

On Being a Disciple

Jesus said, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you”** (John 15:18-19). What is Jesus promising us here? We need to view this promise in the larger piece of being a disciple of Jesus. When Jesus said the words, what did he mean? **“Follow me”** (John 1:43).

I remember the first time I preached on that command. I asked over and over, “Jesus wants us to follow him. Where is he going?” We know the answer to that question. This passage took place in real time, on the night that Jesus was betrayed. That's where Jesus is going. To the cross. What does it mean to follow Jesus? I'll give you his definition. **“A student [literally, a “disciple”] is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the [disciple] to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master”** (Matt 10:24-25). (compare with John 15:20).

We call them “fans.” Hockey fans. Alanis Morissette fans. A year ago Ryan Powell wrote about fans in these words: “Your team just won the game. What do you do? Clap, cheer, high-five your fellow fan. Wrong. Didn't you get the memo? Simply savoring a team's victory isn't an adequate response to winning anymore. These days fans use sports celebrations as an excuse to break laws and destroy property.” He sites example after example of such ridiculous behavior (“Fan Behavior Needs to Change”). You do know, do you not, why we call them “fans”? It's short for “fanatic.”

When Jesus calls us to be his disciples, he is, as it were, calling us to be his fans, calling us to become fanatical for him. Not foolish fanatics, breaking laws and causing chaos; we're to be as wise as serpents and gentle as doves; but fans all the same. He wants us to become like him. He calls us to imitate him. This is what we see the disciples doing. They want to become like Jesus, so when they see him praying one day, they ask him, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Lk 11:1), because they want to learn to pray like Jesus. They're out in a storm on the lake, Jesus comes walking out to them on the water and Peter, who was only expressing the desire of the rest of the disciples asks, *“Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water”* (Matt 14:28). The disciples want to be like Jesus. Jesus sends 72 of his disciples out on a mission, to teach them how to go and make more disciples, and they come back and express amazement. *“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name”* (Lk 10:17). It's like they're saying, “Lord, we can hardly believe it! We've seen demons submit to you; we would have never imagined they would submit to us!” They realized they'd become just like Jesus!

So here, when Jesus makes this promise that if the world hated him, demonstrated so cruelly the next day when they beat him, spit on him, hit him with wicked fists, whipped him, crucified him; the same would happen to his disciples. Now we understand why, in the book of Acts, the disciples come back from imprisonment and threats, rejoicing. Why? Because they'd become like Jesus in this way, too! **The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name** (Acts 5:41).