

“Dimensions of Discipleship” a sermon based on Luke 9:51-62 and Galatians 5:1-2, 13-25, preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 26 June 2016.

We’re always work in progress, a building under construction, clay in a potter’s hands, a student never finishing the degree, an apprentice perpetually practising, a road always being dug up.

God is never finished with us. God keeps working with us, partnering us.

We’re followers. We’re disciples.

I have included in your bulletin ideas from Donald Gelpi. Gelpi talks about the process of growth as conversion, perhaps an uneasy word for you, so think transformation, reconstruction, growth.

At our core, growing in our openness to the way of Jesus Christ, to God’s will, to the way of love. It’s what unifies, integrates and transforms the other forms of conversion.

Growing in our emotional life, in our capacity to experience the true, the good and the beautiful.

Growing in our intellectual life, moving beyond unquestioned acceptance of conventional wisdom, engaging in fair-minded, critical deliberation, welcoming dialogue, freely admitting mistakes.

Gelpi says that people who do not grow in this dimension are prone to authoritarianism, fundamentalism and black and white, know it all thinking.

Growing morally, in our personal conscience, in our sensitivity to the needs of others and our commitment to their well-being, growing in generous self-giving and in courageous action.

Growing socio-politically, taking responsibility for the common good through the just reform of social institutions, growing in our commitment to justice.

Each dimension reinforcing and strengthening the other.

We can look back on our life, and trace times, relationships, events, contexts when one or some of these have been evident.

A context or a relationship that drew out the best in us.

A context or a relationship that challenged us and we had to dig deeper.

A word someone spoke that helped free us, ungluing our stuckness.

A perspective we had not seriously considered before that changed how we saw.

And I like Gelpi’s talk of “questioned acceptance” and “critical assessment”.

Much of the commentary about Brexit is being linked with other world trends suggesting caution about “taking our country back”, “making our country strong again”.

It is a time to bring critical assessment and questioning acceptance.

I found the framework helpful and so I offer it to you.

You might find it helpful to sit with this for a time.

Another way to imagine ourselves is as pilgrims on a journey, people on the move. That's how Luke presents the Christian life. Today we begin his travel narrative that goes for ten chapters in the gospel.

We are a people on the move, people on the move.

We're on a journey to Jerusalem, and we know what happens there.

Jerusalem - with foreboding, with threat, with possible breakthrough.

Jerusalem where we will wrestle with powers.

Where we will be put to the test unlike anything we have experienced before.

Jerusalem where love finally wins amid terrible violence.

Jerusalem where the way of Jesus is decisively revealed.

We need to go through Samaria and it's going to be difficult.

The Samaritans, known for pagan worship.

Tainted, racially and religiously.

They built a rival Temple, on Mt Gerizim and claim it as the only true Temple.

They tried to stop Jews building the Temple in Jerusalem.

The conflict and bitterness is long and deep.

So when they refuse to receive the disciples, James and John say to Jesus – We should tell them to go to hell, to call down fire to consume them.

And Jesus rebuked them, a strong word, not a gentle correction.

Don't condemn people to hell.

Don't call down judgement on people.

Even if they do not receive us, even if they worship differently, even if they trap us in their view of us, don't get trapped with them.

Be free of the history of conflict.

Shake the dust off your feet and move on.

We've got to get to Jerusalem.

That's where we are going.

Affective conversion – giving up the anger that seeks revenge for people being unwelcoming, inhospitable, unresponsive.

And they kept going, to another village.

Someone says "I will follow you wherever you go."

But the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

Get ready for a life of insecurity, of life-giving conversion, of journey, of pilgrimage.

Get ready for a life of being hosted and of receiving, of grace.

Get ready for a life of trusting God.

A couple were driving and came across road work after road work.

They weaved through one set of red cones after another over a long journey, and finally the road work ended.

There was the sign of work completed. And one said to the other ... that is what I want on my gravestone.

"The end of construction. Thank you for your patience."

To another Jesus said, follow me.

First, let me go and bury my father.

Let the dead bury their own dead, as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Kenneth Bailey, the New Testament scholar who lived and taught in the Middle East for forty years says, "The phrase 'to bury one's father' refers to the duty of the son to remain at home and care for his parents until they are laid to rest respectfully" (Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 26). If a son asks permission to leave home prior to the father's death, the father is likely to interpret that as a desire that the father die.

Everyone listening to the dialogue knows that naturally his father will refuse to let the boy wander off on some questionable enterprise.

The preacher Fred Craddock points out the radical nature of Jesus' words. Jesus is claiming priority over the best, not the worst, of human relationships. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil but to choose him over the family. And, says Craddock, the remarkable thing is that those who have done so have been freed from possession and worship of family and have found the distance necessary to love them. (Fred Craddock, *Interpretation Commentary, —Luke*, p. 144.)

Another said ...

I will follow you but let me first say farewell to those at my home.

"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (v. 62).

Ploughing is exacting work.

The farmer controls the plough with one hand, guides or goads the animal with the other hand and watches a fixed point ahead so the furrow is straight.

Looking back causes the farmer to lose sight of what is ahead, the fixed point, and to lose control of the plough.

Jesus overturns the conventional morality of blood solidarity or of home solidarity and raises up a new, all inclusive solidarity of the human race.

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God is never finished with us. God keeps working with us, partnering us, calling us, teaching us.

We're followers. We're disciples.

And, says Paul, this work in progress is God's own spirit in you, bearing fruit.

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## **KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN**

*growing in courage to live the Jesus way*



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## Dimensions of Discipleship

People who seek to follow Jesus are called disciples. The Jesuit theologian Donald Gelpi names dimensions of how God helps followers mature, turning from irresponsible to responsible behaviour. Responsible behaviour measures personal decisions against the ideals and principles of the reign of God taught and embodied by Jesus Christ. It is a process of conversion or growth.

### **1. Heart conversion responds to God's self-giving presence and loving action in our lives.**

Because God loves us first and initiates the relationship, faith involves an open receptivity to God's will. Faith also involves a dynamic commitment of our freedom in action, to renounce wrong and to love God through the service of one another and our world.

### **2. Affective conversion seeks to promote a healthy emotional life.**

This lifelong process invites us to face repressed negative emotions like fear, shame, and guilt that can cause us to struggle. We grow in our capacity to experience the true, the good and the beautiful in life.

### **3. Intellectual conversion takes responsibility for the truth or falsity of our beliefs in our commitment to the search for truth.**

Intellectual conversion moves beyond the unquestioned acceptance of conventional wisdom and engages in fair-minded, critical deliberation to weigh the pros and cons of different arguments. Humbly conceding that there is more than one right answer, we welcome dialogue, recognise the limits of human knowledge and can freely admit mistakes.

### **4. Moral conversion involves formation of our personal conscience.**

We critically assess conventional morality, including what are named as virtues and vices. Moral conversion requires sensitivity to the needs of others and commitment to their well-being. It engenders generous self-giving and courageous action for one's beliefs.

### **5. Socio-political conversion takes responsibility for promoting the common good through the just reform of social institutions.**

Socio-political conversion awakens us to the social injustice that afflicts our suffering world. It involves commitment to justice, to a universal human cause such as welcoming refugees, alleviating poverty, addressing climate change.

*These help us grow in living the Jesus way. They mutually reinforce and strengthen one another. The lack of growth in one area can sabotage and even subvert growth in another.*