

## Rev. Hohly/Rev. Simon Discipleship Plenary Presentation

\*\*Growing in Hope cards are on tables as we begin.

[SLIDE 1 SHOWING AS WE BEGIN]

**(Keith)** 1. Indeed, the banner under which we gather in this Synod Assembly is “Growing in Hope” –

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it is the theme of discipleship.

But not only is this theme the focus of this year’s Assembly,

it will be the focus of our synod for the coming year.

It will guide what we do at this fall’s Bishop’s Convocation

as well as be at the heart of our annual Area Ministry gatherings.

So a good place to begin might be to ask ourselves:

What exactly does the word discipleship mean to us?

Webster provides us this:

Discipleship is

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a: one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another;

such as *Christianity*;

and in this, one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ’s followers

according to the Gospel accounts

[SLIDE 4]

or

b: a convinced adherent of a school or individual,

such as, *a disciple of Freud*

But Scripture teaches us a fuller understanding of discipleship than does Webster.

For example, it tells us that discipleship is about Servant Leadership.

[SLIDE 5.1]

As Jesus says in the tenth chapter of Mark:

“Whoever wishes to become great among you

must be your servant

and whoever wishes to be first among you

must be slave of all.  
For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**(Donna)** Scripture also tells us that discipleship is about Faith Formation.  
[SLIDE 5.2]

We find in the letter to the Hebrews:  
“Therefore let us go on toward perfection,  
leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ,  
and not laying again the foundation:  
repentance from dead works and faith toward God,  
instruction about baptisms,  
laying on of hands,  
resurrection of the dead,  
and eternal judgment.”

**(Keith)** Discipleship is about Works of Love,  
[SLIDE 5.3]

as we are told in Galatians:  
“... the only thing that counts is faith working through love.”

**(Donna)** It is also about Reflecting Jesus to the World,  
[SLIDE 5.4]

As he tells us in the Sermon on the Mount:  
“You are the light of the world.  
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.  
No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basked,  
but on the lamp stand,  
and it gives light to the whole house.  
In the same way,  
let your light shine before others,  
so that they may see your good works  
and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

**(Keith)** Discipleship is also about Striving for Justice and Walking Humbly with God.

[SLIDE 6.1]

This is exactly of what the prophet Micah reminds us:

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice,  
and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?”

**(Donna)** To coin a phrase, discipleship is God’s Work, Our Hands.

[SLIDE 6.2]

Jesus says to us through John’s gospel:

“The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own;  
but the Father who dwells in me does his works ...  
very truly, I tell you,  
the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do  
and, in fact, will do greater works than these ...”

**(Keith)** Dave Daubert adds his own perspective on this,

[SLIDE 6.3]

saying that discipleship is also God’s Word, Our Voice.

This reflects the consolation Jesus offers in the gospel of Luke:

“Do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves  
or what you are to say;  
for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour  
what you ought to say.”

**(Donna)** Perhaps one of the simplest ways to understand discipleship

[SLIDE 7.1]

is in the word “Follow.”

Numerous times in the gospels discipleship is found in the call to follow Jesus,  
as Jesus calls to Levi in the fifth chapter of Luke.

**(Keith)** It is also about following by carrying the cross.

[SLIDE 7.2]

In Mark, Jesus says:

“If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

**(Donna)** And then, as the Bishop reminded us at the close of his remarks a moment ago,

discipleship is about being Christ-like.

[SLIDE 7.3]

St. Paul exhorts us:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited  
but emptied himself ...”

2. **(Donna)** This a great list. You might call it a “Pauline” list. It shows us what discipleship is supposed to look like.

[SLIDE 8]

You can turn it into a cool Word Cloud shaped like a butterfly, if you want.

But being able to recite a list doesn’t make us disciples, does it? Actually living into that list, and making it our own—learning to see the world through the lens of love as Jesus taught it to us—that’s what discipleship looks like.

And that’s not easy, is it? It clearly wasn’t easy for those first disciples, which is why we find Jesus repeating the command to love over and over.

- Love your enemies.
- Love God.
- Love your neighbors.
- Love one another. People will **know that you are my disciples**, if you have love for one another.

So that’s it. Just love everybody. As simple for us as it is for those first disciples.

Last night the bishop asked you to talk about and report on what needs to die in our congregations in order to be a more faithful church. Our accounting firm, Pricewaterhouse...wait, that's Hohly Simon Gustafson and Saltzman...stayed up late into the night reviewing your answers—the envelope, please—and here they are, the top ten things that need to die in our congregations in order for us to be a more faithful church:

Number Ten: Negative attitudes toward children or exclusion of youth and children

Number Nine: Overvaluing of tradition

Number Eight: Being inwardly focus or refusing to be missionally minded

Number Seven Individual self-centeredness

Number Six: Devaluing of the church in our personal lives

Number Five: The pastor!

