



Lenten Study 2021 – Week 1: Being Disciples Together

At St. Luke's we have an incredible vision statement, we say "we are a church family, seeing to grow as missional disciples, sharing God's loving grace and truth in words and actions with our families, friends and communities."

What does "growing as a missional disciple" mean to you? How do we do it, individually and as a community? Read these stories of how Jesus called his disciples:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. – Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus went out again beside the lake; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.' – Mark 2:13-17

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' – John 1:43 - 49

How have you heard a call to follow Jesus? Was there a person or community or moment when you decided you would try to make Jesus' way your way? Who has helped you find

and follow that way? How has your life of faith been different from that of those close to you? What has that taught you?

One detail that stands out for me is that the disciples never follow alone. Sometimes Jesus calls them together, sometimes they bring others, sometimes they involve their community and work. Everyone who gets to know Jesus and has a relationship with him is also related to a whole group of disciples, all learning together how to live the way Jesus is teaching them and showing them. Jesus has called us friends, and asks us to love one another as he has loved us. Being a disciple is like being a link in a chain, or a strand on a web, connected to Jesus and one another. Being a disciple is not work we can do alone.

A disciple means a student, someone who is learning. I've been helping my young children learn how to do many things. Often in frustration they will say "I can't do it!" and I have to remind them "You can't do it *yet*, but you're learning.". As we come to know God's way for us in Jesus through the Spirit there are many things we will get wrong and lessons we need to keep learning. The important thing is to continue to follow, with each misstep or failure or disappointment to lean into the relationship with have with Jesus. This means prayer, scripture and sacrament but also community. If disciples are students you might say they are always part of a class, part of a community who are learning to live lives shaped by how we are coming to know the life of God with us in Jesus.

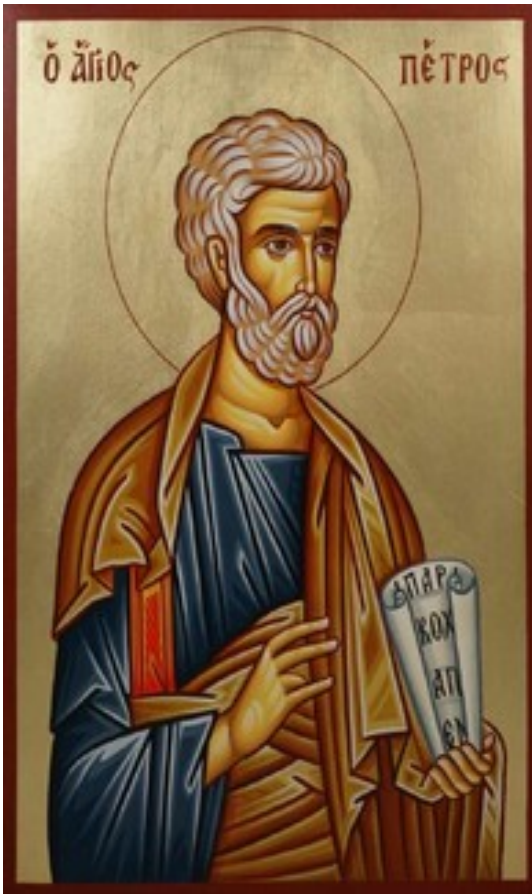
Discipleship: How are we learning to live our lives in the Kingdom among us? What new things are we learning about ourselves and our faith? What new things are we doing in the community around us? What is the role of who we are in Christ in our families, workplace or other communities? What is the Spirit encouraging us to say to one another or to do together?

God changed the world through the lives of those first disciples because of the special relationship they had to Jesus and to one another as a community. God is doing amazing things through St. Luke's through the relationship each of us has to Jesus through the Spirit, and to one another and our neighbours. Each of our perspectives and voices matter as we lead one another to follow Christ together and live a life of the Kingdom among us.

We're going to look at a few of Jesus disciples, their relationship to Jesus and the special gifts in their relationships to one another and the work and leadership of the emerging church. I hope it will help us think about how we know and encounter Jesus in our lives and how we relate to one another as a community centered around Christ and striving to live Jesus' way together in our context.

