

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 4, 2026

In His Steps – A Stewardship Series
“Join Jesus’ Community”
Mark 3:13-19
Rev. Mike Fordham

Lance Ford, in his book entitled, *Unleader*, said that in the late 1600s and early 1700s, a half-literate Italian craftsman named Antonio Stradivari designed and made a series of beautiful musical instruments. Today, those violins, named after the Latinized form of his name, Stradivarius, are considered priceless. In 2024, the *Messiah Antonia Stradivarius* violin was valued at \$20 million. It is believed there are only around 500 of them still in existence, some of which have been submitted to the most intense scientific examination in an attempt to reproduce their extraordinary sound quality. But no one has been able to replicate Stradivari's craftsmanship. Today we do know that Stradivari used spruce for the top, willow for the internal blocks and linings, and maple for the back, ribs, and neck. He also treated the wood with several types of minerals, including potassium borate, sodium and potassium silicate, as well as a handmade varnish that appears to have been composed of gum arabic, honey, and egg white. But the genius craftsman never once recorded his technique for posterity. Instead, he passed on his knowledge to a number of his apprentices through what one scholar called “elbow learning.” The apprentices of the great Stradivari didn't learn their craft from books or manuals but by sitting at his elbow and feeling the wood as he felt it to assess its length, its balance, and its timbre right there in their fingertips. All the learning happened at his elbow, and all the knowledge was contained in his fingers. When Jesus began His ministry as a rabbi, He invited twelve men to be His apprentices or what we call disciples. When they said yes to being Jesus’ disciples, Jesus welcomed them into a community of other apprentices of Jesus who said yes to following Jesus. For the next three years, Jesus used that community to shape their lives. In that community with Jesus and the disciples they learned about the absolute necessity of following Jesus in community with other followers of Jesus. When we become members here at Killearn, we also make a commitment to what we call, Presence, which is the commitment to following Jesus in community with other followers of Jesus.

Mark 3:13-19

¹³ Afterward Jesus went up on a mountain and called out the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him. ¹⁴ Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, and he would send them out to preach, ¹⁵ giving them authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he chose:

Simon (whom he named Peter),
¹⁷ **James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder”),**
¹⁸ **Andrew,**
Philip,
Bartholomew,
Matthew,
Thomas,
James (son of Alphaeus),
Thaddaeus,
Simon (the zealot),
¹⁹ **Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).**

JESUS INVITED INDIVIDUALS TO FOLLOW HIM

We first see that at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, **Jesus invited individuals to follow Him**. In the first century, one very important role of a rabbi was to teach young boys coming of age. These apprentices, students, or disciples would follow as closely as they could every step of the rabbi until they learned everything the rabbi knew and learned to live their lives as the rabbi lived His. Not just any boy could be a rabbi’s disciple. A good rabbi would only invite the sharpest and the best behaved boys to be His students. When Jesus began His formal ministry as a rabbi around thirty years of age, Jesus was looking for students to take under His wing and teach them everything He knew and to shape their lives to learn to live as He lived His life. A careful reading of the Gospels shows us that when Jesus invited these twelve men to be His disciples, He didn’t just walk up to strangers and invite them to a life of discipleship. Jesus and his first disciples knew each other anywhere from several months to over a year before Jesus formally invited them to follow Him as His apprentices. It was only after the disciples spent some time with Jesus, heard Jesus teach, witnessed Jesus perform miracles, got to know Jesus and experienced His love, that Jesus asked them and they accepted the great honor of becoming apprentices of the great and upcoming rabbi called Jesus.

Jesus, as God, came into this world to personally introduce us to God and to invite all of us to follow Him in a relationship with God. T.F. Torrance was one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century, but prior to that, he served as a chaplain during World War II. One day, on a battlefield in Italy, he attended to a dying 19-year-old soldier. The dying man asked him, “Padre, is God really like Jesus?” For Torrance, this question captured “the deepest cry of the human heart”—is the God that we’ll meet on the other side of death the same God who came into this world as a man called Jesus? Torrance assured the dying man with these words: “God is indeed really like Jesus. There is no unknown God behind the back of Jesus for us to fear. To see the Lord Jesus is to see the very face of God.” Not only did Jesus to personally introduce us to who God is, but Jesus also did so to invite us to personally know God through Jesus. Jesus said to Thomas, His disciple, in *John 14:6-7*, “⁶ Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had really known me,

you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!” Jesus came to show us who God is and to provide a way for us to have a relationship with God through Jesus who is God. The first step of being a disciple is to hear Jesus call each one of us to say “yes” to walking closely in a relationship with Jesus as His students, His apprentices.

