

Brackenhurst 22 March 09
The Apprenticed Follower: With Jesus and the First Disciples

Welcome — Neil

Call to Worship: Psalm 1:1-3a — Neil

Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight is in the law of Yahweh.

and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.

Prayer of Invocation — Neil

Notices — Neil

- Hymn 504 — O Heavenly King — Intro by Neil, Nola to take over

Prayer of Adoration and Confession — Nola

- Hymn 141 — Jesus call us o'er the Tumult — Nola

Offering and Prayer — Nola — NB Remain standing

- Hymn 691 — Come let us sing of a Wonderful Love — Nola, Neil to take over

Prayer (and all following) — Neil

Scripture:

Matthew 4:18-22 (and others)

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Is there anybody here this morning who served an apprenticeship to become qualified for a trade?
 - Well, I'm glad to see that, and no doubt you're going to tell me later just what it was like being an apprentice
 - * But today the subject is being an Apprenticed Follower.
- We're doing a sermon series through lent, looking at how we can journey with Jesus through some of the moments in his life and ministry

- We've looked at being with him at his baptism
- Being with him in the wilderness
- Today we look at being with him and the first disciples
 - Being the apprenticed follower
- The idea of apprenticeship goes back many years
 - Officially to the middle ages when the master craftsmen would take on a young boy to learn his trade
 - * The boy would work for very little in return for being trained in that trade
- But of course the concept of apprenticeship goes back many thousands of years before that as children, I suppose particularly boys, would learn the work of their father
 - There was no career choice, the children would simply learn at their father's side, doing whatever work he did and eventually taking that work on from
 - * And as his father grew too old to work and eventually died, so too would his fathers clients get old and die and the boy would continue serving his own generation
 - * the children of his father's clients
- In this way the tricks of the trade were passed down from generation to generation in such a way that knowledge wouldn't be lost in the days before books and libraries and so on.
 - Remember you couldn't actually go and learn how do something
 - * You couldn't study a different career at university
 - You simply did the trade that had been passed down by your family for generations
- Today, of course we can do what we like by going to university and studying
 - And I think that the concept of being an apprentice has become less important recently
 - * Now we go to Universities of Technology
- And something of the meaning of being an apprentice
 - Of being apprenticed to a master craftsman
 - * Has been lost.
- At the same time, as we look at the story of the first followers of Jesus we see that they too did something of an apprenticeship.
 - Course, we call them disciples, not apprentices
 - * But it's the same idea
- Jesus calls them and says, "Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men and women"

- I will take you and shape you and form you
- I will show you how you ought to be living
 - * I will demonstrate the tricks of the trade, and give you knowledge that you can't find in books
- The first followers, Simon, Andrew, James and John, were probably the same age as typical apprentice
 - Certainly James and John were fishing with their father, learning the trade from him, preparing the nets
- Apparently in that time if you wanted to do a religious apprenticeship you would find a rabbi whom you liked
 - As a person
 - Who had teaching that you could agree with
- And you would go to him and try to convince him as to why he should take you on as a disciple
 - and then he would decide if you were worthy enough to learn under him
- Jesus, as he chooses his first followers, doesn't wait for them to approach him, or to live up to any expectations
 - Instead, he says you are worthy, come follow me
 - * Come and be my apprentices
- Something that he continues to say to all of us today
 - That's why we're here.
- So what does it mean to us to be an apprentice of Jesus, to be with him and the first disciples?
- Let's look at what it means to be an apprentice
 - Apprentices are learners
 - Apprentices are servants
 - Apprentices are joyful

(1) Apprentices are Learners

- The basic understanding of a person who is an apprentice is that this person doesn't know very much of the craft yet
 - That is why he is being apprenticed!
 - * He may have a natural talent or an aptitude for it, but basically he recognises that he is there to learn
- And so firstly, if we are to follow Jesus as an apprentices, we need to realise that we don't know everything
 - And we don't have to know everything

- * But we do have to have to willingness to be open to teaching and learning new things
- Very soon after the passage of Jesus calling the disciples that we read earlier, beginning of the next chapter, in fact
 - We read that Jesus went up on the mountainside and his disciples came to him and he began to teach them (Mt 5:1)
 - * And as he teaches them on that occasion, we call it the Sermon on the Mount, he sets before them a whole lot of new stuff
 - He says you have heard it said, but I say to you
- He forces them into a new way of thinking about their scripture and traditions
 - There needs to be a willingness to learn to be an apprentice.
- And later on in John's gospel we read that there were people who were not willing to learn.
 - In John 6:60 and 66, "Many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" And from that time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.
- An apprentice comes with the understanding that what he knows is going to be challenged as he learns new things
 - Some of those things he may like
 - Some he may not like
- But in order to complete his apprenticeship and get his trade licence he has no option but to be willing to submit to the teaching of the master.
 - So firstly apprentices are Learners

(2) Apprentices are Servants

- I've never served an apprenticeship, although the educational process of the Methodist Church is supposed to reflect that.
 - Reality is there aren't enough ministers so we are told to sink or swim
- But I understand from friends who have served an apprenticeship that while they are appies, they are basically the workshop skivvy
 - All the jobs that your master — what do you call that person?
 - * doesn't like doing, you have to do
- Something that you probably resented at the time, but later on realised that it made you into a better person, and that it taught you something vital about the trade
 - Those little unpleasant things you had to do came together and made sense
- A key element of Jesus apprenticeship programme with his disciples, and something that both he and Paul speak about constantly

