

Following Jesus Together | Week 1 | January 12, 2020

Happy New Year. I know that might feel weird to say on the 12th, but this is the first time that we've been together in 2020, so I find it fitting.

We are gearing up for our STC weekend next weekend. If you're unfamiliar, STC Weekend is an event our FoC hosts on MLK Weekend every year where we attempt to basically flood our community with the love of Jesus.

We've partner with 7 different organizations in our city that are in one way or another ministering to the most marginalized and needy segments of our community. Our aim is to come alongside them to enhance the work that God does through them on a yearly basis.

And, for us, STC is something of a core marker of what we want our identity to be as a church. Ever since the first church in our FoC was planted, we believed that the call to follow Jesus was always a call to love and care for those around us who are often unloved and uncared for. So, we find it a fitting way to start the new year every year.

With that in mind, I have two things for us. 1.) I want to encourage you if you have not signed up to serve yet. Go ahead and do so now. You can sign up at STCWeekend.com. There are plenty of ways to serve including a lot of family-friendly ways. But, 2.) for the next two weeks, I want to revisit some of the fundamental aspects of who we are as a church or rather who we're aiming to become as a people that will hopefully help you understand why we do STC, but on a larger scale, give you perspective on the life Jesus is inviting us into.

Hopefully, if you're a believer, specifically one that has been a part of our church for a while, what I say won't be new. I might use some fresh language this morning, but it should be familiar. My prayer is that at this time of year when we're thinking about bettering our lives and making resolutions, it'd give you fresh vision for the type life that Jesus has for you.

So, we're going to start by surveying a few different texts this morning in the biography of Jesus' life known as the gospel according to Mark. Starting in chapter 1.

Mark 1:16-20 [16] Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [17] And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." [18] And immediately they left their nets and followed him. [19] And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. [20] And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Flip over....

Mark 2:13-14 [13] He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. [14] And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

One more...

Mark 8:34–35 [34] And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [35] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Now, what do all of these texts have in common? Not a trick question. They all, in some respect, embody a call or an invitation of Jesus to follow him or another way to say it would be invitations to become His disciples.

When we think about Jesus - who he was and what he came to do - we often think about words like “Son of God” or “Savior” or “Messiah” or “Christ”. All of which are immensely important and true about who He is. However, if you were a first century Jew and Jesus showed up in your town or at your synagogue one Sabbath to teach, you would have also put him in another category. The category of “Rabbi”.

Rabbi was a Hebrew title of honor meaning “my teacher” or “my master”. And it most commonly referred to a teacher who would either be employed by a local synagogue or travel from town to town with his “yoke” which was a Hebrew euphemism for his “teaching”. So if you’ve ever wondered what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 11 when he says “my yoke is easy”, he’s talking about his teaching, his message.

And over and over again, throughout the gospels we see Jesus referred to - by those who followed him, by those interested in following him and even those who just want to show him a bit of respect - as “Rabbi”. This actually has some profound implications for how we understand what’s taking place in these passages and what it means for you and I to be followers of Jesus, as well.

I’ll show you what I mean. We’re gonna need to go History Channel nerd here for a moment, but hang with me, it’s going someplace important.

First, the word “disciple” is one of those words that doesn’t do us a whole lot of favors in English. Because it’s not used all that often outside of religious settings. In Hebrew, the word for disciple is “Talmidim” which in the Greek is translated “Ma-theh-tais”.

Most often, we associate it with the word “student” or “learner” and that’s a fine way to translate it, but because Western learning - that the majority of us grew up in focuses primarily on information transfer - these words actually miss what it meant in this context. **A closer idea for us would be the concept of “apprentice.”**

In the Jewish educational system of Jesus’ day, discipleship was the crowning achievement for a Jewish man. It was the apex of Jewish learning. It was like getting the full ride and degree to the Ivy League. This is why when Jesus calls the fishermen, they just drop their nets and go and nobody bats an eye. Zebedee isn’t like, “Hey, yo James, John... what do you think you’re doing these nets aren’t gonna mend themselves!” No, if you had the opportunity to follow a Rabbi... you took it.