We be using the work of Rev. Canon Dr. Scott Sharman to look at:

- Peter
- John
- Mary the Mother of Jesus
- Mary Magdeline
- Paul
- Stephen



Peter

On This Rock

The play on words that leads to Jesus giving Simon the nickname 'the Rock' ("Cephas" in Aramaic and "Petros" in Greek) is a quite well-known biblical scene. This encounter is recorded in Matthew chapter 16, and comes in response to Jesus' question to the disciples "who do you say that I am?" Some, we hear, have said he is John the Baptizer, and some have guessed Elijah. But it is Simon's response, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God", which turns out to be the correct one – even if he may not have fully known the extent of what he was saying at the time (Matt. 16:16). It is in this discourse that we find a first element of what we are calling Petrine primacy. Jesus replies: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:17).

At this point in the Gospel narrative, the twelve disciples have been with Jesus for some time. They have seen many miracles and listened to teachings of all kinds. They have heard rumors circulating among the crowd – not to mention the murmuring among themselves – about who their Rabbi really is. Peter is the one who puts into words what has been forming on the lips of the people but has not yet found its way out. He is the one who vocalizes and articulates the emerging consensus. And he does this, it would seem from the narrative, on behalf of the others. In this instance, Peter represents the voice of the body of disciples, and it is here that we find the first major element of a Petrine primacy – that of authoritative definition and declaration.

Peter has a gift of precision and clarity which some church leaders have been known to possess, and which enables them to articulate and communicate a consensus on behalf of the larger group. While this is in many ways a special gift of speaking, it is more than that. It also results from a profound gift of listening. The Petrine impulse is to give voice to the sense of the faithful in a way that clarifies diverse perspectives and brings everyone along with that definition as fully as possible. Examples of this can be seen in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, with Peter, time after time, reading the room, addressing the crowds, and putting the emerging Gospel into words for others listening in (Acts 2:14-40, 3:11-26, 4:8-12, 10:24-38). In many cases, in these early sermons, he is the one to do this for the Church for the very first time.

Strengthen Your Siblings

Another important conversation between Jesus and Peter occurs at the Last Supper. Using Luke's account in chapter 22, Jesus has just told the disciples about how he will give his life for the world, and enacted that teaching through an adaptation from the Passover meal traditions which we now know through the sacrament of the Eucharist. Jesus follows this symbolism by telling the twelve that one of them will betray him, which, in all too typical fashion, leads to an argument about which one of them is the greatest (Luke 22:20-24). After interjecting to remind them that he is among them not as a ruler but as one who serves, Jesus speaks a specific word to Peter: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

In these words, I believe we can see another description from Jesus himself of a further part of the role of Peter in the wake of Christ's arrest, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecostal birth of the Church. It is a ministry of unity. It is about strengthening the community of faith through discord and challenge by way of encouragement and servant leadership. An inclusive language rendering might render this as Peter's call to "strengthen his siblings."

We hear of a similar duty echoed in the Gospel of John chapter 21, following Jesus' resurrection appearance among Peter and the others. To Peter directly Jesus issues these commands: "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-19). The context of this commissioning is also important, coming as it does in the wake of Peter's fall and denial of Jesus. These tasks come not out of his experience of his own strength but out of greater knowledge of his weakness and need for support and grace.

These ministries of feeding and tending would seem to carry many of the same protective, instructive, and ameliorative elements to them as mentioned under the heading of 'strengthening' above – giving something of yourself to nourish and sustain others when they are facing trial, or helping them to carry some the burden they bear.

In the early days of the Christian Church, we see Peter exercise this role among the believers in Jerusalem, and later in Antioch, holding different groups and peoples together not only by his preaching but by his example of grace. Of course, Peter still struggles with ups and downs in his understanding and acting, and continually must learn how to be preeminent also in acknowledging his limitations, admitting his failures, listening to correction (Acts 10:9-16, Gal. 2:11-14). Having to persevere through this gives him a unique gift of being able to walk with and support others as they face the same (Cf. the early chapters of Acts and the letters of 1 and 2 Peter).

Have you seen those elements of Peter in yourself or in others in our church?
What do you think it would look like to have them lived more fully in our community of disciples today?
How do you respond to the question from Jesus; "who do you say I am?"
How do you respond to Jesus' call to "strengthen your siblings"?