 19, to talk about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Immediately after Peter's declaration of Jesus' messiahship, Christ prophesizes about his impending death and what it means to follow after Him, i.e., the way of the cross, or Jesus' march to the place of His execution (9:18ff.).

To follow Jesus is to traveling with him to Jerusalem which is …

> a place where God's powerful and restoring/healing presence was made manifest in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

As Individual disciples and kingdom citizens who follow King Jesus, the most fundamental point about discipleship is to

Know the WHY.

[Response Moment: *Yes, I know why I follow Jesus.*]

"The way" to the cross is ***not*** a geographical journey – a strict line itinerary from here to there – it is Luke's creative way to underscore the lesson that following Jesus to the cross is ***not*** believing in Him so to get a ticket to heaven but a ***restoration and renewal of our vocation*** as image-bearers and Spirit-empowered people of hope and healing. Following the way of the cross is …

> ***a way of living*** that manifests God's kingdom purposes, values, attitudes, actions, and behaviours;
>
> it's ***a journey of life-transformation*** through suffering for the purpose of restoring whatever is broken in this world.

Cf. Simon Sinek's ***Start with Why***: Your ***WHY*** is the one constant that will guide you toward fulfillment in your work and life; the ***WHY*** is the purpose, cause or belief that gives clarity and drives every one of us.

Lk. 9:51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus ***resolutely set out*** for Jerusalem ...

"Resolutely set out" – "set his face" – underlines the point that there's a determination, implying fixedness of purpose even with the prospect of difficulty or in spite of danger.

Bearing the cross means getting out of our comfort zone, being vulnerable, encountering danger, dealing with opposition, and offering sacrifice because of the ***WHY***.

Cf. Paul Nixon's amazement in Cornerstone's perseverance, in spite of criticism and

scepticism, and he mentions our story in his books. Because we always keep the WHY before us, even though we were a mobile church for 17 yrs. before we moved into our building in 2015, many embraced the vision, laboured in love, and pursued the mission God entrusted to us. And there's continuous unity in purpose, dedication and generosity of Cornerstone folks we didn't turn inward but extend Jesus' love and serve those in our community and beyond, as we have witnessed in this Covid/pandemic season.

But we must not rest in our laurels but strive forward and ask how does this look like in our personal and corporate day-to-day living post-Covid?

Let me give three practical lessons from Jesus' teaching on the way to the cross:

- Being good neighbour as we serve others (10:25-37).
- Reaching out and love for the Last, the Least, the Lost, & the Lonely (15:1ff.; 19:1-10).
- Stewardship of Time, Talents, & Treasures (16:1-14; 19:11-27).

See, following the Jesus way confronts us with this most important life question:

Who/what do I love most?

14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not ***hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life***—such a person cannot be my disciple.

When Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life," He is speaking hyperbolically and doesn't mean deserting or harming our family members. Instead, the message is this:

Jesus takes precedence before all matters;

He redefines our loyalties and how we relate to others in light of kingdom values and goals.[1]

In the most recent book, ***Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults,*** Melinda Lundquist Denton, Richard Flory, and Christian Smith argue that emerging adults are increasingly personalizing, customizing, and compartmentalizing religion in ways that suit their idiosyncratic desires - God has become increasingly remote yet is highly personalized to meet their particular needs. God has become their own personal "Pocket God"— a God that they can carry around with them but that exerts little power or influence in their daily lives. God functions, in a sense, like a smart phone app—readily accessible, easy to control, and useful but only for limited purposes.

[Response Moment: *No, I don't want a back-pocket God!*]

The issue here "is not so much that [we] love career or family too much, but that [we] love God too little in proportion to them ... "[2]

It is about one's total allegiance to Jesus, submitting to His will and purpose, and being obedient to Him alone.

This leads us to the next crucial lesson in following the Jesus Way:

Count the cost and pay the price.

Lk. 14:28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and ***estimate the cost*** to see if you have enough money to complete it? **29** For if you lay the foundation

[1] F. Craddock, *Luke*, p. 182.

[2] Tim Keller, *Suffering*, p. 304f.; cf. C.S. Lewis.

and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, **30** saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

Lk. 14:31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and ***consider whether he is able*** with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? **32** If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. **33** In the same way, ***those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples***.

Following Jesus is not a journey of blind faith or easy belief-ism; Jesus wants the disciples "to be aware of what is required to walk the full route with him ... moving toward successful discipleship takes reflection; it is not an automatic exercise."[3]

Following Jesus means …

comfort is never guaranteed,

convenience is never promised,

complacency is not allowed!

Jesus calls His disciples first to bear the cross before wearing the crown.

With the mindset of personal happiness and self-fulfillment in our contemporary culture, this is one crucial aspect of following Jesus that many of us don't want to hear but Luke is emphatic.

Via Dolorosa – the way of the cross – is not supposed to be a walk in the park, a scenic route!

For sure, there will be opposition and challenges to every Jesus-follower. But the solution is not self-preservation through

[3] D. Bock, *Luke*, p. 401

compromise; it is remaining faithful and obedient to carry out God's will, thus putting one's self in position to experience the power of the living God in the midst of most trying circumstances. Jesus is adamant about this:

Self denial is the basic currency in God's kingdom economy.

