

Epiphany 4A, 2011

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Title: Disciple's Life

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Last week Jesus called disciples. He doesn't really need disciples. Jesus can do fine by himself. He's the Son of God after all. But Jesus wants to take these guys and give them the joy of playing along, too. "I will make you fishers of men, much more fun," than just catching ordinary fish.

And that's the case for you, too. The Lord doesn't really need you. But the Lord wants you. He wants you to play along and to be a part of His wonderful work of transforming this world and bringing about the kingdom of God. The Lord wants you to share in His joy.

Today, Jesus begins by telling the disciples what they're in for. This is what your life will be like from now on. This is what you've signed up for.

It's a good life. It's a happy life. It's a blessed life. It's much better than life out there in the world (although it might not seem that way at first).

Jesus tells his disciples eight things about their new life. He rattles them off in the beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are the peacemakers, Blessed are the pure in heart, and so forth. Now He's not talking about eight different types of people (well, you've got the poor in spirit over here and the peacemakers over there, and the pure in heart way in the back. No!

All of these apply to everyone. We are all poor in spirit. We are all peacemakers. We are all pure in heart.

So if you want to be in, if you want to follow Jesus and play along with him this year, if you want to be part of the fun, this is what you should be ready for. Eight things. Ready? Here we go.

#1 You will be poor in spirit.

Jesus' message to you will be "repent." You don't have the spiritual resources, that is, good works, to make it on your own. You're poor when it comes to spiritual things.

You know this, that's why you're here. You're here because you know that you're poor and you'd rather be rich in spiritual things.

Rejoice, and be glad.

Jesus gives you the entire kingdom. It's yours. His whole kingdom. Nothing to earn, nothing to do, all yours as a free gift.

#2 You will mourn.

Sin has a way of getting to you after awhile. When you see your own sin and how much pain and hurt you've caused your family and friends, it will tear you up inside and you will shed a few tears.

And then just wait for Good Friday, when you see what sin does to Jesus Christ. When you hear about all that he suffered, when you see Him suffering, bleeding, dying, it's hard to hold back the tears.

But rejoice and glad.

You're forgiven. God comes to fix things. Good Friday leads to Easter. Death turns to resurrection. Tears turned to joy. Jesus will comfort you.

#3 You will be meek.

Not shy, but not boastful in yourself and what an important person you are. There's nothing good in you apart from Jesus. Don't boast about yourself, but boast in Jesus.

Rejoice and be glad.

You will inherit the earth. It will all be yours as a gift. Not this rotting, dying, polluted mess you see around you, but a new heavens and a new earth, paradise restored, just the way that God meant it to be.

#4 You will hunger and thirst for righteousness.

You have no righteousness in yourself. What you want more than anything else is to be right with God, free from guilt and condemnation. You want a clear conscience.

Rejoice and be glad.

You will be filled. You will be gorged. More and more Jesus, more and more righteousness for you every week. Forgiveness- for you, Good News- for you, body and blood- for you, Bible study- for you. Each of these ways you are fed with Jesus and you receive his righteousness. It's an all you can eat buffet. No need to leave hungry. Stay awhile. Eat, drink, be satisfied.

#5 You will be merciful.

You will see hurting people around you. Folks who are poor and hungry, folks who are broken and weighed down. Folks who are beaten up and dying. Folks who need mercy. They don't deserve it. They haven't earned it. But you show them mercy.

Rejoice and be glad.

You will receive mercy, too. When you stand before the Lord, he will say to you 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

And you're going to say to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

And he will say to you 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

#6 You will have a pure heart.

Week after week you pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." And he does. You are made spotless, white, clean by His blood.

Rejoice and be glad.

Because of this you will see God. You will look Him in the eye and see His smile. To see God in your sinfulness would mean death. But since your heart has been made pure, it will be pure joy.

#7 You will be a peacemaker.

You will not cause fights and division, but you will bring people together, reconciled in Jesus Christ. It's not easy. It's much easier to insist on your own way, and to live divided and separate lives.

Rejoice and be glad.

You will be called children of God. God's in the business of making peace, of tearing down divisions. And when you're a part of that you're just like your dad.

#8 You will be persecuted for Jesus' sake.

It will not be an easy life. You might lose friends. Your own family might disown you. You should not be surprised, because this is the way that God's people have always been treated.

Rejoice and be glad.

The kingdom of heaven is yours. It's a small sacrifice to make compared with what awaits you.

That's what being a disciple looks like. Those are the eight things. That's what the present life is like for you. You will be spiritually poor, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. You will be busy showing mercy, making peace and being persecuted.

Honestly, the world's promises sound better. The world promises you a life of power and wealth, friends and pleasure doing things your way.

In a way, it's a miracle that any of you are here at all. That any of you want this kind of life.

But in the end, the world's promises fall flat, and that may be why you're here today, because you're looking for something more than what the world offers

This past year, by the grace of God, eleven members were added to our body and invited to join us at the altar. They stood up and said "Yes" to Jesus' call. They desired this kind of life.

Mary, Frank and Judy, Derrick, Jim, Helen, Bob and Eleonore, Max, Franny and Laura all said, yes, I'm in, I'd like to play, too. This is the altar and the pulpit where I will receive Jesus. This is where Jesus will feed me, show me mercy, and purify my heart.

Today we rejoice in the miracle of faith God has given to them, and also for the faithfulness God has given to the rest of you. Folks who have been faithfully serving here 5, 10, or even 50 or more years. You've said, this is the life for me. And this is where I will live it out.

We also put into place 16 different people as servants of God and this congregation.

They are crazy. They are volunteering to sit in meetings, to plan events, to count money, to write checks, to take notes, to make phone calls, to fix toilets, to change light bulbs, to mow the grass, and much, much more. And they aren't getting paid. And they aren't getting a whole lot of recognition.

What's even crazier is that some of them have been doing it for years now.

But they trust in Jesus Christ, and they believe that what happens here at Faith is important and needs to go on.

And there's always room for you to play along, too. To sing with the choir, to do laundry and dishes with the altar guild, to hand out food on Saturdays, to spend time with the kids on Thursdays, to read God's Word on Sundays and Fridays, to pray, to use the money God's given you to keep this building open, with a pastor in the pulpit and at the altar.

Jesus doesn't need you. But He wants you to have some fun and be a part of His continuing work here in the world, and here at Faith.

Jesus says to you, "Come, follow me."