JESUS INVITES US TO FOLLOW HIM IN COMMUNITY WITH OTHER FOLLOWERS

What those who said “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him discovered was that following Jesus was not just a one-on-one, private relationship with Jesus. When Jesus invites us to follow Him, ***Jesus Invites Us to Follow Him in Community with other Followers***. When Jesus invited these disciples to follow Him, Jesus welcomed them into membership in a community of twelve disciples. Jesus chose the number twelve intentionally to represent the Old Testament twelve tribes of Israel. In this way Jesus was reconstituting the nation of Israel in this new community of twelve disciples and as such proclaiming that God’s Kingdom was coming to this world through this new community of Jesus’ followers. Jesus also chose these twelve to follow Him together in this new community because Jesus knew discipleship happens best not one-on-one with God but in a community of people who are all learning together to walk closely with Jesus. Jesus wanted the disciples to learn the absolute necessity of being a Christian, a follower of Jesus in community with other Christians who are following Jesus. For three years until Jesus left this world to go back to heaven, the disciples spent the majority of time together living together with Jesus and learning from Jesus. They laughed, celebrated, grieved, and cried together, ate together, debated and argued together, camped out together, visited each other’s homes and friends’ homes together, travelled together, played together, fished together, worked together, supported each other during difficult times, confronted one another, fed the hungry together, healed the sick together, served each other, worshipped together, prayed together, watched everything that Jesus did together, listened to Jesus’ teachings together, experienced Jesus’ love together, and learned from Jesus how to love each other. Jesus used this community to train the disciples to be more like Jesus.

The disciples’ community did not end when Jesus left the world. This community with Jesus was just the beginning. When Jesus went back to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to live in them and in so doing Jesus was able to be with them wherever they went. After the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit coming to live within them, Peter preached to the crowds on the street about Jesus and this is what *Acts 2:41* says was the result of Peter’s first sermon, *“Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.”* All these new followers of Jesus were baptized and then added to the church. The first thing that a new follower of Jesus did in the Bible was to become a part of a community of other people who are following Jesus. New communities of followers of Jesus were now meeting in homes throughout Jerusalem as they continued doing what Jesus did in community with His disciples. Listen to what these new communities of Jesus’ followers were doing together. *Acts 2:42-47* says, *“⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared*

everything they had. ⁴⁵ *They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.* ⁴⁶ *They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—* ⁴⁷ *all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*” While they didn't have a membership class and vows like we have today in our church, these early Christians naturally became a part of a group of Christians with whom they met regularly doing what Jesus and His disciples did together.

Chuck Colson, in his book entitled, *The Body*, says, “Many Christians have been infected with the most virulent virus of modern American life, what sociologist Robert Bellah calls ‘radical individualism.’ They concentrate on personal obedience to Christ as if all that matters is ‘Jesus and me,’ but in doing so miss the point altogether. For Christianity is not a solitary belief system. Any genuine resurgence of Christianity, as history demonstrates, depends on a reawakening and renewal of that which is the essence of the faith—that is, the people of God, the new society, the body of Christ, which is made manifest in the world—the church.” When becoming a Christian, we join the spiritual Kingdom of God that consists of God's people from all time and all walks of life. We also then join the visible representation of the Kingdom of God in this world and that is a community of followers of Jesus, which the Bible calls the church. In Jesus' community with the disciples, Jesus taught them that being a Christian was not just a one-on-one private relationship with God, but it was about following Jesus together in community.

