11/1/26 **The Master Carpenter and the Apprentice** ***John 1:35-51***

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Good morning. Imagine two friends together decide they want to learn a new skill, pick up a hobby. They both decide, "Let's pick up woodworking. That would be fun!" So they both commit – on their own time – to become educated in the art of woodworking, but they take two very different approaches. The first signs up for a basic woodworking class. He learns about the different kinds of woods and studies the basic tools of the woodworking trade. By the end of the class, he's picked up a few new skills and can even build a few elementary things, like this picture frame, here. He knows considerably more about woodworking, now that he's taken the class, and by the end, he decides, "This was a success! Mission accomplished."

But the other friend decides not to take a class. He decides to become the apprentice of a master carpenter. He doesn't just show up for lessons; he actually spends all of his working hours with the carpenter, throughout the week. He watches how the carpenter works, he studies how the carpenter makes decisions, and he observes how the carpenter handles mistakes. Maybe, one afternoon, the apprentice cuts a piece of oak too short for the table the master is building. He measured twice, cut once, but still got it wrong. The piece is now useless for its intended purpose. But the master doesn't simply tell him to be more careful next time. Instead, the master shows the apprentice how to more accurately check his measurements to help him better understand where he went wrong. The apprentice learns not just a new technique, but a new way of approaching his work altogether – one that is more patient, humble, and attentive to detail.

Over time, the apprentice begins learning things that aren't easily conveyed in a classroom. He learns what kind of oak is better suited for a dining table, compared to a pine. He learns to recognize when a board is warped before he ever puts the piece of wood on his workbench. And he learns why the carpenter takes such good care of the joints nobody will ever see – because a piece of furniture is only as strong as the level of craftmanship it has beneath its surface.

And gradually, something in the apprentice changes. He doesn't simply know more about woodworking by the end of the experience; he actually learns to love the

craft, and he finds himself becoming more and more like his master – closer to an expert – as he carves and sands his wood. And then the apprentice realizes, "Hey, I can share my love of woodworking with other people, too! I can do this for a living, just like my master! And I can teach people everything the carpenter taught me." The apprentice becomes like the master, taking on pupils of his own.

It isn't a mistake – or an incidental detail – that Jesus is described in the gospels as a carpenter. But why all this talk about woodworking? Why all this talk about education? Because I want to propose that discipleship, the lifelong practice of following Jesus, looks a lot more like becoming the apprentice of a carpenter than it does taking high school woodshop. But don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying classes are bad. Bible studies are great, I love our Starting Point group, and I think it's safe to say that everyone who's participated in Devotional Classics has learned a great deal. But the point is, if the framework for how you view your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus is depending on this class or this church program to provide for you all you need to make a nice picture frame out of your Christian faith, then I think you're selling yourself short. You're missing out on an amazing opportunity.

Here at BBC, we want to make **disciples** of Jesus, whose lives emulate more the beautiful craftmanship we see on our communion table, or our sound booth over there – not the flimsy picture frame I can easily just snap in half and throw into the garbage. We need to approach our Christian faith not as mere students in Jesus' classroom, but as apprentices to the Master Carpenter who teaches us more than just tricks of the trade, but an entirely new way to live. Because following Jesus isn't simply about learning what Jesus taught. It's about allowing ***his*** life to reshape our ***own*** lives, so we can become less like ourselves and more like him in everything we do. And that can't be accomplished through merely attending a class. It takes time and work and can only be done through cultivating a ***relationship*** with Jesus – which is a lifelong process of learning to see the world through his eyes. It's learning to **love** the things that Jesus loves, forgoing the things that are keeping us from him, and discovering our place in the redemptive story God is telling.

Our Scripture passage, this morning, comes from John's account of Jesus' calling of his disciples. What I want you to notice, in this passage, is how Jesus meets each of the disciples along different points of their journey, representing different points in our

spiritual development. But regardless of where each of the disciples are at, Jesus offers them all the same thing: an invitation to a relationship. An invitation to **be** with Jesus, to **learn** from Jesus, **eat** with Jesus, **sleep** with Jesus, **laugh** and **cry** with Jesus, **live** with Jesus, and **follow** Jesus wherever he goes. He invites them on a journey to leave their former lives behind, so he can then shape and mold them into the kind of people he wants them to be. Their full potential. He invites them to ***become his apprentices*** – learning the trade of love of both God and neighbor, and all with the end goal of changing the world, bringing forth the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Regardless of where you are along your own spiritual journey, this same invitation Jesus offers is open to you. Let's hear from *John 1:35-51*.

