

Discipleship 7

23/07/17 09:30 SJ & 11:15 SM

So today, Chris Froome should win his fourth Tour de France. Today's stage in Paris is largely a spectacle for the crowds - all the hard work has gone on over the last 3 weeks. I don't know if you follow professional cycling? Froome's win doesn't come simply through his own effort - he is the principle rider of Team Sky. The other riders of the team have a job, to get Froome to the front (wearing the yellow jersey) and to keep him there. It seems Team Sky are the best at this, as they have dominated the sport in the last few years. Froome's success simply wouldn't happen without those alongside him.

We come to our seventh week of the discipleship sermon series. We are thinking together about how the call to follow Jesus asks us to get out of the boat, and to take risks in the choppy waters of life. We have thought about how following Jesus is not easy, and demands much. Today we think about how being a disciple of Jesus asks us to work together with other disciples. Each of our readings today point us to think of how our faith needs to be rooted in Christ, and in fellowship with one another. The first letter of Peter describes Jesus as the Living Stone - the one in who all believers are rooted, and in whom we are united as the holy priesthood of all believers. St Paul writes to the Christians of Philippi urging them to stand firm in the Spirit and to strive side by side with one mind. From the beginning of the Church, the disciple was to stand alongside other disciples, in the strength of God's Spirit.

But it is in the Gospel that we have much food for thought. It is perhaps an obvious fact, so obvious that we disregard it, that Jesus chose twelve disciples, not just one. Disciples were, and are, always intended to be part of a larger group. In fact we know that the Gospel writers discussed an even larger group of Jesus' followers, calling them disciples too. In our first year of PMC we focussed on reading together Luke 10:1-12, where a group of seventy disciples are called to go out to every town in twos. Discipleship is never something we do alone. God always intends us to walk with others as we seek to follow Jesus.

But the disciples were also a very mixed bag, from different backgrounds, with different temperaments. Those we are called to journey with in discipleship are not of our choosing. Perhaps too often those we mix with at Church are those most like ourselves. But how we become effective in mission with those others God gives us in this local church is the key test. How do we use the skills God provides? How do we include those most unlike me? We are all part of the Body of Christ - some arms, some legs, some eyes. We all have a purpose, and make the Body complete.

In a world that seems increasingly to want to fragment, and lose any suggestion of community, the Church has a great opportunity to show the world how we are called to be in community with one another. But this calling to be disciples together is not just for Sundays, but for each day of the week. Perhaps our biggest challenge is to ask ourselves how our discipleship of Jesus impacts on our life away from Sundays. How do we follow Christ together, supporting one another, from Monday to Saturday? I wonder whether you know other Christians at work, or in social places where you gather? What could each of us do to find out who are the other believers?

We see in today's Gospel the pattern of ministry that Jesus followed. First he rooted himself in God - he took himself away from the crowd to pray. In this reading we are told he spent the night in prayer. The disciple is one who spends time devoted to God in prayer. But after that night of prayer, Jesus calls his disciples - he builds community. It is from there (not in today's reading, but immediately after) that Jesus goes and heals the sick. We note those tasks: solitude, community, ministry. And they follow in that order for every disciple. We need to be rooted in God, then

rooted in one another, before we can go and minister in Christ's name. Might we find ways in which to strengthen our walk with other disciples - as part of Church here, but also with other disciples we know in our lives away from church? And with those disciples, might we find new ways to discover our common calling as disciples of Jesus, as we go and minister in his name, and call others to be his disciples.