

In Holy Baptism, you were made disciples of Jesus –

Being disciples is more than simply a fact,
No, what Jesus did at your baptism – and mine
– was to bring us into a life of discipleship

Learning from Jesus and imitating him.

Being disciples has significance for every moment of our lives,
for from our Baptism on, we follow Jesus.

Following Jesus is not so much a physical location as it is a relationship
with him that teaches us how to live the life God intends for us.

- Discipleship is relationship with Jesus and with others.
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- And that means living in faith.
- **Faith is trusting Jesus**
- – trusting the love of God that calls us to be Jesus' disciples.

So what does Jesus ask of his disciples? Of those who follow him?

1. Share the life of God's people – worship, pray, learn, serve
2. Tell the story of God's salvation—from creation to redemption in Jesus for eternal life
3. Recruit others to be disciples of Jesus – invite, invite, invite!
4. Live in gratitude to God for all things—thank God for everything
5. Pray without ceasing – keep talking with God and listening for God's response

Today, as we celebrate the baptism of Emma Marie
and commemorate James the Just of Jerusalem,

we add one more thing to what Jesus asks of us as his baptized disciples.

6. To endure suffering for the faith.

Then Jesus said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

The cross was the common form of execution in the Roman empire, and the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by thousands of crosses on which were tortured and hung those convicted as criminals.

Jesus was among those crucified

- betrayed by his friend,
- wrongly convicted and
- shedding innocent blood for the sake of all humanity.

When we speak of the Passion of our Lord

we speak of his suffering,

the cross he endured

– and which he calls us to endure who follow him.

Now Chris and Lauren,

James and Lauren,

I know that right now it doesn't sound like good news that you will be presenting Emma Marie for a life that includes enduring suffering for the faith.

But keep listening – hopefully by the end, you will find it so.

Jesus doesn't ask anyone to follow him anywhere he has not already gone ahead of us.

Matthew the evangelist tells us about a time Jesus went to his hometown to teach in the synagogue where he grew up.

But the people there who had known him from the time he was born considered him arrogant – pretentious

Behaving above his station as a humble carpenter's son.

In other words,

they did not believe the Word he spoke was the word of God for them – for their life and salvation.

They rejected his divinity

– they rejected his teaching and so he was not able to do many deeds of power there because of their unbelief.

Rejection by his own community was part of the suffering Jesus endured for the sake of his mission to be the Savior.

But he did not give up. He did not let this painful rejection stop him.

He recognized that elsewhere

– where he was not the hometown boy made good

– multitudes gathered to hear him.

Homes were filled with people eager for what he had to say.

People's lives were transformed by the powerful word of God that offers a future beyond our capacity to be good.

A future only possible by the forgiveness and grace Jesus offers.

So it is that as we follow Jesus

–as we live our baptismal life as his disciples, we will endure suffering.

We don't need to create it, as some medieval monks did by whipping themselves on the bare back

It will come to us simply because we are people who live as Jesus people in a world that often rejects the Gospel.

It may even be that we will be asked to choose between Jesus and death, as the martyr James of Jerusalem did, along with many other disciples, ancient and modern.

Syrian Christians, Chinese Christians, N. Korean Christians, Nigerian Christians

– all daily face the choice between Jesus and death as they endure persecution and the possibility of martyrdom for their faith in Jesus.

Christian faith includes suffering.

But suffering is no fun -- So why bother being Christian at all?

It no longer has the social cachet it once did.

Nowadays, being atheist or “spiritual but not religious” is the popular choice.

But being Christian has truly never been the safe, comfortable, life.

To follow Jesus means enduring rejection, betrayal, suffering, and death if and when it may come.

But the goal of discipleship is the good life God desires for us.

As St. Paul proclaimed in Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This, dear brothers and sisters,

is not only why the Christian faith surpasses atheism,

“spiritual but not religious”,

and all other faith or non-faith,

but it is how we as disciples of Jesus can dare to follow Jesus into suffering.

It is because the cross is not the end.

The cross

– the rejection, suffering, and death we experience because we trust Jesus

– is only a penultimate chapter in the story of salvation.

The final chapter – the last word

– is our resurrection from the dead:

because we follow Jesus not only *to* the cross,

but into the grave,

and out of the grave to eternal life.

That is the good news about what God is doing as you present Emma Marie for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

She will not only be united with Jesus Christ in his death and burial – signified by the drowning in water

– but she will be united with him in his resurrection
as she is brought out of the water

Clothed in Christ's righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,
and sealed with the Holy Spirit

– the Spirit of Jesus' resurrection and life.

She will begin her life of discipleship today – if her parents and sponsors still want to go through with this daring, miraculous event.

And it may well be a difficult life.

But no difficulty need cause despair or discouragement

-- because God has already claimed her for Jesus' life.

What is important for her – and for all of us – is this:

To be taught who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

To learn the whole story of God's saving love

– beginning with creation,

- and Noah, and Abraham,
- and Joseph, and Moses,
- and the prophets,
- and John, and Peter,

- and Paul, and James the Just,
- and Fred and Jan,
- and Chris and Lauren,
- and James and Lauren,
- and me and everyone else who is part of Emma's – and our-- story.

That's why, Chris and Lauren,

you are asked to make promises today.

For you are Emma's first teachers of the faith.

From you she will learn of God's love,

she will learn habits of prayer and Bible reading.

From you she will learn how to trust God to provide for her needs

and how to tell right from wrong,

good from evil.

But you are not alone in this.

You have chosen James and Lauren as Emma's godparents.

It is their particular responsibility to supplement

your faith influence with their own investment in her growth in faith.

And beyond that, this congregation and any other you become part of as you keep the promises you make today

will surround you as a community of faithful disciples to strengthen and encourage you.

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Your promises today are very important,

for they are the means by which Emma will come to know the power of what is happening to her.

But you make promises in the wholehearted trust that God is keeping God's own promises to you.

One of those promises is to maintain the Church against which the gates of hell will not prevail.

As James the Just reminded those gathered for the Council in Jerusalem:
The Lord has promised;

After these things I will return.

The kingdom of David is like a fallen tent.

But I will rebuild it.

'Amos 9:11-12

Jesus is the restoration of the kingdom of David

and the Lord builds up its ruins with every baptism;

So that we who are witnesses of what God is doing here today might be convinced of God's power to give life and salvation to all people who turn to him.

Recalling these promises of God enables us to make our promises of faithful discipleship

- even to endure suffering
- in the sure and certain hope of sharing in the resurrection of our Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen