

Christian or Disciple?

John 1:29-2:12

We just started a sermon series where we are looking at the life and ministry of Jesus from the book of Luke. Two weeks ago we looked at his final preparations for ministry which included his baptism and testing in the wilderness, and today we are going to look at how his ministry began. Matthew, Mark, and Luke skip this part and go from his testing in the wilderness to the start of his first major ministry tour in Galilee. But there are a few weeks in between where a lot happens, and those details are only found in the first 4 chapters of John. So we're going to veer away from Luke for a couple weeks and take a look at John so we don't miss these things.

We are going to get our first introduction to some of Jesus' disciples this morning, and a few questions I want us to begin thinking about are: What is a disciple? Am I a disciple? Is a disciple the same thing as being a Christian? What's the difference? And is that difference important? The primary goal and mission we have as a church is to make disciples. We want everyone who is part of East Lincoln to be growing as a disciple of Christ and engaging in our mission of making disciples. So being a disciple is very important. But what does that mean? And is that different than being a Christian?

I want to point out a distinction as we get started here: How many of you grew up in some kind of Christian family or Christian home? It doesn't matter what kind of church you went to – it could be Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Baptist, or whatever – how many of you have some kind of Christian background?

For those who do it's very common to continue to follow some of those same traditions that we grew up with – believing in God, believing in the Bible, going to church, and so on. These become part of our lives and identity because that's what we grew up with, that's what our family does, it's comfortable, it's important, and we like it. For a lot of people, that's what it means to be a Christian – it's kind of a traditional or cultural Christianity, and that's the way I want us to look at this morning. It's part of our lifestyles, family traditions and practices. If you do those things, you are a Christian. That's your religion. You're not Hindu, Muslim, or Atheist – you're a Christian.

But are you a disciple of Jesus? Is there a difference?

Last week we got the first look at Jesus as an adult. Today we get our first look at some of his disciples. And I want us to look at their examples so we can see some of the characteristics of what it means to be a disciple. I want us to see how it's different than what I just described about being a Christian and then I want us to look at our lives to try to determine if we are just Christians, or disciples, and where we should go from there.

After being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus began his ministry by going back to the Jordan River to where John the Baptist was continuing to preach and baptize people. And that's where we're going to pick things up today.

Read John 1:29-34.

The next day he (John) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

So when John saw Jesus again – probably about 40 days after he baptized him – he was very excited and full of zeal and he said these things to the people gathered around him. It doesn't say who they were, but he was telling them the good news about who Jesus was. The next few verses show us who two of them were.

Read John 1:35-37.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

We know one of these disciples was Andrew because it tells us later on. The other was probably John who's writing this gospel.

This is the first time we see the term “disciple” being used – these were two of John’s disciples. The term “disciple” means “student or pupil.” So Andrew and John were students of John the Baptist – that’s what it meant to be a disciple. And I want to make a few more observations. Later on we will see that neither of them were from that area where John was baptizing people. They were from several miles north in the region of Galilee. That was their home. Neither were they professional students. John the Baptist didn’t have a synagogue or seminary that they had joined. They were actually fishermen from Galilee who worked with their families on the Sea of Galilee in order to make a living.

But they were away from home, with John along the Jordan River. So for them to be his “disciples” meant that they had taken a break from their regular lives and work to go to where John was and learn from him. They were intrigued by what he was teaching and doing and were willing to pursue that interest and devote themselves to it. In John they found someone they could and should learn from.

The other observation I want to make is that even though they were disciples of John, when Jesus showed up, they left him to follow Jesus. John had been teaching them that ultimately they were looking for one who would come after him who was greater than he and when that person showed up, people should follow him – even John’s disciples. So when Jesus came, John’s disciples left him to follow Jesus. That’s important and we’ll come back to that later. Let’s continue...

Read John 1:38-39.

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”³⁹ He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

You can see these two disciples didn’t just meet Jesus and go out for coffee, they actually spent the rest of the day with him. They went to where he was staying, hung out with him, and stayed the evening. At some point Andrew got really excited, so he went and found his brother, to tell him about what was going on. And this is the first time we see Peter.

Read John 1:40-42.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

So in his excitement, Andrew's response was to reach out to his brother to tell him and invite him to meet Jesus. Peter was in that area, perhaps accompanying Andrew, or maybe looking into what was going on with John. And when Andrew met Jesus and spent time with him, he wanted to go get him and include him so he too could meet Jesus and be part of what was happening.