You see, in Jesus’ day, there were essentially 3 levels to education:

1. **“bet sefer”** - house of the book - this was essentially like elementary school. Children from about the age of 5 would all enter into this stage to learn things like reading and writing from “The Torah” - which was the first five books of the Bible. In fact, many, if not most, children in this stage would memorize the Torah in its entirety. That’s Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy... memorized. Which, I don’t know about you, but I find incredibly impressive. And this would last until the child was around the age of 12 and the vast majority of children were

done by this point. Females would likely get married and males would apprentice to their fathers in the family business - learning their trade - wood or stone working, fishing, and the like.

2. But, the children who were exceptional. The gifted and talented, so to speak. Would move on to a second phase called "**Bet midrash**". The best moved onto this level. It would be a school built on the side of the synagogue for boys (and boys only) who showed potential and would learn from a full-time paid teacher. Here they would memorize most if not all of the rest of the OT.
3. But, for the truly exceptional. The best of the best would move on to what was called "**Bet Talmud**". This was for the elite. Only the Rhodes scholars of the ancient Jewish world would go on to this third and final level.

And in this stage was not just about learning the things that your Rabbi knew. It wasn't just information transfer to make the grade or get the degree. It was learning to become like who your Rabbi was. To soak up everything about them to one day become like them yourself.

So, if per chance, this were to happen to one of us... which, to be quite honest, the deck would be stacked against most of us, but let's just say it did... you would have 3 goals as an apprentice to your Rabbi.

First, to be with your Rabbi. To 24/7 - all day every day be with the one you followed. Disciples would eat, sleep, travel with their Rabbi. This is why you see the disciples virtually *always* with Jesus in the gospel accounts and why nobody acts like it's even remotely weird.

They wouldn't seek to miss a moment. Rabbis and their disciples had their lives intertwined in ways that would seem unreasonable and potentially creepy to us. Theologian Ray Vanderlaan talks about an old Jewish blessing that said "*May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.*" May you follow him so closely that his dust is all over you, and you begin to be like him more and more. This was the goal and expectation.

So obviously, the second goal would be to become like your Rabbi. That line when Jesus says the whole thing about "fishers of men", he's not just making a silly pun. Give Jesus a bit more credit. He's actually funnier than that. Rather, this was a well-known Hebrew idiom for "great teacher". If you were sort of like a superstar rabbi, you would be called "a fisher of men" because they would essentially be able to "capture the minds and hearts of men". Jesus is essentially saying, "I am a great teacher, come follow me and I will make you like me."

And this is the heart and soul behind apprenticeship in the 1st century world. If you were a talmidim. Your goal would be to become the carbon-copy of your rabbi. Disciples would follow their teacher around and copy his every move. Learning to mimic his mannerisms and the way he spoke. His tone of voice, the way he dressed... you wanted to be just like him.

And all of that was in order that one day you would be able to do what your Rabbi did. The point of apprenticeship was to one day, after soaking up all that you could from your Rabbi to become a Rabbi yourself. That one day, he would turn to you and say, "Okay, now it's your turn." You're up to bat now. Go and make disciples yourself.

And this was crazy hard to get accepted into. To become a talmidim, you'd essentially have to apply and sit in an interview with a Rabbi who would grill you on your knowledge and size you up to see if you had what it took and if he deemed you worthy he would turn to you and say, "come, follow me".

And so this is what's actually happening in these texts this morning. Jesus is inviting Peter and Andrew and James and John and Levi... and subsequently, you and I as well as well as anyone who would - in to the life of his talmidim - his disciple - his apprentice. And I think this has some profound implications for us. That I want to share with you this morning...

The first is this: the invitation of Jesus is an invitation to discipleship

To be a Christian means to be a disciple of Jesus. The word "disciple" is used some 260+ times to refer to Jesus' people in the NT. By contrast, the word Christian used 3. In fact, early on believers we're simply known as followers of the Way.

