



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 28 June 2020

READINGS

Genesis 22: 1-14; Psalm 13; Romans 6: 12-23; Matthew 10: 40-42

Discipleship in the new normal

Our Gospel passage is part of the missionary discourses. Jesus is teaching his disciples what it means to be a missionary, to bring the gospel to the world. Jesus goes on to explain to them how they are to be his disciples, he explains the relationship between a disciple and his/her master.

I am sure that when Jesus looked at his disciples and realised what they were signing up for he was surely concerned for them because the very definition of a disciple is to literally follow in the footsteps of the teacher. He was going to the cross and so his disciples too. Jesus knew what he was here for, but he was certain, his disciples did not really understand the full extend of the challenge before them.

Now after last week's very hard lessons about the cost of discipleship Jesus reassures them that even though it be difficult to be a disciple there will be charity shown them. There will be people who will regard them as prophets and who will offer them water when they thirsty and hopefully some food also. Jesus might have spoken these words to his disciples, but he really addressed it to us. We who are his disciples in this time.

In my preparation for this sermon I was once again confronted with the reality of our lives in this present moment. In the time of Covid 19, with all that this new reality entails, understanding that our lives will never be the same. For some of us we live in 14-day cycles, marking our calendars rejoicing that we survived another window period and we are still okay. Those of us who have to go to work or go to the shops or otherwise expose themselves to the virus, the medical and emergency personnel those who put their lives at risk to help others.

In an emergency budget speech that had zero change of containing good news and with daily corona virus updates showing us that the pandemic is just getting worse we look around us and despite all that is going on around us Jesus is calling us to be disciples, missionaries bringng good news to the world.

Personally, I have had to deal with my own fears and apprehensions these last few weeks. As have you. Making the decision whether to wait it out and not expose yourself to any contact with people outside of your immediate circle, what of those who are living alone, with no circle. The Gospel demands that we welcome others and reach out to others. Some of us think that to be a missionary means to leave behind your family and go to far distant lands but it is not only that. The missionary spreads the gospel where he or she is. You and I are called to the same.

Covid 19 is putting things into perspective, we have to now make choices about how we spend our lives, how we are going to put ourselves at risk or if we just going to stay indoors and wait it out with no physical interaction. Looking at the long lines in the shopping malls and at taxi ranks, driving on the highway and seeing children playing out in the townships I wonder what Jesus would have done now. I think he would have challenged us to look at how we are prepared to follow him and bear witness to him even in this time. To be missionaries of His love.

I included a piece from the book by Marrienne Williamson, a quote that has often been connected to the late Nelson Mandela. In this poem we are reminded, like Jesus reminded his disciples, that we can let other people's light shine bright. We are powerful beyond what our fear limits us to.

To the students out there I say take courage and do not let the darkness overcome the light that was always meant to shine bright within you, we need your voices now. We need your strength and your hope for a brighter future now.

To parents and teachers, I say that through your hard work and dedication this too will make you into the heroes that you have always been. To our older people I say be our inspiration, encourage the younger generation and be witnesses to all that you have seen God do in your lives. Indeed there is no need to play small because it does not serve the world.

Over the years I had to confront myself with the question: what is my discipleship worth? What will I sell it for?

I remember when I landed in India as a young missionary, all the excitement and the hype soon came crashing down when I realised that our mission director was attacked and nearly killed because he was suspected of converting people who were Hindu.

When I arrived in Kerala they told me of an European missionary burned alive just days ago not far from where we lived. I smiled because people in the village didn't know what to make of me so they thought I must be a Muslim, and this meant I was safe because there was a Muslim presence in the region.

My missionary work took me to other far away places where I lived and worked among people who did not believe in Christ, like in China, but also places where I shared my faith with other Christians. In all of this I can confess that my faith has been challenged more when I lived among other Christians.

Because like C. J. Lewis I also believe that the Church exists for nothing else than to draw people to Christ, to make them like little Christs.

How are we living out this mandate of Jesus to his disciples? How are we drawing people to Christ in this time of Covid 19, with all the online remote meetings, online church we must be looking carefully at the way we are disciples through this experience.

In a time where we limit human personal contact, we need to be ware of the dangers that lurk in the distance and behind the masks and closed doors. Let us reach out and acknowledge that this is the time that Christians need to step out and stand out for their faith. We need to speak out against violence and abuse, reach out to those who are suffering because loneliness and mental health issues are real and we are called to be welcoming and supportive of each other.

Together with the world we pray in great sadness but filled with hope in the power of God. We pray for those who die from Covid 19, those who die of hunger and deprivation, those who die because of violence and hatred, women and children who are murdered in the most senseless acts of violence.

We have struggled to be God's disciples before covid 19, now the struggle is even more real. We are called upon to be more welcoming, more accommodating, more understanding and yes, more loving, because as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.