Number Four: Ownership: this church belongs to me!

Number Three: Fear of the other/the stranger—giving people who are different **the stink eye.**

Number Two: Focus on money/finances

Number One: Fear of and resistance to **Change**

3. **(Keith)** So what's going on in all of this?

What are there so many things that get in the way of discipleship for us?

Why are there all these things that have to die

in order for us to be fruitful disciples?

Donna and I have a hunch.

We think all these things and others prevent us from living into our call to discipleship

because we tend to treat discipleship as a set of obligations.

We tend to think of discipleship as actions we *must undertake*

in order to be worthy to be called Christ's body –

things we *must do* in order to gain God's favor –

a discipline we *must follow* in order to consider ourselves faithful.  
In other words,  
the problem is we tend to view discipleship from the perspective of the law.

But what if we viewed discipleship from the perspective of the gospel?  
How might this change our experience of it?

Well for starters,

it just might help us experience discipleship as the gift it is really  
meant to be.

For appreciated from the perspective of grace,  
discipleship is no longer something we *must* do,  
it is something we are *invited* to do.

Discipleship is not something we do in order to gain God's favor –  
for, by grace, we understand we *already have this*.

Instead, discipleship becomes the invitation to a way of expressing our gratitude  
for God's grace  
and a way to live into the favor God already has for us.

In the end,

a gospel perspective shows us that discipleship is not really about us.

We are truly disciples when we follow the example of Christ and empty  
ourselves,

and make it all about God.

The barriers to faithful discipleship really start to fall away

when we let go of our “shoulds” –

that is, those things that we “should do” –

and simply let it be our “thanks” for what God is doing.

**(Donna)** So...what if? What if we returned to the last part of the Bishop's address  
and treated discipleship as Paul instructs the Philippians to do? To return once  
again to his letter to the Philippians, Paul admonished us to be of one mind with  
Jesus,

[SLIDE 10]

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

[SLIDE 11]

And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

Understanding discipleship as a gift means emptying ourselves to obligation in order to serve freely. **This** is the Freedom of a Christian, as Luther described in his exquisite paradox:

[SLIDE 12]

*A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.*

*A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.*

### **(Keith)**

So, our freedom is found in Christ,  
not in adherence to narrow ideologies.

Unity is not a thing we do.

It is an identity we are given in Christ.

Our human tendency is to understand each other according to our differences.

Jesus, however, sees us as one,

just as he sees he and the Father being one.

In other words, Jesus begins with our unity.

So discipleship is the invitation to see things as Jesus does.

Walter Bruggemann maintains that we must relinquish the past  
in order to receive the future.

We must let go of old ways of understanding ourselves  
in order to embrace the way Christ understands us.

We must let go of the law

in order to be redefined by the gospel.

We must let go of a Protestant work ethic

in order to live into a Protestant principle of grace.  
To truly become disciples,  
we must allow ourselves to die  
in order that we might be reborn.

[SLIDE 13]

4. **(Donna)** We want to invite you to encounter discipleship as a gift this year—to be “emptied” and drawn toward God’s grace and Christ’s love as a gift freely given, requiring no action on our part, but inviting us to respond by loving each other. To be of assistance in this journey toward love and discipleship, we’ve developed a little “dwelling guide” we call the Growing in Hope Card. There is one for each of you on the table, and each church should have gotten ten of these to use as you wish, before meetings; Bible Studies; Church picnics—whenever you want to gather around the Word and the promise of baptism.

5. **(Keith)** So let’s begin to see how this might work.

In the remaining time we have with you this morning,  
let’s do a little dwelling in the Word around our tables.

Please open your Growing in Discipleship cards.

After I read the text,

let the words sit with you for a moment,

and then have some table conversation

around one or more of the questions on the card.

(Read the text)

6. **(Donna)** We’re inviting all of us in the Central States Synod to think about discipleship in the coming year—about growing in hope toward love for our neighbors and our world.

So a final question for all of you:

[SLIDE 14]

→How might we *grow in hope* in the coming year?

→What kinds of experiments could we do in our congregations to grow as disciples?

>Table Conversation.

--Check back. Comments as time allows.

7. **Roger** closes with his hopes for their progress in the coming year and our progress as a synod during this growing in hope year.