

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 7
Year A

Jeremiah 20:7-13
Psalm 69:8-20
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

Much of the time over the past couple of months, I have called on all of us to be apostles – to go and do or to go and tell. Since that first Easter morning 2000 years ago, the message seems to have been to go and spread the word about Jesus. We have looked at what that might mean for us here in Ozark – how we might better serve the people of this community. Today’s gospel reading is calling us to a different mission – one that looks at ourselves and what Jesus wants to tell us.

What does it mean to be a disciple? What is Jesus trying to teach us in this reading?

At its core, discipleship is about learning. A disciple is a student, sitting at the feet of the teacher. It is not always easy to understand the lesson we are to learn, but that is common in any educational setting. And, like any educational experience, this discipleship is a journey through which we learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The primary message in the reading today is one of obedience. To be a true disciple of Jesus requires obedience. But this obedience is not one based on an imbalance of power, as we find in authoritarian rule. That form of obedience becomes blind to what is happening in the world and only follows directions.

In the discipleship Jesus proclaims, obedience implies responsibility. It is like the responsibility of the prophet Jeremiah to proclaim the message God has called him to preach, even when it was unpopular. It is formed in the realization that God’s grace is not a license to live carelessly, unbounded by the restraints of the law, as Paul is trying to get us to understand. Most of all, this obedience takes the form of accepting the priorities Jesus requires of all who seek to follow Him.

While some have used this passage from Matthew’s Gospel as a justification for destroying the nuclear family, Jesus is only asking us to set our priorities straight. To be a disciple of Jesus is difficult. It may lead us to place God above everything else in our world. That is the sentiment behind the call to take up our cross as we follow Him.

Jesus is asking us to make radical choices. There is no guarantee that life will be a bed of roses. Not everything will be a “kumbaya” experience. There will be difficult times ahead. Our discipleship may cause us to face difficult decisions. But, in everything we do, we know that God is with us, guiding us along the way.