RCA Worship Resource Toolkit: Sermon on discipleship

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Disciple-shift: From “Churchianity” to Discipleship
Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

Introduction: What does it mean to be a Christian?

Good morning, everyone. I would like to begin this morning with something funny I recently saw: kids’ answers on a Catholic elementary school test. In this test children were asked questions about the Old and New Testaments. Here’s what they came up with:

Kids’ answers on a Catholic elementary school test

- Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark. Noah built the ark and the animals came in pears.
- Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt during the day, but a ball of fire during the night.
- The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- The seventh commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
- The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
- When the three wise guys from the east side arrived they found Jesus in the manager.
- Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption.
- Jesus enunciated the golden rule, which says to do unto others before they do one to you.
- The epistles were the wives of the apostles, and Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

Pretty funny, right? I was trying to picture the nice nun who was correcting these. “Well isn’t that special…” But what you may have noticed in these children’s answers is that parts of these answers were correct, but they missed other parts, like they misspelled something, or misunderstood something. Somehow they missed it.

Have any of you ever had one of those times when the light bulb kind of went on…You have a revelation, and you realize, “Man, I have been missing it!” I have a sense that I am in one of those right now. I sense that God is stirring something deeply within me as a pastor—as deeply as I have sensed God stir anything else within me. I think this stirring could have seismic implications for how I, and Lord willing, we might view our faith and church life. It is regarding our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and to be the church. Let me tell you what I mean…

Score matters. A couple years ago I went to a basketball game of one of my sons, and I was running a little late. When I got there it was quiet, which is kind of weird, because usually it is loud as parents are shouting at their young Lebrons and Stephen Currys to score. Then I noticed that the scoreboard wasn’t working. I asked somebody what the
score was, and they very helpfully replied, “Hey Einstein, you might have noticed that the scoreboard isn’t working, I have no idea, my guess is that the team with more points is winning.” “Thanks,” I said. People were just kind of checking their Facebook posts, and it was very quiet, fans weren’t really into the game, coaches were having a rough time coaching, because they didn’t know how much time was left on the clock, or when to make substitutions, the kids had no urgency and didn’t know who was winning. It was totally impacting the game. Then all of a sudden, the power came on, the scoreboard went up, and guess what happened? Everything changed—kids were focused, coaches started coaching, and people started yelling at their kids and insulting the officials just the way they were supposed to. Score matters.

Well, in the American church how do we keep score? How is success usually measured in the church? How do we determine if that’s a successful church? [If you have a conversational sermon style, you might want to ask the congregation here...] Usually there are three things: Buildings, budgets, and butts in a pew—maybe a little crass way of saying it, but pretty accurate, isn’t it? If the buildings are big and impressive, budgets are bulging, and lots of people are crammed in the building, at least in the American church, it is considered successful. What does it mean to be a Christian in our culture? Dress up, go to church, learn about God, give a little bit in the offering, and go home. It is about going to church, not really being the church.

The problem is really twofold.
Is this really what Jesus taught about Christianity and the church, and is it really working? Take a look at the following statistics regarding morality and lifestyle issues of Christians and non-Christians.

- Divorce rates are about the same.
- The percentage of men who regularly view porn is roughly the same.
- Christians are considered to be two times as likely to have racist attitudes as non-Christians.
- Domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse are just as prevalent among Christians as non-Christians.

Is this a problem, folks? What’s up with that? Shouldn’t being a Christian and going to church have a bigger impact on our lives? Is this really what it means to be a Christian, and are buildings, budgets, and butts in a pew really considered success? Is it what Jesus taught? Maybe we are using the wrong scorecard.

Here’s the deal, Jesus never talked about just being a Christian—ever. In fact, Jesus never even used the term. The term “Christian” was only used three times in the whole New Testament…three (Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16). It was used as a term for those associated with Christ. To Jesus it wasn’t about simply associating with Christ, going to church, believing certain things about God, and calling ourselves Christians. It also doesn’t appear that Jesus was interested in starting another religion, but was interested in starting a movement—a discipleship movement. For Jesus, it was
all about discipleship. The word disciple occurs 270 times in the New Testament, and it has radically different implications than simply calling ourselves a Christian—going to church, learning some things about God, giving some money, and going home. This is the big idea that I hope to communicate today: It’s time for a shift from “churchianity” to discipleship. Churchianity is this notion in our culture that Christianity is simply dressing up, going to church, learning about God, giving a little bit in the offering, and going home. There, I did my church thing. So, you might be wondering, what’s the difference, what’s the difference between churchianity and discipleship? What does it really mean to be a disciple?