> The next day, John the Baptist again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?" 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).
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> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said to him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I

saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Last week, we started a new four-week worship series called "We Will Tell the Coming Generation." After celebrating the incredible love and faithfulness of God over the past 25 years in this new facility, just a couple of weeks ago, we now turn our attention to the ***future***, and the ways God is calling us to build on that legacy – preparing our church not simply to serve the needs of our congregation today, but ultimately to nurture and equip future generations of Christ-followers to seek God's Kingdom and his righteousness at BBC. And, of course, that begins with discipleship – and I'm not just saying that because I'm the Discipleship Pastor. The call of the church is to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission: to "Go therefore and make disciples of **all** nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey **everything** [Jesus commanded us]" (*Matthew 28:19-20*).

But what does it actually **mean** to make disciples? I tried to lay out a vision of discipleship that moves away from understanding our Christian faith as just the mere accumulation of facts about Jesus in a classroom or a small group, to actually ***becoming Jesus' apprentices*** in his way of life. True discipleship is following the master, so as to become more like the master, so that we might pass on to others everything the master taught us. That's what Jesus modeled with his own disciples during his ministry on earth, and it's because of the disciples' obedience in that call that we all stand here, today. Do you ever think about that? Our mission is to keep passing it on.

But in a church the size of Brewster Baptist, we have to recognize that we're all coming from very different points along the journey. Some of us have been faithfully following Jesus for decades; some of us might still be unsure about who Jesus really is and whether we believe it's true what he says about himself and if he really did rise from the dead. Our church needs to be committed to investing our time, energy, resources, and, most importantly, our **relationships** with one another, to offering something that's of value to **everyone**, as they learn to walk alongside the Master as **apprentices**, seeking to become more like him. I think our passage, this morning, gives us a hint, or a window if you will, into the kinds of things Jesus offers people along each stage of the

spiritual journey – and thus, provides insight for the church on what more we can do to live in to its call. For the sake of simplicity, I'm going to break the journey of the disciple into four categories. And we have people who fit each of these categories in the life of our church, today. We're all here. No one is left out. They are 1) Seekers, 2) New Believers, 3) Growing Disciples, and 4) Mature Disciples.

Let's start with Seekers. Seekers are individuals who don't yet have a relationship with Jesus. They question whether or not they're comfortable truly identifying themselves as a Christian, but, for whatever reason, something in their lives has prompted them to come here. They have questions; they're intrigued. Maybe they consider themselves "spiritual, but not religious." They have an openness to God, and are attracted to the teachings of Jesus, but they aren't really "all in" on this church thing, and want to know more.

In our passage, this morning, after John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God to two of his followers, the two men begin following Jesus ***because they're intrigued***. They want to know what all this fuss is about, and trust John enough to know that when he tells them this guy Jesus is someone they should really look into, he's serious. So, they seek Jesus out. And when he notices the two of them following him, Jesus turns around and asks them a question: "What are you looking for?" (*John 1:38*).

"What are you looking for?" He validates and affirms their intrigue. Jesus correctly discerns that they're ***longing*** for something – something more. They're ***longing*** for something deeper, something that's going to give their lives a sense of meaning and purpose, something they don't presently have. And the two men are so eager to learn from Jesus that they ask him where he is staying, because this first interaction with him is not enough to satisfy their hunger. Their intrigue has done nothing but deepen, after they encounter Jesus the first time. So, Jesus invites them on a journey – a journey that has **far** reaching implications that go beyond anything they could have possibly had the ability to predict or comprehend in that moment.