Now, the difference here is somewhat semantic... but I draw it out because it's very popular to believe - especially in our context - that being a Christian merely means mentally agreeing that some fundamental ideas about Jesus and maybe showing up to church... sometimes. Just say "yes" to these four ideas and show up every now and again and you're good to go for eternity.

In fact - and you may think this is too sharp of me to say - for many, the idea of being a Christian is often more about Jesus following you, than you following Jesus. Jesus to help your day go better. Jesus to help you get the job you want or the spouse you want. Or Jesus to help your kids turn out all right.

But that is not the life that Jesus invites anyone into. His words in Mark 8 make that abundantly clear: **Mark 8:34-35** "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [35] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

For Jesus, it's an all or nothing gig. Jesus invites us to cast everything else aside - to deny ourselves, to lay down our personal desires, ambitions, comforts and control - and have him become the focal point of our existence. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Following Jesus isn't a hobby or an optional part of Christianity. There is no "I'm kinda into Jesus and I'm kinda into camping". As if those two things were comparable. No, following Jesus is meant to be the whole thing.

Now, that doesn't mean that you need to quit your job and become a pastor - you can follow Jesus as a stay at home mom, or an accountant, or a teacher, or whatever... you're meant to follow Jesus where you're at. But it DOES mean that the focal point of your life is meant to be apprenticing to Jesus.

Now, perhaps you're thinking, "But, wait, I thought this whole Christianity thing was about faith? That Jesus is calling us to faith. And isn't faith just believing?"

Yes and no. Yes, this whole Christianity thing is about faith. Jesus is calling us to trust him above all else. **But what you have to understand is that following is what faith looks like with boots on the ground.** Another way to say it would be to say that the way we live reveals what we actually believe.

Imagine, for example, you were sick and a doctor prescribed you medication. You could say that you believe the doctor has made the right diagnosis and the medicine will make you better. But, if you refuse to take it - what do you actually believe? Either that your doctor is incorrect, or that you think you know better... maybe both.

In the same way, following Jesus is saying with our lives - Jesus I trust you. I trust you are for my good. I trust that you know how life works best. That your ways are right and true and good. That you hold the keys to the good life and salvation. **Faith in Jesus and following Jesus are ultimately inseparable.**

So, if following Jesus is what Christianity is all about, what does that practically mean for us? It means if you have faith in Jesus, you order your life around the same three goals of a disciple: In this case, **to be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do the things that Jesus would do.**

It means the first, and I'd argue, most important aim, of our life is to **be with Jesus.**

To be a person who knows Jesus intimately. A person who has deeply experienced his love, and grace and kindness - not just in theoretical ways, but personally. A person who is well acquainted with his gospel - that forgiveness and freedom are found in his sacrifice and resurrection alone. A person consumed by the things He says. A person aware of His activity around them. A person who trusts Him. A person who listens to Him. A person who knows Him. A person who aims to spend every waking moment of their life with your Rabbi.

This is how Jesus says it: **John 15:1-8** [1] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser...[4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The metaphor Jesus uses here is that of a branch and a vine. That the life of a believer only functions properly when it flows from connection to Him.

Now obviously, the question we should be asking is "How?" Like this makes a lot more sense for Peter and Andrew and the rest because, well, Jesus was physically there. And well, Jesus isn't physically here, so how do we do this?

The short answer is - through Holy Spirit - the very person of God given to dwell with believers forever. But, the long answer is by engaging with the Holy Spirit through what we call spiritual disciplines... or what we like to call "practices."

Things like reading and meditating on Scripture, prayer, sabbath, fasting, silence and solitude and others. All of these are vehicles, to - in the language of Jesus - abide in the vine. To bring yourself into connection with God throughout your day, your week, your life... to hit the pause button on all of the things that cloud and distract and take our minds eye away from Jesus and say, "God you're here. You've always been here... but, I have not. I've been in traffic, or dealing with the kids, or on insta or whatever. I have not been here. But now I am here. And You're here. And we're together. - to learn from Him and soak up who He is.

