

Sermon: The Discernment of Jesus (Discernment Series) 10/06/24

John 1:35-50 (pg.92)

Opening Story:

Today, we begin our sermon series on discernment. As we make our way through this series I will be using the book *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* by Henri Nouwen (Now-when). I want to begin by taking a look at the life of Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) to help ground us in his story.

Henri Nouwen was a renowned author, teacher, and Catholic Priest. He was born in the Netherlands and moved to America to pursue educational opportunities. He was a very successful academic, serving initially as a professor at Notre Dame, and then Yale, and later Harvard. After some time, he stepped away from academia to explore other roads that God was calling him down.

You might be surprised to know that Nouwen has a local connection to this area. He spent several extended periods of time among the Trappist monks at the Abby of the Genessee, near Geneseo, NY. It is here where he went deeper in his relationship with the Lord by engaging in daily monastic life, contemplation, and discernment. Later in life, Henri took a job working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto. He served as pastor and leader of this community for the last 10 years of his life.

Henri was also a prolific writer, publishing over 40 books on spirituality and religion. He was greatly influenced by the work of Thomas Merton, and the two once met. Among his most famous works are: *The Wounded Healer, Return of the Prodigal Son, and Life of the Beloved*. He became friends with Richard Rohr and developed a close friendship with everyone's favorite neighbor, the late, great Fred Rogers.

Henri says, “**Discernment is a spiritual understanding** and an experiential knowledge **of how God is active in daily life** that is **acquired through disciplined spiritual practice. Discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s** love and **direction** so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.”

Our scripture for today is a story about how Jesus modeled discernment at the calling of his first disciples.

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³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (Sea-fuss) (which is translated Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King

of Israel!"⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.'

Scripture Reflection

There's a couple of great teachings on discernment in today's scripture. First, in verse 37-39a, after hearing John the Baptist point out Jesus as the "lamb of God," Andrew and the other disciple leave John and begin following after Jesus. After a while Jesus turns to them and asks them a question, "What are you looking for?" They respond, "Rabbi, where are you staying?," to which Jesus responds, "Come and see." Now, it's pretty obvious Jesus knows why they are following him, so why does he ask the question? The question, **"What are you looking for?" urges the disciples to move from sight to insight**" (Marianne Meye Thompson). Jesus isn't asking the question for himself but for the sake of the disciples. Jesus is asking them to use their discernment. He's asking them to search their hearts. He's asking them, "Why do you really want to be my followers?"

Well...they don't quite know what to say, so they call him teacher, and ask him where he's headed. These disciples don't yet have the insight to answer Jesus' question. Insight, or discernment, is something they will learn and develop overtime as they grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Friends, the good news is, all disciples begin in the same place. **We start from a place of using our own sight and we journey towards a place of learning God's insight.** Like the two disciples, Jesus invites us to "come and see." To come check him out and see for ourselves what following him is really about.

The second teaching on discernment in this chapter comes from Jesus' own prophetic abilities of perception. Phillip goes to find his friend Nathaniel to tell him the exciting news that he has found the messiah, but Nathaniel is not impressed. He says, Nazareth? "Can anything good

come out of Nazareth." By the standards of his day Nathaniel is right to think this way. Nazareth was nothing special. It was a small, rural, farming town that was filled with ordinary people. How could the messiah come from a place like this? Echoing Jesus' words Philip invites Nathaniel to "come and see." So Nathaniel goes to Jesus, still carrying his skeptical attitude with him. When Jesus sees him he says, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' But Nathaniel is still not impressed. He says, 'Where did you come to know me?' He calls Jesus out. He says, man, you don't know me. As wise and as good as Nathaniel is, he's a man who relies on his own knowledge, and that is his weakness. He calls it how he sees it. But Jesus has a thing or two to teach him about insight.

"Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.'⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.'"

Friends, it's good to have knowledge, but if we just rely on ourselves, it can only take us so far. Jesus wants to teach his disciples to draw from a deeper well of wisdom. He wants to teach them discernment and how to sense and understand God's voice in their lives. **He wants to turn their outward sight into inner sight.**

Discernment Part 1: Embracing the Practice in Solitude (1 of 2)

As his followers, Jesus wants the same for us as well.

At the heart of discernment is this premise: **"God is always speaking to us and discernment is the spiritual practice that seeks to understand what God is trying to say."** (Discernment, vii).

"For Henri, spiritual **discernment is hearing a deeper sound beneath the noise of ordinary life and seeing through appearances** to the interconnectedness of all things."

In this sense, discernment involves looking for the divine in the

ordinary. In the people we meet, in the things we observe, in our time spent out in nature. It can come to us when we are praying, reading scripture, or simply enjoying our morning cup of coffee. Discernment is learning to tune in to the presence of God that lies just below the surface.

Henri tells a story to illustrate this point:

“When I was living in a Trappist monastery [at the Abby of the Genesee] as a temporary monk. . . I came across a painting by Hazard Durfee called *The Flute Player*. It was framed with a text by Henry David Thoreau that said: ‘Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.’

During my time at the Genessee, I began to understand that **when we listen to the Spirit, we hear a deeper sound, a different beat. The great movement of the spiritual life is from a deaf, non-hearing life to a life of listening.** From a life in which we experience ourselves as separated, isolated, and lonely, to a life in which we hear the guiding and healing voice of God, who is with us and will never leave us alone.”

Over these next few weeks, we will be getting into some of the practices that help us to hear this “different beat” in a better way. But for now I leave you with a few tips. Pay attention to the things happening around you and seek to understand the deeper meaning that God might be trying to show you. Take some quiet time out, each day, even if its only 5 or 10 minutes, to read scripture, pray, or just sit and listen for the voice of God. Turn your phone off and go to a place where no one will disturb you. **We must first learn to hear God better in the silence before can hear him in the noise.** Finally, remember that discernment

is not only a spiritual gift but a practice. The more time you spend at it the better you will get.

Conclusion

So may you take time to practice being quiet before the Lord.

May you find what you are looking for as Jesus turns your sight into insight.

And may the Lord train your mind to listen for a different kind of beat

Children's Moment: Discernment of Jesus 10/06/24

Object: None

Who's the smartest person you know? What makes them smart?

Today I want to talk about the difference between being smart and being wise.

Being smart might mean you have a lot of knowledge about a particular subject. Being wise means you are able to take knowledge you have and apply it to make good decisions.

No matter how much knowledge we have it can only help us so much. The wisest people in the Bible always sought God's wisdom to help them make good choices. God can give us discernment too, so we know what to do. What is discernment? Discernment is the ability to hear what God is trying to tell us. How do you think we can hear God's voice in our hearts more clearly? We can read the Bible, pray, spend time with other Christians. The more time we spend with God the stronger our relationship is with him and the easier it is to sense his voice. So the next time your having trouble making a decision I want you to remember to pray to God and ask him for his guidance and help.