What does it mean to be a disciple?
Any idea how many Americans claim to be Christian? Any guesses? 80 percent. Only six percent tithe, one in four live together outside of marriage. Only half the people who say they attend church regularly actually do. Fewer than one in five who claim to be Christians have a worldview of even a few fundamental biblical beliefs. Listen to this: as many as 80 percent of the millennials, the emerging generation, are leaving church and will never come back. 80 percent! How are we doing?

Folks, this is a little bit of a tangent, but I have real concerns about this generation of kids. First of all, have you ever traveled abroad, and have you seen the way the kids study? I mean, it is considered a privilege to go to school, and they are going after it. What are our kids doing often times: playing video games on their smartphones… yelling, “Cool, I shot him!” It’s not exactly going to get them ahead in the world. Now, that’s just education. How about spiritual education? Are we really passing on our faith to our kids? Are we discipling them in a love for Jesus and his church in such a way as to overcome the current trends? The kind of love, devotion, and spiritual rigor that is going to prepare them for the post-Christian world that they will find themselves in? The world we live in is radically discipling our kids everyday in all kinds of values and lifestyle issues that are not only unwise, but are contrary to the kingdom of God. Friends, we need to figure this one out, teaching and pouring our lives into our kids spiritually. Teaching them what it means to be a disciple following Jesus.

Let’s take a look at what Jesus taught. A great definition of discipleship is found in Matthew 4:18-22. This is the story of where Jesus called his first disciples Peter and Andrew to be his disciples. Let’s read this together...

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 fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for 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.

What? They left everything to follow Jesus? Yep, immediately! Now, a little background here… This wasn’t the first time that Andrew and Peter met Jesus. In other words this
was not a random drive-by, disciple-making process by Jesus. In John 1, we see John the Baptist and Andrew were hanging out one day and Jesus appeared. John stopped what he was doing and said, “Look, the Lamb of God” (1:36). They ended up hanging out with Jesus for the day. Before they did, Andrew found his brother Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah, the Christ” (meaning the “anointed one”). They then got to spend the day with the Savior of the world.

So, when Jesus called them to follow him I can imagine they were like, “What, really, us? Stinky, foul-mouthed fishermen, following you, a rabbi and the savior of the world? Are you kidding me?” After they had been with Jesus, and they saw with their own eyes what he was like—so compelling, so awesome—it was a no-brainer. They threw down their nets and followed Jesus immediately. I think when we really grasp who Jesus is, what he has done, what he can do, what he will do and what eternity will be like, it becomes a no-brainer for us too.

Jesus’ call to Peter and Andrew in v. 19 gives us a simple outline of…

**What does it mean to be a disciple?**

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men [or people]” (v. 19). (I memorized this in the older NIV84 version which uses exclusive language, so we will use “people” vs. “men”.) From this one simple verse we find three key attributes of what it means to be a disciple.

Say it with me…follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.

1. **“Follow me…”**

These first two words of Jesus to Andrew and Peter are a simple invitation to follow him. This indicates our acceptance of Jesus as our Savior and Lord of our lives. This speaks of **spiritual rebirth** primarily at the head level, and as such it is a decision that we need to make.

A man named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. (He was the original “Nick at Nite”.) He clearly had a spiritual longing and hunger, and wanted to know more about the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about, so he asked to meet with Jesus privately. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). Jesus was telling Nick that he had to be born again. Now Nick, being a Pharisee, an academic, and a ruler in that community, was a little confused by this. He may have been thinking, “I may not know everything, but I’m pretty sure I’m too big to get back inside of mom.” However, Jesus was teaching that even as you were born physically, you need to be born again spiritually. There are some similarities between childbirth and spiritual rebirth. We were born out of the darkness of the womb into the light of life, and breath. Spiritually, apart from Christ we are in a state of spiritual darkness, or death, really—no life.
Many of us can probably remember what it was like before you came to faith in Jesus Christ. I know I can. Before I had a relationship with Christ, the Bible was just words on a page and profoundly boring. When I heard a Christian song on the radio, I would quickly say, “What is this? Lame!” and I would change the station. I totally lived for myself, consumed with my own agenda. I did not want anyone else telling me what to do, or infringing on my fun, and had no prayer life or any meaningful connection with God. However, when God broke into my life in a powerful way, and I opened myself to Christ and a relationship with him, it was like a light bulb in my soul turning on. All of a sudden the word of God was more than words on a page. It came alive and I sensed the spirit of God speaking to me through them. I would hear a pastor on the radio, or hear a Christian song, and I would tune in to it, and think “Hey, they are talking about my friend, Jesus!” I had a new desire to serve others, use my gifts, make a difference, learn about God, share my faith, experience God and began to enjoy prayer and his presence. It was not a dead religion but a living relationship with Jesus. I had spiritual new life; maybe you have a similar story.

