

DEFINING MOMENTS ON THE DISCIPLESHIP PATH

Good morning to you, it is so good to be with you today. This is the first week of our three part series that we are calling Defining Moments on the Discipleship Path.

Moments matter; moments matter because they can shape the direction of our lives. Certain moments can define how we relate to others around us. Moments matter because they form a kind of lens through which we understand ourselves and the world around us.

God can use moments in our lives to draw us closer to Him, to communicate his will for us. And if we are attentive, we will hear his voice and be able to respond. Can you recall any defining moments in your life?

One defining moment in my life was attending an Outreach for Justice Committee meeting in the year 1999 at St Gregory Parish. It was the night I was asked if I would go on an exposure trip to Haiti. It turned out to be an incredible learning experience for me. As we talked that night and learned more about the trip, it was like my heart burning within me. I knew that night that I was going to go on that trip.

God used that moment in time to guide me on a Discipleship Path that I still travel down twenty years later. These defining moments are like sign posts. And just like we can get lost in a strange city if we don't watch for the signs, so we can get lost if we miss the spiritual sign posts in our lives.

Now what we are calling the Discipleship Path is another way to describe our walk with God. For us, the life of Jesus is the model that we fashion our lives after. Look at what he does, he forgives, heals, companions us, loves us for who we are and not for what we do; he pursues us; he protects the vulnerable; he draws us closer to himself... All these things that he does we need to do as well.

This is called Discipleship and the path is the way in which we accomplish what he desires us to do.

The story of Samuel in our first reading is a good way to illustrate what I am talking about. Samuel lived about a 1,000 years before Christ. This was a period of great uncertainty for the Israelites. There was no leadership or vision. It was in the last days of the period of Judges.

There was much instability at this time and Israel was not the great nation that it would soon become under King David. The prophet Eli was weak and his sons were rebellious to the Lord.

And so God chose Eli's servant, Samuel to succeed him as God's holy prophet. Our reading today illustrates a defining moment that God uses to launch Samuel on his Discipleship Path.

The Lord has to call Samuel three times before Eli recognizes that it is in fact, the Lord who is calling him. Eli gives Samuel a simple piece of advice that forever changes his life.

This advice is so important and yet so simple. It is advice that can change the direction of our lives as well. It could very well be a defining moment on our Discipleship Path.

I think that we miss many opportunities in life, especially opportunities to know, love and serve God. This happens because we fail to see these opportunities right in front of us. And that's what happened to Samuel and Eli; they failed to see the obvious, right in front of them.

In my experience, God does not make it difficult for us to access his mercy and his love. He makes it simple and straightforward. We are the ones who tend to over complicate things! We are the ones who create the many obstacles between us and God!

So what was Eli's simple advice to Samuel? He just tells him to:

- “Go lie down” and he continues, he says “and if he calls you, you shall say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Pretty simple instructions from Eli, but the moment Samuel follows those instructions, his life and ministry would never be the same.

Moments ARE important. God uses them in our lives to launch us and then keep us on the Discipleship Path. But we have to be ready for them. We have to be looking for them, otherwise we just walk right past them.

Samuel learns to listen to the Lord and he becomes a great prophet. He helps usher in the royal kingdom of David, a truly great time in Israel's history.

And, as we read in our gospel today, a simple remark by John the Baptist launches Andrew and Peter on their great Discipleship Path.

And that is how discipleship starts; with a humble, listening ear, a humble obedience to be on the lookout for what God is telling us.

I personally have never experienced the voice of God coming from heaven. But I have experienced a burning in my heart and I have experienced the voice of God through others. He answers us in many different ways.

At Good Shepherd Parish we want to help you discover what God has planned for you.

Maybe you've been away from the Church for a while. Maybe you've been thinking about returning but don't know how. Remember, look for the simple things. God doesn't make it complicated. Maybe attending our live streamed masses is a good way to start.

Reaching out to a member of our Pastoral Team is also a good way to start the process of re-discovery and return.

We also have a Discipleship Path that is available to anyone interested in taking that next step in their faith journey.

Alpha is a good place to start. Alpha is a series of sessions that explores the basics of the Christian faith. It is well suited to those who don't normally go to church as well as those who are looking for a place to explore their faith in more depth.

It is a place to ask questions. It is a place to share with others what is important to you. It is a place to discover God's goodness and his love.

Maybe you've already completed the Alpha series. Then Discovering Catholicism will build on your Alpha experience. You will learn more about the incredible beauty of our Catholic Faith.

Could participation in Alpha or Discovering Catholicism be a defining moment on your Discipleship Path? Where is God calling you and what does he want you to do? Listen...then act.

For those who are at a different point on the Discipleship Path, maybe joining a small faith group could be your next step. Stay tuned because small groups are coming.

And guess what, both Alpha and Discovering Catholicism are starting up the first week of February. *Imagine, what timing!!*

You might even know someone who could benefit from these opportunities, so invite them to join you. Check out our website or our Facebook page for more information, as well as other ways that can help you to take your next step. And remember, our journey down the Discipleship Path will be a life-long journey.

So, how do we prepare ourselves for the Lord's call.....Do we spend some quiet time each and every day and just listen for his voice?

It could be in our car on the way to work; it could be when we walk the dog; it could be in a quiet spot in the comfort of our home. We need to be patient in waiting for the Lord. I know at times I have had to wait on the Lord longer that I would have liked, but he does answer.

Our relationship with God is meant to be a vital part of our everyday lives. We are meant to be close to him, the one who loves us the most.

But we have to be intentional, we have say “speak Lord, your servant is listening.” That is a good thing to repeat every day. I have that written on a note above my desk in my office.....“speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

In that way, we will become the person who listens...to God and to others. We will recognize those opportunities in our lives to grow in faith and to be true disciples. We can even be the people who help others discover their defining moments.

God has something to say to all of us, believe it! And then spend the time to discover just what that something is. “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”