

## **“A Good Disciple Is One Who Leaves”**

### **Mark 1:14-20**

At a hospital in Galveston, Texas, a Filipino nurse named Rosalie was working the night shift. One of her patients was a 92-year-old engineer with a broken arm. Another was an 82-year-old man with renal disease. The third patient was only 52, but diabetes had caused him to lose his left foot.

The diabetic had been a Baptist preacher in an African American church, along with running a car-detailing business. But then his disease began to rule his life. He took only a portion of his insulin, telling Rosalie that he knew his body best. “I’ll let the doctor know,” she said with a smile, wanting to avoid an argument.

He softened a bit and told her that he would try to be a model patient. “Your job is hard enough,” he said. “You don’t need someone acting the fool.”

Then things got busy with a diaper change for the engineer, instructions for the man with renal disease, and a shot for the diabetic. On top of this, a new patient arrived, a Mexican who spoke limited English. Since Rosalie had once thought of becoming a nun, she made a connection with him over the fact that they were both Catholic. Later in the shift, Rosalie and the diabetic preacher talked about the book of Job.

“Because of his faith,” said the man, “God rewarded him double.”

“God is just,” Rosalie agreed.

“Whatever his will,” said the diabetic, “I accept it.”

All through the night, Rosalie worked hard, caring for her patients, and then she “went out into the sun-scrubbed morning with a satisfied yawn.” In a book on Rosalie, journalist Jason DeParle writes about how “Celtic pilgrims talk of ‘thin places’ where the distance between heaven and earth narrows and the presence of God is more readily felt. Rosalie, the almost nun, worked in a thin place.”

Jason DeParle’s book is called: *A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves: One Family and Migration in the 21st Century*. In it, he follows Rosalie and her family over the course of 30 years. Members of the family migrate around the world in search of work, then send money back to their relatives in the Philippines.

DeParle says, “the money that migrants send back to their families is three times the world’s foreign-aid budgets combined. Migration is the world’s largest self-help program, the world’s largest anti-poverty program. It’s hugely important to the people who are relying on the money they get for education, for health care, for food, for shelter.” Because of this, a common Filipino expression – “A good provider is one who leaves” – became the title of a book.

That’s surprising, isn’t it? Normally we think of good providers as people who stick around. But in a world of global migration, a good provider is one who *leaves*.

The very same is true of disciples. At the beginning of the gospel of Mark, Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, and there he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea. Jesus said to these two fishermen, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:16-17).

What did they do? Mark says that “immediately they left their nets and followed him” (1:18). They left their nets and presumably their families as well. Although the Bible does not say anything about wives for these men, Mark tells us that Simon had a mother-in-law (1:30). Where there is a mother-in-law, there is usually a wife.

Then Jesus saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were also fishermen, sitting in their boat and mending their nets. Immediately, Jesus called them, and they “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him” (1:20).

A good disciple is one who leaves.

The original followers of Jesus created problems when they took off. After all, fishing was a family business, and Zebedee could not have been happy to be left holding the nets. Simon had a house in Capernaum, which he shared with family members that included Andrew and Simon’s mother-in-law, at the very least. With Simon and Andrew on the road with Jesus, who was paying the bills?

The 12 disciples may have sent money home, as Filipino nurses do from around the world. But there is no biblical evidence that they did so. In fact, Luke tells us that a group of women provided for Jesus and the disciples “out of their resources” (8:3).

The disciples simply left. And Jesus was proud of them for doing so.

So, what does it mean to be a good disciple today? We may not be challenged to quit fishing and follow Jesus, but still we are supposed to leave. This means abandoning what we know and walking with Jesus in a new direction.

One of our members, Amanda Apathy, reminded me of my calling in a get well card. “You have been in our thoughts and prayers over the last few months. Continue to heal each day! Came across a quote that has me thinking, ‘The role of a pastor is not to grow a big church. The pastor’s role is to grow mature disciples who make disciples.’” Amen Amanda!