Now, there are also some critical differences between childbirth and spiritual rebirth. For example, you were born with absolutely no help from you. You didn’t cry out from the womb. “Mom, I’m tired of this place, I am outta here. I got things to do, let’s go!” No, you had no choice in the matter. But Jesus made it clear that this new rebirth is a decision we need to make. We make a choice to put our trust and faith in Jesus Christ and to follow him (John 3:16-18).

Now, here is where we need a “disciple-shift”—from churchianity to discipleship. Biblical Christianity calls us not just to make Jesus our Savior (saving us from sin, death, the devil, and hell), but also our Lord—the leader and master of our lives. As it says in Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Jesus simply says, “Follow me.” He is meant to lead us, and we are to follow.

Another biblical word for this is to repent. To repent means to take a U-turn—to turn from following myself, and the winds of the culture, to following Jesus. It is a turn from an “I am in charge, it’s all about me, I got this, and I don’t need God” attitude, to surrendering to and following Jesus. This is the first element of discipleship: following Jesus.

Many Christians today have this “all you have to do is pray a little prayer and you will be saved” kind of theology, and that’s it. Is this right? Wives, would you be excited on the wedding day, when the ceremony is over, and your husband says, “Whew, glad I got that over with, now I can do whatever I want! William Wallace, baby—freedom! Now it’s party time.” No, the wedding is just the beginning of a lifetime of loving and serving each other. Others are sold a brand of Christianity where, when we accept Christ into our lives, he will fulfill all our wishes and plans for our lives, and it will be perfect and easy, riding on clouds with baby angels. No, not true. A disciple is someone who knows Jesus and willingly follows him. I used to be self-ruled; now I am following Jesus and his will and ways in my life. Being a disciple is first following Jesus.
Secondly, Jesus says, “and I will make you…”

2. “…and I will make you…”

The next five words in this verse speak of a process of spiritual re-formation—or transformation. Christ begins to form his life in us. This is not only a decision with our minds, but it involves a transformation of our hearts. Discipleship involves molding our hearts to become more like his heart. In other words, discipleship is making a decision to follow Jesus, and in this process Jesus changes us to become more like him. Spiritual writer Dallas Willard puts it this way, “A mature disciple is one who effortlessly does what Jesus would do if Jesus were him or her.” A disciple of Jesus begins to think like Jesus, act like Jesus, behave like Jesus, and most importantly look like Jesus. We begin to take on his character—love, joy, peace, patience. Discipleship is not simply going to church, or any other religious practice—it really means becoming more and more like Jesus in our everyday, ordinary, day-in and day-out lives. Does that mean we blow off church or Bible studies, or other activities in the church? No, they are not the ends, but the means to help us grow as disciples of Christ.

Now, there’s no way in one message that we can even begin to sort out all the implications of becoming more like Jesus. A great place to begin considering what it means to be a disciple is to meditate on the greatest message Jesus ever told, and perhaps the greatest sermon ever given, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew chapters 5-7). Over and over again in this message Jesus says, “You have heard it said… but I tell you.” In other words, in Jesus’ context, there were many popular teachings from the culture, and even from the religious establishment, of how to live our lives. However, Jesus over and over again in his Sermon on the Mount clarifies what it really means to be his disciple. These teachings of Jesus have rather radical implications for our faith and our lifestyle of what it really means to follow Jesus in our daily lives, in such areas as anger, marriage, sex, living with difficult people, our stuff, worry, prayer, and much more.

This work of being transformed or reformed is a work of the Holy Spirit of God, who does his work in us. Don’t be fooled, it is not magic and does not happen by mistake. We are to be actively involved in this process. Notice what it says in Philippians 2:12-13 in your notes… Wait—so who does this work of transforming work, God or us? Paul would say “Yes, it’s both.” Salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9), and we are called to work out what God has worked in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This work of being a disciple and discipling others is a process that we are actively involved in. Being a disciple is following Jesus, becoming more like Jesus, and finally, it is learning to do what Jesus did.

Jesus said, “…and I will make you fishers of people.”

3. “…fishers of people.”
The final three words in this verse indicate a response of action. This leads us to spiritual reproduction. It leads to a change in what we do with our hands or actions. In other words, a disciple of Jesus is saved for heaven after we die, pie in the sky in the sweet by and by, we are saved for a purpose: spiritual reproduction.

Now, all their lives Peter and Andrew had fished for fish. They worked every day, studied the good fishing spots, working to maintain good strong nets, throwing these nets into the water, and pulling out fish—hopefully lots of them. Jesus said, “Now I am going to make you fishers of people.” This is a metaphor for going out and reaching people who are lost broken and hurting. Helping them to follow Jesus, become more like Jesus, and make them disciples who make disciples. The last thing Jesus does before leaving this earth is to give his disciples a great commission, or mission. Here’s how Jesus stated it in Matthew 28. Jesus said, “Go,” or literally, in your going, wherever you go, make disciples who make disciples. Notice how Paul states it in 2 Timothy 2:2. This is spiritual reproduction. Notice that Paul indicates here four generations of disciple-making: “The things you have heard me say (generation one), I am entrusting to you (generation two), entrust to reliable people (generation three), who will also be able to teach others (generation four).” Do you see it? By definition, being a disciple is one who makes disciples of others. The goal of discipleship for Jesus was to become a disciple who actually makes disciples of others. In other words, spiritual reproduction.