Dallas Willard puts it: "The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds... this is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in this practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our "practicing" we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits -- not the law of gravity -- and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a

compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings.”

He’s saying: look, this is ground zero for life as an apprentice to Jesus. Like if you’re new to this whole Jesus thing - like you have faith in his salvation for you, but you’re not sure where you go from there. Start here. Just start carving out little bits of time, in the morning or at night before bed, or even just periodically throughout your day - build in little habits - to connect with God.

And he says that over time, what begins to take place is with increasing frequency life with God actually becomes our new normal.

And for the record, this is the good stuff of the Christian life. The absolute best part of following Jesus is Jesus - to experience in fuller measure the depths of his love, grace, faithfulness, hope, peace, presence and joy.

So first, be with Jesus, but out of that being with Jesus, 2.) to become like Jesus.

To become a person who lives how Jesus lived. That you think the way that Jesus would think. That you speak the way Jesus would speak. That you interact, relate and respond to others the way that Jesus interacts, relates and responds.

To become a person full of love and grace. A person whose heart level posture is to love their enemies instead of gossip about them or kill them or whatever. A person who trusts God deeply as a good Father who provides instead of person who freaks out in worry at the bills at the end of the month... or over every little detail of their children’s lives.

Essentially, to be a person who puts off what Paul in his letter to the Ephesians calls the “old self” - full of sin, idolatry and pride - and put on a “new self” created in God’s likeness - to become a person like God himself.

In theological terms, this is called sanctification. Language that I find a bit more accessible is “spiritual formation”.

In his book, “An Invitation to a Journey”, Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as “the process of being formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others.” And that is precisely what discipleship is.

And you might be asking, “Well, why would I even want that?” And, I’d answer it with because it’s what you were made for. It’s what life - not just yours - but all of humanity’s is meant to be.

In John 10:10, Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

That word abundantly is the word - “perisos” in Greek. It’s the superlative word that means over and above, more than is necessary, superadded, superior, extraordinary.

I love the way Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson paraphrased it in The Message: **I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.**

Jesus, when he talks about this type of life, isn't just referring to a *quantity* of life - this idea that when you die you will be with Jesus forever. Certainly a huge part of it. Jesus is also referring to a *quality* of life - that there is a way to operate in this world right here and now such that you experience it to the fullest - the way Jesus intended - the way you were always designed for.

To be clear, he's not talking about a life where all of your dreams come true. Or life that goes exactly how you want it go... but a life full of what the Bible would call "the fruit of the Spirit" - a life full of love and joy. A life of peace and patience. A life of kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. A life filled with the power, presence, comfort, hope and love of God. This is what it is to truly be human as God-designed.

I mean, would any of us even try to argue that life is better when it's filled with bitterness and resentment? Like, "You know what I have too much of in my life? Forgiveness and kindness!" Would we try to make a case that worry is the key to human flourishing? Or that selfishness - in whatever form it takes - greed or gossip or self-righteousness or narcissism - are essential to finding the good life? No, I don't think so.

Mulholland later goes on to say that "spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness." And so, apprenticeship to Jesus will mean learning to put off old ways of living and believing - and pursuing wholeness.

And this another reason why following Jesus has to be a whole life endeavor. Because the closer we get to Jesus the more aware we become of even more areas in need of wholeness and healing.

- areas where insecurity and anxiety still reign supreme.
- Areas of apathy and addiction lying unnoticed.
- Areas of impatience and anger and cynicism that we just considered the norm.

So the whole of life as Luther says becomes one of repentance as Jesus makes us more like himself.

But, not just for our own sake. But, also for the good of everyone around us. **The goal of apprenticeship is to carry on his work - to do what Jesus does.**

This is where we have to keep in mind that Jesus wasn't just a Rabbi... he was more than a Rabbi. He was the Son of God, the Messiah - He came to reverse the curse of sin and usher in the Kingdom of God.