Lk. 9:23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple *must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me* ...

To deny one's self doesn't mean self-loathing;

it is not thinking less of me but thinking me less (cf. C.S. Lewis - humility);

it is not asking Jesus to take up our cross and follow after us;

"Deny themselves and take up their cross": an aorist imperative – a defining and a decisive moment to begin this journey that requires discipline, a decision to nail our selfish, self-serving agenda on the cross.

And when this happens, when the nails start piercing through to the inner core of our selfish desires, the SELF screams, kicks, and fights back as much as possible – there'd be major pushed back!

F. Fenelon, a 17th century believer, talks about the self that refuses to die would cause more pain and difficulty in his devotional classic, *The Seeking Heart*: Pain is only felt where there is self-centeredness, when one persists to take control, unwilling to let go of personal pride. prejudice, position, and possession.

Satan knows more about the blessing of surrendering our complete self to God:

"When they are wholly His (God's) they will be more themselves than ever."

Screwtape

Our true self is found in letting God defines who we are and how we live!

Lk. 9:24 For whoever wants to ***save*** their life will ***lose*** it, but whoever ***loses*** their life for me will ***save*** it.

Of course, the critical issue Jesus addresses here is about our ***value system***.

What we value most is the source of our strength or weakness in the face of temptation, trial, and testing.

> What we value most can cause us to compromise, give in, give up, spiralling down, and getting farther away from God;
>
> or to shine like stars, as a city on a hill, a preserving presence in a morally decaying society.

Lk. 9:25 What good is it for someone to ***gain*** the whole world, and yet ***lose or forfeit*** their very self?

"To gain the whole world" means all the provision, power, and property the world can provide is available to us ... To gain the world at the expense of one's soul is a bad investment and a losing proposition."[4]

Jesus is calling His disciples to die to the values and endeavours which are temporal and anti-God, dishonouring and pulling us away from God and His purposes.

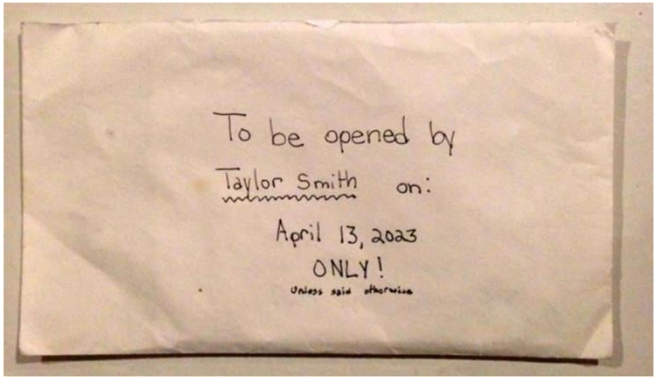
Jesus' point is clear and penetrating:

Not what we possess but what possesses us;

whatever we value most becomes our master.

[Response Moment: *Yes, Jesus is my master*.]

[4] Bock, p. 266.



Cf. [https://www.boredpanda.com/12-year-old-girl-letter-to-future-self-taylor-smith/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic]

On January 5, 14 12 year old Taylor Smith passed away from complications with pneumonia. It left her parents, family, and friends absolutely devastated. She was a joyful child just like any other, full of life.

But it was after some time had passed that they made a discovery they'd never forget.

As her parents went through her belongings, they found several letters Taylor had written to others. But one was very different. It was a letter to her future self, written on April 13, 13. It wasn't supposed to be opened until 2023, but because she had passed on, her parents decided to open it.

Taylor wrote about the importance of getting a good education, her love for her little sister, her iPad, her favourite TV show and amusement park. But here is the part that shows her Christian faith:

"Speaking of, how's your relationship with GOD? Have you prayed, worshipped, read the bible, or gone to serve the lord recently? If not, get up and do so NOW! I don't care what point in our life we're in right now, do it! He was mocked, beaten, tortured, and crucified for you! A sinless man, who never did you or any other person any wrong!

Now, have you gone on any more mission trips?"

This letter reveals what Taylor valued and her faith shines through it!

Discipleship is never a weekend hobby; it is not a part-time job but a permanent position on call 24/7.

Lk. 9:23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and ***follow me*** ...

"To follow" – a present imperative – a continuous command, a repetitive process to discipline one's self, a progress that takes time.

While we are not going to have it all together, a Christ-follower is never stagnant and is always ready to be challenged to a deeper walk with Jesus. Every disciple is ***a work in progress***, for he is "a person under constant renovation."[5] Here is the key message:

Progress not Perfection.

It matters to bear fruit, to see God's transforming work in and through our daily journeying with Jesus; it's vital to know what has been hindering our growth toward maturity, to get unstuck!

If you haven't done so, today is the time to use our **online self assessment tool** to find out your next steps in your discipleship journey and get access to some helpful tools for growth and maturity.

Remember:

God's job is not to keep us happy

but shape us like Jesus.

[5] Bock, p. 403.