

THE PARISH CHARTER - DISCIPLESHIP

Kevin Robertson - 4th July 2004

Ephesians 4:11-24; Hebrews 12:1-11; Matthew 28:16-20

A lady came to her priest who had been emphasizing discipleship and said: "I just want to be a Christian. I do not want to be a disciple – I like my life the way it is. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and that I will be with him when I die. Why should I have to be a disciple?"

I have been asked to share some ideas on discipleship and that is a very exciting thing to do. I hope you will discover why this good lady has got it so wrong and why discipleship is the one essential concept for all of God's children.

One beautiful Sunday morning the caterpillars gathered in their usual place under the leaves of the great oak tree for their service. The preacher today was a guest and they were a little surprised to discover that he was a butterfly, but they settled in to their familiar liturgy and were comfortable in the flow of the service until the butterfly began to preach:

"You are caterpillars. God has chosen you to become butterflies. As caterpillars you live simple, restricted lives on the branches and leaves you call home.

As butterflies you will experience freedom – as he said that word one caterpillar was heard loudly whispering "here we go again – making us uncomfortable with our present life how. I like my tree and branches and leaves and I keep on the lower sections because I am scared of heights – I didn't come to church today to hear this nonsense ...

The preacher continued ... Freedom is your destiny, what you were born for. Your destiny is to be a butterfly. That is what God has said in the bible as our reading clearly stated. The whole point of your faith is to understand that God wants to transform you, your life, into a new way of living – like Jesus, a resurrection life now here on earth.

Another caterpillar grumbled as a definite restlessness was evident in many caterpillars as they listened. Some were grumbling – "Fine for Jesus, but I am not Jesus" others were getting excited "That's what the good news is all about" said one to another. Some others just sat and it seemed that they were not really there but lost in a day dream.

"Caterpillars!" the preacher shouted as he drew his sermon to a finale – "Caterpillars" you are destined to be transformed – to become butterflies! Do you want this? Silence – "Do you want this plan of God for your life?" – some murmured "Yes" quietly. I can't hear you – the preacher announced "Do you want to become butterflies?"

"Yes!" said a few more boldly and then even more "Yes! Yes!"

During the notices their minister announced that on Tuesday: transformation classes would be beginning to help those who had said “yes” discover what it means to “die to caterpillar life and be transformed into butterflies.” You can give your names in to the parish office or just arrive he informed them.

The service ended, and out wobbled the caterpillars to prepare their Sunday lunch leaves.

A Consumer Christian, writes Dallas Willard, is one who uses the grace of God for forgiveness and the services of the church for special occasions, but does not give his life and innermost thoughts, feelings and intentions over to the Kingdom of God. They are not inwardly transformed and they are not committed to it. They remain “slaves to sin” with lives dominated by fear, greed, impatience, egotism, bodily desires and the like and they continue to make provision for them.

Os Guinness writes these thoughts: “the journey of a 1000 miles begins with the first step, but the purpose of the first step is the whole journey. People do not lose their faith, but cease to use their faith – they cease to shape their lives by it. Faith must mean everything today, or in some tomorrow it may mean nothing. Yesterday’s experiences, insights, answers to prayer, way of putting things were completely legitimate and satisfying yesterday, but today is another day.”

St Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises writes about who we are, and simply yet profoundly states:

“Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man that they may help him in achieving the end for which he is created”

Listen again to Paul in his letter to the Ephesians 4:11-24.

In our gospel reading, Jesus’ great commission involved 2 statements of who Jesus is and three commands or consequences or commissionings.

The 2 great statements:

1. All authority is mine
2. I am with you always.

The 3 commands or consequences or commissionings:

1. Go and make disciples of all nations
2. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
3. Teach them to observe all things I have commanded you.

Paul and Jesus are speaking about a transformation that will take us from being caterpillars into butterflies. While it is true every caterpillar will possibly one day spin

his cocoon and so be transformed, this butterfly life can be experienced in the now TODAY.

This transformation involves immersing ourselves in the fullness of the Trinity, putting off the old man and woman we are and becoming who we are created to be.

Let us cease to be consumer Christians, take the first step in our journey and create now the life of God's Kingdom in us, remembering that all things are created to enable us to reach this destiny.

C S Lewis writes: "It is hard, but any sort of compromise we all hanker after is harder – in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it could be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present and you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

C S Lewis continues: "May I come back to what I said before? This is the whole point of Christianity. There is nothing else... The church exists for nothing else but to draw man and woman into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the bible itself are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose." Definition of Discipleship – become like Christ.

I began with the story of a lady telling her priest that she was happy being a Christian but definitely not interested in being a disciple.

How would you answer her?

How many ideas I've tossed out helped?

My last comment to her maybe to tell her that she seems to have the faith to die with but not the faith to live with. What about you?

A chicken and a pig were walking down the main street of a town one early morning and both feeling hungry decided to go to the local restaurant for breakfast. After considering the menu the chicken said, "Why don't we have egg and bacon?" The pig replied "that is fine for you to say, it require of you some involvement, but for me it is total commitment."

Amen.