It's no accident that Jesus says, "anyone who comes after must take up their cross" an image of the very burden he himself would carry. The goal is not just to know more about the Bible. The goal is not to just have a fulfilling sense of personal relationship with Jesus. Our goal is to actually join up with what Jesus is going on about in the world. To become agents of His love in the world around us.

I'm going to talk more about this one next week in light of Serve the City weekend, but that's Jesus endgame for you - to transform you into a person of love for the sake of the world. As Jesus brings life and healing to the places He inhabits, that we become a people who do the same. A people who serve and care for lost and hurting around us. A people who shares good news of God's love and grace. A people who stand up for what is right and sacrifice themselves for the good of others.

So, as a church, his is who we're aiming to be - a people whose lives are centered on Jesus - who follow him - who are with him, becoming like him, and doing the things he does.

Now, my guess would be - and maybe I'm assuming too much, I apologize if so - but my guess would be that this vision of discipleship is far, far more involved than what you previously thought or feel capable of... but, here's what I want to put out there for you today... it's not.

You see, here's the actual truth being a disciple: the reality is you already are one. As Mulholland says it "Spiritual formation is not an option! The inescapable conclusion is that life itself is a process of spiritual development."

Formation is not actually an option. You are being formed into the image of something. We're all actually apprentices. The only question is apprentices of what?

I love how C.S. Lewis puts it "Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other."

With every decision you make regarding how you'll spend your time, money, relationships and everything in between, you are being formed into something. The way we say it around here is "the things you do, do things to you." There is no neutral. It is the inescapable reality of the human condition. The only choice we have is whether that growth moves us toward wholeness in Christ or toward something else.

According to Jesus, Paul, Lewis, and countless other thinkers, philosophers, and psychologists, Christian or not, all agree: there is no such thing as being undisciplined, everyone is disciplined about something. You have an aim in life whether you know it or not.

- And you can generally see what you're disciplined about based in many ways on how you spend your time, how you spend your money, what your conversations are about
- For most of us, our main aim is being entertained as much as possible so we discipline ourselves around that - so when you hang out in LifeGroup and people begin talking about their lives and what's going on, you may get really quiet and awkward, but man, as soon as someone mentions Clemson football - you can talk for hours on end... Hypothetically speaking, of course.
- For some of us, spending time reading the Bible sounds like this impossible task that you never seem to have time for but the moment you get an email from work or you find out the latest episode of your show come on or someone reached out to you to go hang out - its like you magically have the time for it now - that reveals where you are truly disciplined.

We all have one main thing in life that we center ourselves around but is the main thing one of abundance that Jesus maps out for you or is your main aim whatever your culture, your upbringing, your feelings, your circumstances, or your TV watchlist has laid out for you?

Moment by moment we are choosing what kind of life we are really after. And those moments are forming us whether we know it or not.

To choose to live a life of wholeness found in Christ begins with assessing where you are:

- It's a recognition that your **time and attention and adoration** go towards a million other things every single day. And disciplining your life to look more and more like Jesus means cutting out the million little things that suck away at your soul each day in so you can prioritize around just one thing - the presence of God.
- It's a recognition that your **money goes towards the things that you care about most** - most of which have no direct correlation to warming your affections in Jesus and becoming more like Him. And disciplining your life to be more like Jesus means cutting out the things that you spend your money on so you can prioritize around just one thing - the mission of God. Caring and providing for others the way God has cared for and provided for you.
- It's acknowledging that watching the next episode or staying at your phone for hours on end, or checking your phone the first thing when you wake up and the last thing before you go to bed is all shaping you and turning you into something - and is that someone looking more and more like Jesus or less?

And so it begs the question for many of us, if you were to plot out the current trajectory of your life out for the next 5, 10, 20 or 30 years... who or what are you becoming? Would you more fully be Jesus expressed through your personality, your gender, your socio-economic status, or whatever... or would you be something else?