The next thing Jesus says is going to fundamentally change **everything** about their lives, from that moment on. He says, "Come and see." (*John 1:39*). "Come and see." Jesus gives them full and unrestricted access to himself. Jesus invites them into his world, into his very life, and the two men's lives are changed forever, from that point on. Jesus invites them to ***become his apprentices***, and they respond with "Yes" – simply

because Jesus took enough time to match the level of their intrigue with his personal attention to them. ***What more can the community of BBC do to give this same level of personal attention and care to the Seekers in our midst, who want to know more about Jesus, but haven't yet decided they want to follow him? Are we a warm and inviting community – enough for those people who don't yet believe in Jesus to feel safe asking their questions?*** It's an open question.

The second group is New Believers. These are individuals who have recently made the decision to believe. They've said "Yes" to Jesus, and are fully committed to walking along the new and unpredictable – but ultimately, rewarding and life-changing – road of an apprentice. After we learn that John the Baptist's followers have decided to respond to Jesus' invitation, we read that one of them goes back home to tell his brother about Jesus, and the good news he's learned. "We have found the Messiah," Andrew says. (*John 1:41*) And he brings his brother, who we now know as Simon, to Jesus, and Jesus says to him, "'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)" (*John 1:42*). Jesus gives him a new name, with a new identity and meaning. Peter means "rock," and later in the Gospels, Jesus is going to tell Peter that it is on the rock of his declaration that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the living God that Jesus will build his church. And as we know from the gospels, too, along the way, Peter is going to make mistakes. He's going to deny Jesus three times, he's going to vengefully cut off the high priest's servant's ear with the sword at Jesus' arrest, and he's even going to get into a bitter and physical confrontation with Paul, as they work together to lead the early church. But even then – even with all that baggage – Jesus gives Simon, son of John, a new name, which cannot be revoked. He is the rock on which the foundation of Jesus' entire church will be built.

When we say "Yes" to Jesus, to become his apprentice, we're given a new name, an identity, and a purpose that gives new meaning and value to our lives, which we've never known before. All of our past mistakes and all of our future mistakes can never change the new name and identity Jesus gives us. He calls us his own, and he gives us the right to be children of God. ***What more can the community of BBC do to reassure and encourage people in the midst of their mistakes that once they've said "Yes" to Jesus, the new identity he's given them can never be***

taken away from them, that they are loved by the Master, and the Master will never give up on them? It's an open question.

The third group is Growing Disciples. These are those who have been following Jesus for a while, and have fully embraced the life of an apprentice. They're learning Jesus' tricks of the trade about love, forgiveness, peace, and the Kingdom of God, and they've even embraced the Fruit of the Spirit and are committed to practicing them in their lives. But they are also painfully aware that apprenticeship does not have a finish line – that there's always more to surrender of yourself to the Master, as he shapes and forms you into his image.

Our passage continues with the story of another pair of disciples: Philip and Nathanael. After Philip says "Yes" to Jesus, Philip offers Nathanael the same invitation that Jesus first offered John's disciples, "Come and see." (*John 1:46*). When Nathanael then comes to Jesus, he doesn't even have to say a word, and it's already as if Jesus knows him like a close friend. Jesus says, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" (*John 1:47*). You don't tell a mere acquaintance something like that, right? That's the kind of thing you only feel comfortable saying to someone you know very well. Deeply. Personally. None of us would ever dare describe the character of someone we've never met as honest and full of integrity and without deceit. We would only do that for someone we know, whose character we're willing to vouch for. And Nathanael, dumbfounded by what Jesus said, asks, "Where did you get to know me?" "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you," Jesus says. And Nathanael, profoundly moved, replies, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." (*John 1:47-50*).

Now, upon a quick glance, reading this passage, it's kind of hard to understand what's going on here. What is it about Jesus having seen Nathanael under a fig tree that leads him to make the bold – and seemingly abrupt – claim that Jesus is the Son of God? It kind of feels like we're missing some details from the story. Well, this is where – I would argue – it's helpful to understand how some of the richest **symbols** found in the Bible can help us better understand the biblical text. St. Augustine, in his commentary on John in the fifth century, highlights a potential significance the ***fig*** tree might play, in this passage. Figs are used, throughout the Bible, as symbols to represent sin and shame. Remember, in *Genesis*, when Adam and Eve sin by eating the fruit from

the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – what do they use to cover themselves with, when they realize they are naked? Fig leaves. Figs represent shame. The fact that Jesus says that he saw Nathanael under the fig tree might suggest something deeper than originally meets the eye. What Jesus might be saying is that the reason he knew Nathanael so well was because he had the ability to see Nathanael in the most vulnerable parts of himself, in the depths of his sin and shame, in a way nobody else can. Jesus knew Nathanael better than anyone ever could, and Nathanael feels the intimacy of Christ's knowledge of him in this moment so powerfully, that it leaves him with no other choice than to realize he must come from God. Nobody can know him that deeply, unless he's from a divine source. So, he proclaims, "You are the Son of God, the King of Israel."