That's the first time Jesus met these three disciples and as we've seen, they spent the day with him. The next day we're introduced to two more.

Read John 1:43-51.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Here we see similar things to what happened with Andrew and Peter. Philip was in that area even though he was from Galilee. He too was probably checking out John the Baptist like a lot of people were doing. When Jesus invited him to follow

him and return to Galilee, he was all in and went and found Nathanael so he could be part of it too.

So now you have five disciples who had met Jesus and joined together in following him on his way back up to Galilee: Andrew and his brother Peter. John, who wrote this book. And Philip and Nathanael, who were probably friends.

Then last thing I want us to see this morning is what happened the day after they arrived in Galilee.

Read John 2:1-12.

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

So again I want us to focus in on the experience of the disciples and here we see that they witnessed Jesus' first miracle – he did something beyond the realm of natural possibility – a supernatural sign. And you'll notice their response – they "believed in him." I looked up that word so we could understand what John meant and it means they were persuaded and confident, and in this context it had to do with Jesus being the Messiah. After spending time with him and seeing this miracle they believed in him as the promised Messiah.

And as you can see in verse 12, after that, they went with him to Capernaum, a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and spent a few more days together.

So in these verses we looked at today, we see what it looked like for someone to be a disciple. And I want you to think about the difference between what we've seen and how I described a typical Christian at the beginning of the sermon.

In these men who were called "disciples" there was first a valuing and interest in the things of God to the point where there was a willingness to devote themselves to pursuing the things of God – to be a student, to make it a priority, to take time away from regular activities in order to spend time with Jesus. It wasn't just a weekly tradition of going to church. There was a desire and willingness to spend time with Jesus.

There was also a clear pursuit of Jesus as the ultimate goal rather than just listening to a good preacher. John the Baptist would have been very interesting to listen to. He was different, vibrant, cutting edge, and drawing huge crowds of people, and yet when Jesus came, he pointed his listeners to him and his disciples left him to follow Jesus. A Christian might enjoy listening to a good preacher, but a disciple wants to go beyond that to know Jesus. They are a student of Jesus, not just a listener of good sermons.

Another thing we see in these disciples is a desire to walk together with others in seeking Christ and growing in him. They didn't observe from a distance and keep a private faith. There was togetherness and community – a group of Christ-followers that were learning and growing together. It wasn't about a weekly routine of going to church for an hour on Sunday without any other interaction with fellow believers the rest of the week.

And finally, in these disciples we see a faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Christians will have faith in Jesus as well, but often times that's about as far as it goes. It doesn't lead to these other things. A disciple is one who has faith, but that faith also leads to a growing and deepening relationship with Christ along with other fellow believers.

So what are you? A Christian or a disciple? Jesus never called anyone to be a Christian. But he did call us to be his disciples. And the things we've seen today are the things we should be seeking to emulate in our lives as well. We need to have faith in Christ, but it needs to go way beyond that. We also need to devote ourselves to being students of Jesus, and not just practice the tradition of going to church. We need to make it our goal to seek Jesus himself to know him deeply, and not stop short by just listening to a good preacher. And we need to do this with one another and not be isolated from Christian community.

Maybe you can see that you've been more like a Christian and not a disciple. What is Jesus calling you to do today? It starts by answering his call to follow him and become one of his disciples. Go beyond Christian traditions and start following Jesus. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 16:24-25: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Following Jesus is a hard road – it's not easy. It requires us to die to ourselves and walk in his ways. But whoever walks with him will find true life both now and forevermore. So the first step for all of us is choosing to follow Jesus.

After that is an ongoing process of growth. The primary reason the church is here is to help you grow as a disciple of Jesus. We want to come alongside you and encourage you right where you're at. We have ministries and resources to help you keep moving forward. Maybe a next step for you is getting into the habit of daily devotions. We've got devotional books for you to take in the front lobby and will keep getting more when those run out. We've got Bibles and daily reading plans in the same place to help you read through the Bible in a year. We've got small groups to help you get connected in Christian community so that you can grow with fellow believers. Whatever the Lord is prompting you to do, I urge you to follow his leading in your life today.