

Today's scripture readings remind us what it means to be a disciple, to follow Jesus. As Christians, we believe that God created us by name. Each one of us was created in love to be the person we are today. While we are unique individuals, each with our own gifts and talents, we are bound together by God's love. Take a moment to look around the church – each person here reflects the image of God's face and together we create the tapestry of life. In our gospel message today, Jesus is telling us that if we want to follow him, if we want to be a disciple, we have a responsibility to care for not just our selves, but for each and every person on this planet.

There is a big difference between being a follower of Jesus, a disciple, and being an admirer of Jesus. Someone who admires Jesus may recognize that he is the Risen Lord, that he is the Son of God, but fails to develop a relationship with God. Faith remains at the surface and doesn't permeate the heart. An admirer may profess faith in Jesus with his or her lips, but stops short of letting God's love bring about a change of heart. A follower of Jesus, on the other hand, not only professes faith in Jesus with his or her lips, but is also willing to put that faith into action. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is willing to trust in God, to let go of fear and follow where God leads.

In our own lives, I think that all of us struggle with how best to live out our faith. We may vacillate between being a follower of Jesus and being an admirer. The struggle is very real. There are many competing forces in our lives that sometimes drown out God's voice, that get in the way of our relationship with God. But Jesus challenges us to keep focused on our love for God, for ourselves, and for one another. When we fall, we need to get back up, shake the dust off, and keep moving forward. The amazing thing with God's love is that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in our lives. When we stray from God, we are gently invited back to begin again.

In our scripture readings today, we see that sometimes God clearly calls us to step out of our comfort zones and to follow. In our first reading,

God called Amos to do something difficult, to challenge the excess and unjust situation in society. He was called to challenge the leaders of his faith and of his society. And it's also clear that Amos didn't want to do it, but he trusted God and was willing to step out of his comfort zone and to speak. He became a reluctant prophet. At the time of Amos, the world was not so different than it is today. There was a huge disparity between the wealthy and the poor. There were only a small number at the top, and the vast majority of the world's population lived in poverty. God called Amos to leave his job, his way of life and to speak out, to challenge injustice to invite those who have strayed to turn back and to stop being just admirers and repent – to live their faith once again.

In our Gospel reading, we heard Jesus send out his disciples, his followers, in pairs, to go forth and to call on people to repent and live their faith. He sent them forth to overcome evil, all that separated people from God, armed only with the power of love. Jesus instructed his disciples to go forth in his name to change the world by

- Loving one another
- Respecting one another
- Caring for those in need
- Forgiving those who wronged you
- Understanding differences
- Feeding the hungry
- Clothing the naked
- Welcoming the stranger
- Educating the ignorant
- Responding to violence with love and compassion

- Caring for all of God's creatures, both great and small

As Jesus sent forth his early followers to do these things in his name, he too calls us to do the same.

As disciples of Jesus we are called to speak in God's name, to help make a difference in this world, to allow God's love to flow in and through us. Jesus is telling us to have faith and not to be afraid. We don't have worry about tomorrow, we only have to trust in God's merciful love. And, when we are rejected or mocked, Jesus is telling us to get up and shake the dust from our feet. In other words, do not become discouraged when we are challenged or rejected, when we are mocked or ridiculed, because God is with us. Let it go and keep celebrating and sharing God's love with the world around us.

In our baptism, each one of us was anointed Priest, Prophet and King. Part of the job description for a prophet is to disturb the comfortable and to be a voice for the oppressed. In a few moments Tyler will be baptized. He has decided to follow Jesus, to be reborn in the waters of baptism and to be anointed Priest, Prophet, and King.

- As a priest – we are called to be a person of prayer
- As a prophet – we are called to speak the truth and live our faith
- As a king – we are called to care for all of God's people

My friends, as you witness Tyler's baptism, let it remind you of our call to be people of faith, to be disciples of Jesus. As Tyler professes his faith, let us renew our faith in Jesus Christ and pray that we have the courage and strength to go forth in Jesus name by bringing peace and healing to those in need of our love and compassion.