

WOULD JESUS HAVE CHOSEN YOU AS ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES?

(Sermon for Sunday 14th June 2020 – Pentecost 2 – Matthew 9:35-10:8)

Would Jesus have chosen you as one of his disciples? If Jesus was here today and you were part of his crowd listening to his words of insight and challenge and wisdom, and then Jesus decided he needed a group of us to be leaders in his ongoing ministry, would he have chosen you? Would he have chosen you unprepared, as were all his original disciples, to tell the world what God is really like, and not what many people mistakenly think God is like, and of bringing God's love and healing and forgiveness and hope and new direction into the world? Of course, presumably today he would choose a mixture of men and women, so gender and race would not be an issue. Jesus may in fact look directly at you and say "*Follow me*". Could you do it? Jesus didn't call all his hearers to the total service of his Gospel, but Jesus certainly was calling them and us to some sort of witness and service to God.

For many of us, the opportunities of being a witness of Christian love, hope and integrity are far more frequent and present than we recognize or respond to. Sadly, recent studies have shown that Christian people are generally not seen to be significantly different to others of different or no faith at all. This seems odd, for Christian faith and practice surely should make a positive difference to who we are and what we do and how we respond. In the early Christian Church, this difference was clearly seen in the way people welcomed and were inclusive and loved one another, and the church grew rapidly, but society then was very stratified and unequal.

But why do we seem no different to others in society around us today? I guess we tend to be very private about our faith and we just do not show it or advertise it very well. The power of Christian faith and the power of Christian values in our lives should be a power that motivates positively healthful and insightful and loving responses to life's situations. One of the greatest gifts that God has given us as human beings is the power to choose morally and ethically. Animals don't appear to have this power, but we do and we need to use this power to choose confidently, wisely and responsibly from within the context of a Christian ethical framework.

I am constantly confronted in my life experiences and in listening to news reports and other "life issues and analysis" programs on TV about how poorly people generally are able to motivate and use their gift of choice responsibly and unselfishly. Many seem almost "falsely wired" so as to make and take the easy or self-serving or power-controlling choices, and they fail to see that they should then be accountable and responsible for any of the negative or unhelpful outcomes of their choices.

Look at the behaviour of many drivers on the roads, and their thoughtlessness, selfishness, aggressiveness and total absorption on "what is good for me only." Look at the violence that unexpectedly erupts and results so often in injury and even death in households and pubs and clubs and in our streets. Even people with significant levels of responsibility make

amazing wrong wired choices. We only need to think of the current riots in the US caused by the unacceptable brutal death of George Floyd during that violent police arrest and their ongoing overzealous behaviour and deaths in custody and constant police harassment of people of color. We acknowledge and are saddened by the many aboriginal deaths in custody over the years which so often suggest unacceptable force or complete disregard for the welfare for those under police care.

An essential spiritual gift in today's changing and stressful world is emotional intelligence and wisdom. This is a wisdom Christ can and does give us and calls us to act upon as his modern-day disciples. The ability to handle our emotions intelligently means that we then have more energy and insight and positive ability to handle life's challenges. There is a difference, and a very important difference, between positive emotion-focused coping and just knee-jerk problem-focused coping. Many people wrongly assume that we only have to solve our problems to feel better. In reality, we will never solve all our problems. As soon as we solve one problem, then one or two more hit the road of life in front of us. But we can learn to be emotionally resilient, and feel positive about ourselves and life so that we can continue to go on meeting life's challenges constructively.

Let me now suggest five lifestyle habits for such emotional fitness. These are habits and life ministry styles that Jesus himself tried to live by and taught us to follow as well.

1. **HABIT 1: Choose to act and not to react. Or, in other words, don't forget to press the pause button!**

Instead of choosing to act positively, based on Christian values, we often react based on the stress-induced feelings of the moment. We get sucked into the emotion and immediacy of the situation and allow these emotions and responses of others to influence and determine our choices. As a result, we often say things we don't really mean, or do things we later regret. We each, in fact, are given a remote control for our lives and that remote is our spiritual conscience empowered by the presence and wisdom of God's Spirit in our lives. This life remote control has a pause button that enables us to stop between what happens to us, and how we respond to it, so that we can pause and choose our response.

For example, someone cuts in dangerously in front of you on the road. How should you respond? Press pause should be your immediate reaction. Someone says or does something hurtful or stupid to you. How should you respond? Press pause is your immediate reaction. Your partner or child or neighbour or work colleague confronts you with selfishness or pig-headedness or aggression – press pause.