The longer we're on the journey of becoming Jesus' apprentices, the deeper into a loving relationship with him we fall. We're able to hold our guard down and allow God to see us in the midst of our darkest moments – the midst of our sin and shame – and he responds to us, not with judgment or condemnation, but instead, only with a sense of his ever greater and exceeding love. We grow in the intimacy of knowing God – ***and being known by God*** – in a loving embrace, the longer we walk on the journey of apprenticeship. And this leads us to no longer seek the kinds of praise and validation we often try to find from the world. It allows us to let go of our idols, to let go of our attachments, and it enables us to no longer let any worldly allegiances dictate our sense of value and self-worth and belonging. Jesus becomes the **one true Lord** of our lives, and there is no other. There's no more appropriate response than to shout – with Nathanael – that Jesus is our King and our Lord, when we're wrapped in such love. ***What more can the community of BBC do to inspire growing disciples to enter into a greater sense of God's love for them?*** It's an open question.

And finally, if you notice, in this passage, every transformative encounter Jesus has with his soon-to-be disciples is prompted by the encouragement of another, who points them to Jesus – who shares their faith. John says, "Look! The Lamb of God!" Andrew says to Peter, "We have found the Messiah." Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found him who Moses and the Prophets wrote about." Every encounter is prompted by the courage of another, who stepped out – in faith – to share their enthusiasm about the great treasure hidden in a field they sold everything they had to buy – Jesus. The final

group is Mature Disciples – those who have reached the point, in their apprenticeship to Jesus, where they feel called and ready to start taking on pupils of their own. ***What more can the community of BBC do to create mature disciples of Jesus, who are joyous about sharing their faith and leading our church into the next generation, so God's love can be passed on?*** It's an open question, and one Pastor Doug will have a lot to say about next week.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus,
You are our Master Carpenter in the trade of love, and we are your apprentices. Regardless of where we are on the journey, may we come to know you more, and know that you are enough. May BBC be a place where Seekers can ask their questions without feeling fear or concern of being judged, because we welcome them. May this be a place where New Believers can receive their new name – their new identity as children of God. May this be a place where Mature Believers can be immersed in an ever-present and growing sense of your love for them and their love of you. And may this be a place where we rise up new generations of believers to share their faith and their enthusiasm, leading people in the Way of you. As we come to your table and encounter your presence with us, may you inspire us with a renewed vision and imagination of what we can do to make BBC a place where disciples are made. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection:

1. How would you currently characterize your relationship to Jesus? How might your relationship to Jesus need to be reimagined when seen through the lens of a master/apprentice relationship?
2. **Seekers** – When you think about Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" (*John 1:38*), how would you answer it today? What longings or questions do you think might lead someone to seek Jesus in our contemporary culture and day and age?
3. **New Believers** – In *John 1:42*, Jesus gives Simon a new name. How has following Jesus challenged the ways you previously understood your identity, purpose, and sense of belonging in this world?
4. **Growing Disciples** – Read *Galatians 2:19-20*. What do you think it means for us to say that we have been crucified with Christ and that Christ now lives in us? What beliefs, habits, priorities, and allegiances have you had to reconsider as you've grown in your faith? What remains difficult for you to surrender to Jesus?
5. **Mature Disciples** – What is the difference between inviting someone to encounter Jesus and intentionally walking alongside them as they grow in faith? How might we do both?
6. **Discipleship at BBC** – Consider the four groups – *Seekers, New Believers, Growing Disciples, and Mature Disciples*. Where do you see our church helping people grow well? Where might we need to become more intentional and how? What is one thing <u>*you*</u> can do to help encourage others to move from one group to the next?