*A good disciple is one who leaves the workplace to serve.* Many of you spend a great deal of time on the job, laboring in ways that provide income for yourself and your family. Such effort is beneficial but watch out that your job does not take over your life.

“How’s your work-life balance?” That’s a question asked by a career guru named Jenny Ungless. She points out that the “pace of our lives today, and the fact that modern technology means we’re always contactable, can make it very difficult to ‘switch off’ from work.” If work takes up all of our time and energy, we are going to resent it instead of enjoying it.

Jesus calls us to switch off, leave the workplace, and serve. This might mean tutoring an at-risk kid. Teaching English as a second language. Swinging a hammer for Habitat for Humanity. Putting a few hours, a week into serving others will give you a sense of satisfaction that you cannot find at work. Service brings us closer to Jesus, who said that he “came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Divinity encourages you to fill out your Time and Talent sheet this week and send it in. How can you serve others as part of one of our Divinity ministries?

*A good disciple is also one who leaves the comfortable for the uncomfortable.* Until last summer and the virus, our high school youth have gone on a “servant trip” every summer to a different place where there are people in need. The last trip I went on with our youth was in 2011 to a small town in West Virginia.

We sleep on floors, use showers occasionally, paint houses, visit nursing homes, help out at day cares and food pantries. When our youth get older, they always remember the servant camp week and how uncomfortable it was but also how inspiring it was to be with people living under much more hardship than we are.

Those experiences motivate us to come back to Divinity and to serve at Redeemer Crisis Center, the Hope in the City Refugee House, the Lakeside Homeless Shelter, to support our pantry and Parma Park grade school ministries, and to go on another servant week.

*Finally, a good disciple is one who leaves the familiar for the unfamiliar.* In the United States today, people are seeking out like-minded friends and neighbors, and the result is terrible political polarization. “Americans are increasingly segregating themselves by political party and ideology even in their residential communities,” says *Greater Good Magazine*. “This segregation makes us more likely to demonize each other, as more and more people live alongside people who hold similar political beliefs to them.”

A good disciple is one who leaves the familiar and seeks connections with people who do not share their race, religion, political party, or ideology. Such a person understands that Jesus did not begin his ministry by talking only with like-minded Galileans. Instead, he and his disciples immediately faced “a man with an unclean spirit” (1:23). Then Jesus “cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons” (1:34). And instead of staying at home, Jesus said, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also” (1:38).

Jesus and his disciples did not remain in familiar places with like-minded people. Instead, they moved into new areas and did the work of helping, healing, teaching, and preaching. Yes, they had difficult confrontations, which is to be expected when lines are crossed. But disagreements are natural and healthy, while polarization is not. *Greater Good Magazine* reports that polarization has a long list of negative effects. Our families are being undermined, we are less likely to help each other, we are more stressed out, violence is more likely, and it is becoming harder and harder for us to solve problems.

Disciples are going to have to make sacrifices and face hardships, like migrants who travel the world in search of work. But a willingness to leave the workplace, leave the comfortable, and leave the familiar can have a powerful and positive impact. When we reach out to others, we discover that the words of Jesus are true: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15).

Just ask Rosalie. On the wall of her Texas house, she has a 6-foot crucifix that proclaims Jesus the “Redeemer” and “King of Kings.” She has a nurse’s prayer for a “compassionate heart” that she passes each day as she leaves her house and goes to work at the hospital.

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That is one of the Biblical teachings our 5 second graders will learn from their new Bibles they’re receiving from our Education Board today. Because we are forced to do the ceremony virtually, the Revilocks will be delivering the Bibles after our service this morning.

Over these next years in Sunday School and Confirmation classes, Samantha Jirik, Justin Regovich, Jaxson Laurenzi, Evan Smith, and Aideyn Clevenger will learn what it means to be a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, what it means to be a good disciple who leaves all too quickly after high school – hopefully.

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May the peace of God . . .

#798 – Will You Come and Follow Me