Let me ask you, what was Jesus’ strategy for changing the world? Yes, he preached, he taught, he healed, he delivered and he set people free. But what was his main work? Where did he spend the majority of his time? Pouring his life into the three (Peter, James and John), and then into his 12 disciples. He took 12 fishermen, tax collectors, and ordinary people, called them to follow him, and they were transformed by him. This has mushroomed into a movement of more than 2 billion followers of Christ today. Life-on-life, intentional, relational, pouring-his-life-into-them, disciple-making. I would argue that this was Jesus’ primary work. For too long we have made discipleship something other than what Jesus defined it as. We think of discipleship as a curriculum we work through, or learning a certain body of material, or completing a class. Not so! Jesus defines it as actually making disciples who make disciples.

Now, let me be clear, this is a demanding, difficult, painful, and beautiful work. Notice what it says in Galatians 4:19. Now, how many of you have ever been a part of, or witnessed, a child being born. How many of you would describe childbirth as a minor inconvenience, or something you just do on Sunday. No, it is a raw, painful, bloody, messy, all-out commitment. Becoming like Christ will cost us something, but notice—Paul wasn’t talking about himself. He was in the pains of labor until Christ may be formed in you. There is a cost to making disciples: time, energy, investment, love, care, money, guidance, protection, etc. However, as a parent I can tell you that being a parent is also the most rewarding, beautiful, life-giving, stretching, fun, and amazing thing in life. So is disciple-making, difficult and glorious.

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus offers us a definition of discipleship and a different scorecard of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be the church. Jesus didn’t talk
about buildings, budgets, and butts in a pew, ever. Jesus didn’t talk about being a Christian, ever. It is far more than just being associated with Christ. I want you to hear me. Spiritual maturity—what it means to be a Christian—is more than just going to church (which is good, but not the goal), just learning more about Jesus (which is good, but not the goal), a great spiritual encounter (which is good, but not the goal), or going to a Bible study (which is good, but not the goal).

Jesus didn’t talk about being a Christian, he talked about being a disciple, which means three things: following Jesus, becoming more like Jesus, and making disciples that make disciples. I really believe that this understanding can and must have huge implications for our lives, and for the church.

So can we talk—shoot straight for a minute. I want to ask all of you three questions this morning, and I want us to answer them as honestly as we can. Ask the spirit of God to move in your heart as we do:

1) **Are you following Jesus?** Becoming a disciple is more than just praying a prayer, so that we don’t go to hell when we die. Jesus never said that. Yes, it begins with a prayer, “Lord Jesus, will you be my Savior and Lord,” but then it is a lifelong journey of following Jesus. Turning from our old life, following ourselves, to following Jesus and making him the Lord and leader of our lives. Now, please don’t see this as kind of like an oppressive marriage, “the old ball and chain,” or like eating vegetables, “I don’t like it much, but I suppose it’s good for me.” Jesus makes it clear that this is the pathway to life. Jesus said, “…I have come that you might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Following Jesus is the path to love and joy and peace and life. Are you following Jesus? Have you made him Savior and Lord of your life?

2) **Are you becoming more and more like Jesus?** Are you progressively becoming more like Jesus? Are you more like Jesus now than you were six months ago, two years ago, or 10 years ago? Because we grow older in our faith does not mean we are growing up in our faith. We need to be submitting ourselves to God’s word, and on a daily basis reading his word, and asking, “Lord, how can I become more like you in my relationships, work, play, and behavior? Lord Jesus, fill me up and change me and make me more like you.”

3) **Are we making disciples that make disciples?** It is hard to say (or impossible to say) we are becoming more like Christ—who personally and intentionally picked out disciples, poured his life into them and made more disciples—and not make more disciples ourselves. The best indicator that someone is a mature disciple is that they have made disciples who are now making disciples. A mature disciple can point to several people whom he or she has discipled who are now making disciples of others. This is ultimately the definition and goal of discipleship. This is the part of this whole conversation that has most personally impacted me. God has convicted me to be much more intentional about this, first with my kids, and then with other people. I want to speak about this to the
spiritual mothers and fathers this morning, those who are quite spiritually mature, walking with Jesus for a long time, and whom others have invested deeply into. I want to ask you—are you pouring your life into others? If not, pray about another person or other people you could intentionally invest in spiritually.

Let’s close in prayer about this.