So, I know for many of you, following Jesus - or the lack thereof - in your life is not for lack of desire. I know that many of us want to grow as a disciple of Jesus. The problem is we don't know where to start and it feels like the deck is stacked against us.

Our culture sets us up at a profound disadvantage here. Busyness, tech, hurry, etc. swallow us whole and leave us feeling empty and hollow, like we couldn't do many of these things no matter how badly we want to.

So because we know we're there, I want to introduce you to something: **FollowingJesusTogether.com**

Over the years, our Family of Churches has accumulated loads of resources on the spiritual practices and growing as a disciple of Jesus. FollowingJesusTogether.com is our attempt to compile them all in one easy to find and use space to help you get started.

It's a work in progress... or a living website, if I may. Our plan is to keep adding to it with more content we develop and to come back to it consistently through our future as a church.

Because here's the thing: Cultivating a life with Jesus that becomes like Jesus to do what Jesus does - takes practice. Specifically, it takes practice in community with the help of the Spirit. We have to partner together with God and other believers in our transformation. And truthfully, it's not even just a *we-have-to* thing, it's a *we-get-to* thing. Following Jesus with each other is a gift.

Now I'm a little biased here - but honestly, **being in a LifeGroup** is one of the best things we do here. Not the easiest or the most comfortable thing we do... but the best. Getting you into relationships with other people, committing to each other. That becomes the training ground for how you grow into a disciple of Jesus.

FollowingJesusTogether.com is our attempt to give you as much access as possible to content, and training, and tools to help us grow together.

So let's say, where to begin with the Bible. You can go to **followingjesustgether.com** and find a slew of tools to get started . It might look like subscribing to the **Bible reading plan** and meeting up for coffee once a week with someone in your LifeGroup to go over what you've been reading or texting your LifeGroup each day about what you read.

Let's say you have no clue how to pray. We've got you. Tools and guides to walk you through cultivation a life with Jesus.

Three resources that I'm really excited about - we put together daily guides for fighting against 3 things that in my experience seem to plague our lives the most: feeling overwhelmed, feeling anxious, and feeling apathetic. These devos are 3 weeks long, there's a passage for you to read and an activity to do.

Each of these 3 tracks takes about 5 minutes a day and could make some radical changes to your life if you stick with them.

So in LifeGroups, here's what we're going to do together this week - we're going to the website and you'll team up with people in your LifeGroup to work through one spiritual practice. That's it.

We just want you to go to the site and pick one thing to start with. That's it. What's the one thing you can do this week when you look at those practices to grow in your affection for Jesus and become more like Him? Just one thing.

And here's what I'll leave you with this morning.

The invitation to follow Jesus is available to anyone.

I would hate for us to miss this. These passages want us to consider who these people were that Jesus called. Fishermen, tax collectors. If they were fishermen, then what did that mean? It meant they weren't the elite. They weren't the best of the best. They weren't on any "top 30 under 30 lists of Jewish society. In fact, this is what is even criticized of them later in Acts that they were "ordinary, unschooled men".

Consider Levi... he was tax collector. That doesn't just mean that he worked for the IRS. This meant he was on Rome's payroll. The very Rome that the Jew's felt oppressed under. The very Rome that threatened their existence. Not to mention that tax collector's were notorious for taking a bit extra from folks to line their own pockets. He was not the moral compass of society to say the least. Nor the most popular guy on the block.

And we didn't look at these texts, but there are other places in the gospel accounts that show us even more - that women - including women of ill-repute were counted among Jesus disciples - which would have been unheard of in this time.

And this is the good news of the gospel. Following Jesus is not about making ourselves worthy enough to be called his follower. It's about coming to the who makes us worthy.

There is no specific "type" that is invited. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is not about you being worthy enough to become one. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done. No matter how unworthy you may feel to receive this invitation. The invitation is for you.

Pray. Communion.