

## God and Jesus: Contemporary Resonances Discipleship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### I. Discipleship Is a Comprehensive Image of the Christian Life in the NT and Early Christianity. Its primary meanings:

\*Its ordinary Greek meaning: to be a student - a student of Jesus. Interesting in itself and worth pondering: what does it mean to be a student of Jesus?

\*An additional meaning given by its gospel contexts: to follow Jesus.

\*In particular, to follow him on his way – the way that leads to Jerusalem. This is the theme of the central section of the synoptic gospels (Mk 8.22-10.52 par.)

\*In this story, Jerusalem has a twofold significance: the place of confrontation with the domination system; and the place of death and resurrection.

\*Most concisely expressed in Mark 8.31-34: take up your cross....

\*Discipleship is about the way/path of death and resurrection – as a metaphor of a twofold transformation: of the self and of “the way things are”

\*Discipleship is about the Kingdom of God

### \*Other comprehensive images in the NT with similar meanings:

\*Paul: “Be imitators of Christ” Life “in Christ”

“Present yourselves as living sacrifices – do not be conformed to *this world*, but be transformed...” (Rom. 12.1-2)

\*John: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Note the theme of imitation. The Christian life is about embodiment, incarnation, of what we see in Jesus

To be born again: an inner transformation

\*To repent: to return from exile by going beyond the mind that you have

### II. Discipleship (the Christian Life) Is About a Twofold Transformation.

**1. Personal Transformation.** The transformation of the self. We all need this in order to counter the natural result of growing up: we become self-concerned, anxious, wounded, limited in vision, in bondage and exile....

\*The means of personal transformation. Sometimes it just happens. More often it is the product of becoming conscious of and intentional about a deepening relationship with God. This is the purpose of classic Christian practices like worship, prayer, devotion, deeds of compassion, and so forth.

\*Believing understood as “believing the right things” has little transformative power – discipleship is about following Jesus on “the way,” not primarily about believing things about Jesus

\*The recovery of Christian spiritual practices in our time is encouraging

**2. Political Transformation.** Seeking to change the world - from systems of domination and violence to systems of justice and peace. This is “the dream of God” (Verna Dozier and Desmond Tutu), God’s dream for the world. More controversial.

\*Helping congregations to see that the God of the Bible and Jesus is passionate about political transformation as well as personal transformation: many of the most important biblical images of salvation are political as well as personal.

\*Exodus as liberation from political and economic bondage in Egypt

\*The prophets' passion for justice and peace during the monarchy

\*Return from exile (repentance) as leaving life in Babylon

\*Jesus: The Kingdom of God

\*Paul and early Christianity: Jesus is Lord (Caesar is not)

\*Revelation: the lordship of Caesar versus lordship of Jesus

### **III. Reflections about God's Dream of Justice and Peace Today**

\*On income inequality and effects, see *The Spirit Level* by R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett

*Discipleship and other comprehensive NT images of the Christian life are not only about transformation but about participation: they call us to participate in what we see in Jesus. To cite Desmond Tutu's paraphrase of Augustine:*

Augustine said: God made us without us; God will not transform us without us

Tutu: God without us will not; we without God cannot.

Discipleship is about participating in God's transforming passion.

***What is the Christian life about? Love God as known in Jesus, and seek to change the world.***