

Images of Discipleship
“Soldier”
Matthew 28:18 – 20; 1 Peter 2:11 - 12

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

1 Peter 2:11 – 12:

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

So to begin this morning I want begin with a question.

“What is the core calling of the church?”

If you could boil it down to the essence of what the church locally and globally is all about, what would it be?

Tell the person next to you.

(To help in your discussion you may want to ask, what is it the church can do they no one else can?)

I don't know what you said but:

Is it environmental care and climate justice?

Is it social justice full stop?

Is it political activism?

Is it aid and community development?

(Just to be honest and clear, I am being little bit provocative this morning).

All of those dimensions may and can alter the quality of a person's life and can make the world and our immediate environment better.

The thing is, you don't have to be Christian to do these things – true???

There are plenty of secular groups doing environmental care and social justice.

There are a lot of people who would self-define themselves as non-Christian advocating for political activism.
There are a lot of other religions supporting aid and community development.

None of these is the core business of the church.
So what is it?

Jesus last command was what? It's in one of our readings this morning:
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [so excellent; He is the reigning King].
Therefore go and make disciples..."

So my next question is this: what is a 'disciple'?

A learner, a pupil, one whose whole life is shaped by a teacher.
A disciple or discipleship is not something you do; it's actually someone you are.

And to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, is to be a disciple of King Jesus.

It means that our whole lives are governed by the King; his pardon we receive, his example to follow, his teaching to obey, his presence to experience, his love to share and his good news to proclaim.

To give our lives over to King Jesus is the highest calling there is!
All of life and all of eternity hangs on that decision.

What Scripture then does it expand on what it means to be disciple by giving us number of images.

Our reading this morning gives a three but I only want to talk about one this morning.

Peter says "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, *which war against your soul.*"

So what's the imagery?

Paul, the Apostle Paul, talks about fighting to the good fight¹ and refers co-workers as fellow soldiers.²

It's one of warfare; to be a disciple is to a *soldier* in a war.

¹ 1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:12;

² Philippians 2:25; 2 Timothy 2:3; Philemon 2

So how does that resonate with you this morning?

You may not like talk of warfare or the use of military metaphor, but it is inescapable.

We do have a battle with sin and self.

Do you know the story of the frog and a scorpion?

There was a frog sitting next to a swift running stream and a scorpion approaches him.

The scorpion says to the frog, "Would you please carry me across the stream. I can't swim but want to get to the other side. Would you do that for me please."

And of course the frog is wary of the scorpion and says to him, "Do you really think that I a frog would let you, a scorpion, hop on my back and take you to the other side of the river?"

And the scorpion says, "Well, why not?"

The frog says, "Well, you're a scorpion and you have that stinger. How do I know that half way across this stream that you won't poison me to death with your stinger?"

The scorpion replied, "Well then we'd both be dead."

The frog then asked, "How do I know that when we reach the other side you will sting me with your sting."

And the scorpion answered, "I would so grateful that I wouldn't dare do such a thing."

The frog thought fair enough say's to the scorpion, "Jump on."

The frog is swimming across the river and halfway across he feels a sharp pain in his back – the pain of the scorpion's stinger.

And as the numbness crept up his body the frog says the scorpion, "Why? Why would you do that?"

And the scorpion replies, "Didn't you know – it's in my nature."

We do have desires that are at times so destructive – it's in our nature.

Part of the human condition is this capacity to cause hurt and disappointment and pain.

It manifests itself in so many ways.

There are some people who have a speech impediment – they just can't help but badmouth other people. It's like criticism is their second language. If there's something to moan about, have a dig, a failing to point out, they'll let you know.

And talking about people in churches (not this one off course ☺).

Even though we've been given a new nature we are still afflicted by a human condition that wants to reassert itself in ways, that if we're honest, that is bent towards the destruction of ourselves and others.

To be a Christ-soldier – a soldier centred on Jesus – is to take a stand against the desires that threaten our souls.

But if we are to honour the Biblical witness the battle is not only with sin and self.

The Evil One

There are other entities – unseen, intelligent but very real – at play in our lives.

Ephesians 6:10 – 12

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Or as the Living Bible puts it:

“For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies – the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.”

When you came to know Jesus your relationship with God changed.

You also received a new family, the largest family in the world.

Your relationship with yourself changed as you received a new identity as a child of God.

