

On the Demands of Discipleship

January 25, 2026

Rev. Traceymay Kalvaitis

Isaiah 9: 2-4

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken.

Psalm 27:1 and 4

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? One thing I asked of the LORD; this I seek: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles— the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Today’s sermon is titled, *On the Demands of Discipleship*. These days we almost exclusively use the word *disciple* to refer to the inner circle of Jesus’s followers, but a disciple can be anyone who, according to the dictionary, “accepts and assists in spreading the teaching of another.” The word *disciple* is closely related to *discipline* and *discernment*; they all share the same Latin root, *discere*, meaning “to learn.” A disciple can be thought of as a student and it is safe to say that we here are all students, we are all disciples, we are all drawn to the teachings

of Jesus that, we pray, will *lead* us in bringing about what Jesus calls, “the kingdom of Heaven” on earth, based on justice, kindness, love of God and love of neighbor.

In our scripture reading today from the book of Matthew, it is the first few words that are so easily overlooked and yet they provide critical context. “Jesus heard that John had been arrested.” We read in the Gospel of Mark that the reason behind John’s arrest was his public criticism of King Herod Antipas. So it was in the wake of John’s arrest that Jesus goes public with his ministry and his first item of business is to build a community. We read that Peter and Andrew are casting their nets when Jesus says to them, “Follow me.” The scriptures say, “Immediately, they left their nets.” Further down the lake shore James and John are mending their nets in the boat with their father. Jesus calls to them and they, too, leave nets, boat, and their father to walk with him. One could speculate that they had no idea what they were getting themselves into, but I like to think that with one look of Jesus’s face, they knew. I like to think that when Jesus called them, they did not need to take the time to deliberate because they were inexplicably drawn to him. I like to think that they sensed his divinity, his holiness, his wholeness.

The following words we heard from the psalmist come to mind: “One thing will I seek after: to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Psalm 27). There he was, right there on the shore, the incarnation of God, calling to Peter and Andrew and James and John. Jesus called them and, in a flash, they went; they became his students, they became his disciples and, just like that, their lives were changed forever.

I’ve been thinking a lot this past week about how we can be, quite literally, taken over by such a strong impulse to follow a leading, to answer a call, to get involved with a cause we are passionate about. There is a word for that...vocation. *Vocation* is different from *profession*, even though we use them somewhat interchangeably these days. *Vocation* comes from the Latin root *vocare*, meaning “to call.” A vocation is something we *must* do; it is as if we are called, like the disciples were called, and we simply must follow.

As students of Christ, as disciples of Christ, what we learn in our spiritual lives can (and probably *should*) alter our life’s course in some way. Men and women of deep faith have been at the forefront of some of the major movements of our age. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Pope Leo are names recognized all over the world. There comes a time in discipleship when *knowing* is not enough. There comes a time in discipleship when the knowing insists to be made manifest in *doing*, doing something to remedy the injustices in our world.

In Little Village, Chicago, a man by the name of Baltazar Enriquez wakes up before sunrise on school day mornings because he has an unofficial bus route. He drives his own van that he

calls his “Magic School bus.” Baltazar and other volunteers escort more than 60 students to school each morning. These are students from families who emigrated to the U.S.; some have green cards and some even have citizenship, but with the risk of unlawful detention at an all time high, standing at a bus stop is simply not safe for many parents. Baltazar Enriquez and his team of volunteer magic school bus drivers are responding, because there comes a time in discipleship when *knowing* insists to be made manifest in *doing*, doing something to remedy the injustices in our world.

Clergy across southern New Hampshire gathered twice this past week in preparation for what we are calling a “moral intervention.” Our message is clear: We are calling for the rule of law to be upheld. The rule of law protects all people, including immigration enforcement personnel. Because the rule of law is not being upheld, we see that our neighbors are being terrorized. People in New Hampshire are being taken off the streets and out of their vehicles without judicial warrants and without any assurance that masked individuals are actually trained immigration enforcement personnel. We are planning a press conference to shed light on the potentially dangerous undermining of public trust in our local law enforcement when they are encouraged to become extensions of federal enforcement measures. New Hampshire leads the nation in the number of local police departments that have agreed to partner with immigration enforcement; the current tally is 13. We will appeal to the Governor to uphold the Equal Protection clause of the 14th amendment of the Constitution; it is written there "*nor shall any State ... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*" Protection of the law is not just extended to citizens of this country; in a democracy, protection of the law is extended to all. New Hampshire clergy are responding to the breakdown in the rule of law, because there comes a time in discipleship when *knowing* insists to be made manifest in *doing*, doing something to remedy the injustices in our world, breaking the yoke of the people’s burden, as the prophet Isaiah describes in our reading today, breaking “the rod of the oppressor.” Friends, it is time for change.

After the unlawful arrest of his cousin, John, Jesus called his disciples and he preached the message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” *Repent* means to facilitate a change, especially a change of heart. Jesus knows that turning the tides of a culture cannot be done by one; turning the tides of a culture takes many...many disciples, many students. We are among the disciples you and I, and there comes a time in discipleship when *knowing* insists to be made manifest in *doing*, doing something to remedy the injustices in our world.

In closing, I remind us that we, each of us, are in ranks with the disciples of Christ, down through the ages, starting on the shores of Galilee and manifesting today in magic school bus drivers. There comes a time when the presence of God breaks through and change is no longer a choice, it is an imperative. May God grant us the courage to say “yes” when and where we are called to be agents of kindness, and voices for justice. So be it. Amen.

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2025/12/02/as-immigration-agents-swept-chicago-this-fall-communities-stepped-in-to-get-kids-to-school-safely>

Pastoral Prayer Dearest Beloved, our minds and our hearts are so full this morning. We are trying to make sense of the senseless, to find reason in the unreasonable, and to see You, Lord, in the inner workings of a culture that seems to be falling apart. Remind us, when we question, that Your presence is alive within us, preceding before us, inspiring us in the moment, and supporting us when we falter. We ask your blessings on those who are without, those who are in pain, and those who are frightened. May we be receptive to Your Holy Spirit working through us to nurture them, and nurture ourselves, in ways unexpected and profound. This I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Benediction I leave you with these words from Ephesians 3:

“I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that... you may be strengthened through his Spirit...that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Amen.”