In that pause, you can then have time to run quickly through the following helpful guidelines:

- I cannot always control or change others, but I can control and change myself.
- I cannot always get my own way, but I can change how I feel when I don't always get my own way.

- I cannot always control the outcomes in life, but I can choose my response to them
- I cannot always avoid stressful situations but I can choose how I react, with a peaceful reaction rather than conflict, with loving awareness rather than fear or anger.

One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the power to choose. Much in life isn't always fair. However, it is the way we choose to respond to life's events that determines our inner emotional peace and stability.

2. **HABIT 2: Practice being calm in the eye of the storm.**

The world is in constant conflict and is often a “whitewater of turmoil” with one change unfolding on top of another. There is little time to make any immediate order in it. Discipline is necessary to create a gentle space in order just to “be” and to think, plan, create, and renew. This is one of the great benefits of the practice of meditation. In this Diocese, we try to meet some of this need in the [Anam Cara](#) Group Quiet Days. There is a deep need and a hunger in people to create sacred space just to “be”. The 16th Century Spanish mystic, St John of the Cross, wrote that “Silence is where the Spirit of God’s peace secretly anoints your soul.” A calm state of mind and soul can be achieved by being still and silent for even just five minutes a day, but preferably 20 minutes or more. This will positively impact on the way you act and feel upon returning to the hurly-burly of the day’s tasks and demands. Have you ever thought that music is only music because of the silent spaces in between the notes? Without the silent spaces, the music would simply become constant noise. So, it is with our minds and souls, we need the silent spaces in between.

3. **HABIT 3: Keep the main issue as the main issue.**

We are each given 24 hours a day. We can't change that. We can only manage the way we respond to that 24 hours. Time management is not so much about the way we carve up the hours and minutes of the day. Time management is more about making conscious choices about what are the main things to be done, and what are the less important and unnecessary things to be done. It is amazing how we let unimportant and unnecessary things stress out our day and the main event can get a bit side-lined. You will not have more time tomorrow, or next week, or when you retire. You will still have exactly the same amount of time. It is how you decide to use that time and how you allow outside influences to derail your plans and choices that matters. When we say “I don't have time”, and I say it myself as we all do, we are creating ‘fake news’ for ourselves. We have as much time as anyone else. When we say “I don't have time’, what we are really saying is that we have made choices about what are our level of priorities are. Time is a bit like money. We need to budget how we are going to spend it wisely and productively. We need to keep the main issue the main issue. We should positively seek to control what we can control, and avoid doing first the much less important (but perhaps more enjoyable) things.

4. **HABIT 4: Observe the learning or challenge behind any annoying behaviour.**

Imagine that every different person or problem is here to teach us something. Focus away from the difficult and unacceptable behaviour and try to see what good learning the situation can call out of you. When you change your focus away from the difficult behaviour, you end up far less annoyed, bothered and frustrated by the imperfections of other people. There is no doubt that the amount of stress we feel has more to do with how we react to the problems before us, rather than the problems themselves. Behind a difficult person and behind unacceptable behaviour may be the need for our patience, our compassion and our tolerance. We may also gain the wisdom to discern the triggers that result in such difficult behaviour. These triggers may be many such as anger, tiredness, feelings of rejection or inadequacy, low self-worth, family violence and abuse, or drugs and alcohol. Try to be a bridge over troubled waters and a calming foam over life's fires of doubt and hurt and pain. Try to see the problem behind the behaviour and not just the behaviour.

4. **HABIT 5: Keep a healthy perspective.**

You don't get apple juice when you squeeze an orange. You can hit an orange with a hammer, or stamp on it, or issue dire warnings to it, but all you will get in the end is orange juice. In other words, it doesn't matter the external pressure that is applied, it is what is inside that ultimately comes out.

Someone once said that there are two simple rules of life. 1) Don't sweat the small stuff 2) It's all small stuff. Now we know that this is not entirely true, but possibly 70% of what we get stressed over is small stuff. Try the "in one year's time" exercise. The next time you feel yourself tensed or anxious or stressed about something, imagine yourself in one year's time and ask yourself "In one year's time, will this really matter?" Don't sweat the small stuff. Getting back to the opening theme of this sermon: "Would Jesus have chosen you as one of his disciples?" Maybe. Maybe not. But he certainly does call and want each one of us to a ministry of positive and caring living in the world. Emotional and spiritual health is of prime importance in that ministry. Remember the five above mentioned habits to help us all do this.

- 1) Choose to act and not react. Press the pause button.
- 2) Practice being calm in the eye of the storm.
- 3) Keep the main issue the main issue.
- 4) Observe the learning or challenge behind the behaviour.
- 5) Keep a healthy perspective and don't sweat the small stuff