- is the theme of servanthood.
- Turn to John 13:5-9, 12; this is the well known story of Jesus washing the feet of his apprentices
 - And we will look at this passage in more detail later on in the sermon series
- Now I don't think any master would do what Jesus did in this story
 - Usually the master makes his apprentices do the things he is not willing to do
 - * And this is reflected as Peter in horror refuses to let Jesus wash his feet.
- But Jesus does this, and says to his apprentices, I have set you an example
 - I have washed your feet, now you do that for each other
- Be a servant, if you want to follow me and be true to me you have to be a servant
 - If you want to learn the tricks of the trade, it's not just to be found listening to my teaching
 - But also in doing the unpleasant things for me and each other
- The apprentice is a servant

(3) Apprentices are Joyous

- I think, so far as I know, that we humans are the only beings who can intentionally set out to learn something.
 - Other creatures may learn by trial and error what's good to eat or how to navigate a maze, or something
- But we are the only creatures who can intentionally set out to learn something as we do with an apprenticeship
 - And one of the things about learning something new is the joy that it brings
 - * To finally master a new skill!
- I can vividly remember that day I first learnt to tie my own shoelace!
 - I must have been in grade one because I'm sure that I never wore lace up shoes before then
 - * But I remember my parents showing me over and over again how to tie a shoelace, but I just didn't get it
 - Until one day I did!
- Read Luke 10:17; 21
 - Jesus has just sent out the 72 to go and minister in his name, and we read of their return in verse 17:
 - “The seventy-two returned with joy, and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’”
- There is a joy in getting a new skill right, when your master says to you, “You really did a good job there...”

- But there's more to it than that. In verse 21 Jesus prays to God about his followers, and we read that he did that full of joy.
 - Jesus was excited that his apprentices had learned one of the skills necessary.
 - * As someone who teaches others it's exciting when they learn a new skill
- When you master a new skill as an apprentice you are filled with joy
 - As excited as I was when I learnt to tie my shoes for myself
 - * And God is filled with joy.
- Now my parents weren't particularly excited about me tying my own shoes, but I think that was because it was very early one Saturday morning and I went to wake them both up to show them what I'd done
 - But God is excited when he sees us learning new things, and mastering new skills, and becoming more and more like his son Jesus Christ
- As much as being an apprentice is hard work, there is also the element of joy in it

CONCLUSION

- Let me close off
 - How do we live as apprenticed followers?
- Firstly by keeping company with Jesus in the gospels
 - The gospels are the only place we have to learn from Jesus
- The Spirit may guide us and teach us in our daily lives, but it is only by reading the gospels again and again that we get to know and understand who Jesus is
 - In your daily scripture reading, by all means use devotionals, and Faith for Daily Living and whatever else you may have
- But keep going back to the gospels to learn from Jesus
 - Immerse yourself in the stories
 - * Imagine that you are there in the crowds listening to him speak
 - How do you feel about what he says
 - * Are you challenged? do you like it? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?
- Keep company with Jesus
 - Listen to what he has to say
 - Do what he says, even when it is unpleasant
 - and be willing to be surprised by joy as you discover little breakthroughs in your faith
- Secondly find someone who is more experienced in the faith than you and be willing to learn from them
 - When you do an apprenticeship the person that you learn from is more experienced, that's why you can learn.

- Find a spiritual director that you can trust to challenge you in your Christian walk, someone with whom you can discuss what you're learning with Jesus
 - Someone who will help you learn the tricks of the trade, as it were
- Now I want to really challenge you, and this goes for me as well
 - If we want to really grow in our Christian faith, in what it means to be an apprentice, a disciple, if we want a different perspective on what it means to live as a Christ follower
 - * Maybe, maybe, we need to find, as a spiritual director, somebody of a different race
- And I want to thank the people of colour who have made the effort to come and worship here with us
 - I'm sure that it must not always be easy to join a congregation where everybody is a different colour
 - * where you're not sure you'll be accepted or not
 - * Where probably you encounter racism
- But it is only through you joining us that prejudices are challenged and people's thinking changes and we can learn to build a new South Africa together
 - So thank you for that
- Let me close with a story
- As you know I'm training to run the Comrades, and part of that is doing a whole lot of races
 - Yesterday Ian and I ran the "Om die Dam" at Hartbeespoort, and there was just such a good vibe at the start
- And we were waiting at the starting line, packed together, shoulder to shoulder, all races, and a group of people came running up to the start together singing songs about Zuma, nobody made a comment
 - Then just before the start the announcer said let's pray
 - * White Afrikaner
- And he prayed in four languages, said Amen
 - And the crowd broke out into spontaneous applause and cheers
- And at that moment I was so proud to be a South African in all our diversity
 - And I think that we can learn to be the same as a church, but it does require intentional effort
 - * We need to learn from each other who are different to us
- So, in being apprenticed to Jesus, with the first disciples
 - Let's keep company with Jesus
 - Let's entrust our lives to others
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.

- Amen

Prayer of Response and Intercession

The Lord's Prayer

- Hymn 315 — God's Spirit is in my heart

Benediction

Doxology