You have also established a new relationship with the powers of darkness.

Faith in the Lord Jesus has introduced you to a battleground.

You antagonised the evil one by given your allegiance to Jesus Christ as King.

Before he didn't have to pay any attention to you but now you've been enlisted in the Lord's army.

John Calvin who is often portrayed as being quite dour and highly intellectual and even 'unspiritual', was very clear about what the Bible said about the devil.

He wrote these words:

The tendency of all that Scripture teaches concerning devils is *to put us on our guard* against their wiles and machinations, that we may provide ourselves with weapons strong enough to drive away the most formidable foes.

For when Satan is called the god and ruler of this world, the strong man armed, the prince of the power of the air, the roaring lion, the object of all these descriptions is to *make us more cautious and vigilant, and more prepared for the contest...*

Being forewarned of the constant presence of an enemy the most daring, the most powerful, the most crafty, the most unrelenting, the most completely equipped with all the engines and the most expert in the science of war, let us not allow ourselves to be overtaken by sloth or cowardice, but, on the contrary, with minds aroused and ever on the alert, let us stand ready to resist; and, knowing that this warfare is terminated only by death, let us study to persevere.

Above all, *fully conscious of our weakness* and lack of skill, let us invoke the help of God, and attempt nothing without trusting in him, since it is his alone to supply counsel, and strength, and courage, and arms.³

It other words, we are not given information about the spiritual realm to arouse our curiosity but to war us about what we are up against.

And I don't about you, but there are times when it is one thing after another!
It's like, you can't get break!

I had a week in my life that stands out in my mind where nothing went. Amongst other things, nearly every finger had a band aid on from work place accident, a lost my wallet and suffered a flat tire while travelling from Rotorua to Tauranga. There was other stuff going on as well.

I was like, "What is going on???"

Well it happened that the flat tire made me late to an evening service and arrived just after it finished.

During the message the speaker had a word of knowledge, "accident proneness".

So thankfully a friend at the service introduced the speaker to me and he said, you think it's accident proneness but it's actually a spiritual attack.

Or it may be in your thought life.

³ Calvin's Institutes 14.13 [John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion - Christian Classics Ethereal Library \(ccel.org\)](http://www.ccel.org)

Or it might be these thoughts that come out of nowhere either to tempt you or accuse you or discourage you or even try to deceive you.
So you think to yourself, “Where did those come from???”
And it’s not just the presence of these thought of the intensity.

And if he can he will look for a “place to land” or “room” to make take up residence in, in our lives.
He will look to see where we have become embittered or opened ourselves up to the occult or engaged areas of sin that we haven’t dealt with.
And once there he will seek to try and do his work.

But a Christ-soldier will evict the trespasser and keep aware of this unseen realm.

So we are at war – are you encouraged this morning 😊?

Well there’s a third area that needs to highlighted:

The World.

1 John 2:15 – 17:

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do – comes not from the Father but from the world.
The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

Now, here when it refers to “the world”, it is not this physical planet being referred to, right?

By world it means the sinful, broken, rebellious and evil aspects of this world; the spirit of the age with all its goals, values and aspirations that are opposed to God.

In other words, in every age and place on this planet, there will always be cultural pressures and assumptions that are at odds with following Jesus.

And it has be said that the further the Western culture drifts from its Christian roots, the greater it will be at odds with the Church and followers of Jesus.

This growing pressure to capitulate and cohere to cultural norms is a battleground.

Christ-soldiers take a stand even when the pressure is on.

So what's our response this morning as disciples who Christ-soldiers in a warzone?

Well for one, we need to acknowledge the battle is real.

We can't ignore it's reality.

Yes, there are times of peace, especially since God is the God of Peace and war has been won when Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead.

We are acknowledge too that in the battles we fight, our own ability and resources aren't enough.

Ephesians 6 verse 10:

“Finally, be strong *in the Lord* and in *his* mighty power.”

His mighty power, this strength, is the Holy Spirit who lives within you.

When the pressure is on, when self seeks to reassert itself, when the devil makes his presence know, the Spirit of the Lord is our strength.

And finally, you don't have to fight alone.

In fact, you shouldn't fight alone.

To be a Christ-soldier is not only to pray for others but with others.

So is that you this morning?

Is there a battle raging in your life right now?

Let's pray.