COMMUNITY WITH OTHER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

Throughout the Bible, from the Old Testament nation of Israel to Jesus' disciples, all the way to the New Testament church, and even to one day in heaven for all eternity, God's plan is for His people to follow Him in community. The church today needs to grasp the truth that **Community with Other Followers of Jesus is an Absolute Necessity**. The vast majority of times that Bible uses the word “church” it refers to a specific group of Christians joined together for a specific purpose. The church never refers to one person. There is no such thing in the Bible as a solitary person being the church. As a matter of fact, the New Testament contains fifty-nine specific “one another” commands that describe actions believers must do for or with each other, which can only be fulfilled in a community. One example comes from Jesus Himself who said to His disciples in *John 13:35*, “*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*” Jesus makes it clear that the world especially sees that we are Christians not by just what we do as individual Christians but especially through our love for fellow Christians.

The reality is that Christian community can be very challenging at times. We are all imperfect human beings who can very easily rub each other wrong and cause all kinds of conflict. I see it as not just a pastor of a church but also as a presiding elder with the responsibility of over twenty churches. God knew that we needed community to shape us to be more like Christ, and that includes the challenge to love others who drive us crazy. That is the point of *Proverbs 27:17* that says, “*As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.*” It is in community with other imperfect followers of Jesus where we

grow to be like Jesus by forgiving, loving, being patient, kind, gentle, speaking the truth in love, reconciling, encouraging and so much more like Jesus did. Christian community can be challenging. We are so busy that regularly being together in community with other Christians, praying together, studying the Bible together, worshiping together, serving together, and all that we do together as Christians, too often takes a backseat in our lives. This was even a problem in the First Century New Testament church where some people were drifting away from being in community with other Christians. To them and to us *Hebrews 10:23-25* says, *“²³ Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. ²⁴ Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”* We all need community to help us hold tightly without wavering in the hope we have in Jesus, to continually motivate and encourage one another to love like Jesus loved and serve like Jesus served, to cheer each other on to keep on following Jesus no matter how hard it gets, to help each other grow spiritually, and to be accountable to one another.

You may have heard the story about a member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly but then over time, stopped going. After a long absence the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and “dead as a doornail.” Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coal around it. As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, “Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday.” Jesus knew the truth and the disciples caught it that we desperately need each other to stay on fire for God. As Eugene Peterson once said, “There can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life, apart from an immersion in, and embrace of, community. I am not myself by myself.”

When we become Christians and join a local church family, we are not only saying that we are in a relationship with Jesus as His followers, but we are also committing ourselves to follow Jesus with His church, a community of fellow disciples following Jesus.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *Giving Challenge* (weekly videos), RightNow Media
- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Timothy Keller
- *The Hole in Our Holiness*, Kevin DeYoung
- *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia*, Jerry Bridges
- *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Icebreaker Questions

1. The sermon opens with the story of Antonio Stradivari, whose apprentices learned their craft by working alongside him. Who has been a mentor or influential person in your life, and what did you learn simply by spending time with them?
2. Think about a time when being part of a group, team, or community made an experience more meaningful or helped you through a difficult season. What made that connection so valuable?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. Jesus intentionally called twelve individuals to become His disciples and invited them to learn from Him together. What does it mean to be an apprentice of Jesus rather than simply someone who believes in Him? How might this understanding change the way we approach our daily walk with Christ?
2. The early church devoted itself to teaching, fellowship, prayer, worship, and meeting one another's needs. Which of these practices do you see most clearly in your own Christian community? Where might God be calling you to become more intentional?
3. The sermon reminds us that Christian community can be challenging because we are all imperfect people. How has God used a difficult relationship or disagreement with another believer to teach you patience, humility, forgiveness, or grace?
4. The illustration of the burning ember reminds us that our spiritual lives can grow cold when we become isolated. What are some common reasons Christians drift away from meaningful fellowship? How can we recognize when someone is becoming disconnected and lovingly encourage them?
5. At Killearn, membership includes a commitment to Presence—following Jesus in community with other believers. Beyond simply attending Sunday worship, what does meaningful participation in the life of the church look like? What is one practical step you can take this week to strengthen your connection with others and demonstrate Christ's love?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?