13 And [Jesus] went up on the mountain

SOLITUDE

and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him.

COMMUNITY

14 And He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach…

MINISTRY

Mark 3:13-14

Henri Nouwen sees in Jesus' choices recorded in Mark 3:13ff a pattern for a loving life with God and others.

Please take a copy with you to the balcony. Do not try to take it all in now. Simply read the introductory paragraphs and the section on SOLITUDE.

Where in the coming week can you arrange your life so that you have time alone with God? Time to take a walk. Sit before a fire. Come to the worship center or chapel to pray.

Come remember who God is… and who you are. The news is good!

MOVING FROM SOLITUDE TO COMMUNITY TO MINISTRY

By Henri Nouwen

The word discipleship and the word discipline are the same word — that has always fascinated me. Once you have made the choice to say, "Yes, I want to follow Jesus," the question is, "What disciplines will help me remain faithful to that choice?" If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we have to live a disciplined life.

By discipline, I do not mean control. If I know the discipline of psychology or of economics, I have a certain control over a body of knowledge. If I discipline my children, I want to have a little control over them.

But in the spiritual life, the word discipline means "the effort to create some space in which God can act." Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on.

I think three disciplines are important for us to remain faithful, so we not only become disciples, but also remain disciples. These disciplines are contained in one passage from Scripture with which we're familiar, but one that we may be surprised to find speaks about discipline.

"Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray, and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them and called them apostles: Simon, whom he called Peter; and his brother, Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, son of Alphaeus; Simon, called the Zealot; Judas, son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

"He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples. There was a great crowd of people from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and be cured of their diseases. And people tormented by unclean spirits were also cured. Everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all" (Luke 6:12-19).

This is a beautiful story that moves from night to morning toafternoon. Jesus spent the night in solitude with God. In the morning, he gathered his apostles around him and formed

community. In the afternoon, with his apostles, he went out and preached the Word and healed the sick.

Notice the order—from solitude to community to ministry. The night is for solitude; the morning for community; the afternoon for ministry.

So often in ministry, I have wanted to do it by myself. If it didn't work, I went to others and said, "Please!" searching for a community to help me. If that didn't work, maybe I'd start praying.

But the order that Jesus teaches us is the reverse. It begins by being with God in solitude; then it creates a fellowship, a community of people with whom the mission is being lived; and finally this community goes out together to heal and to proclaim good news.

I believe you can look at solitude, community, and ministry as three disciplines by which we create space for God. If we create space in which God can act and speak, something surprising will happen. You and I are called to these disciplines if we want to be disciples.

Solitude

Solitude is being with God and God alone. Is there any space for that in your life? Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Who am I? I am the beloved. That's the voice Jesus heard when he came out of the Jordan River: "You are my beloved; on you my favor rests." And Jesus says to you and to me that we are loved as he is loved. That same voice is there for you. When you are not claiming that voice, you cannot walk freely in this world.

Jesus listened to that voice all the time, and he was able to walk right through life. People were applauding him, laughing at him; praising him and rejecting him; calling "Hosanna!" and calling "Crucify!" But in the midst of that, Jesus knew one thing—I am the beloved; I am God's favorite one. He clung to that voice.

There are many other voices speaking—loudly: "Prove that you are the beloved." "Prove you're worth something." "Prove you have any contribution to make." "Do something relevant." "Be sure you make a name for yourself." "At least have some power—then people will love you; then people will say you're wonderful, you're great."

These voices are so strong in this world. These were the voices Jesus heard right after he heard "You are my beloved." Another voice said, "Prove you are the beloved. Do something. Change these stones into bread. Be sure you're famous. Jump from the temple, and you will be known. Grab some power so you have real influence. Don't you want some influence? Isn't that why you came?"

Jesus said, "No, I don't have to prove anything. I am already the beloved."

I love Rembrandt's painting The Return of the Prodigal Son. The father holds his son, holds his daughter, and touches his son and his daughter and says, "You are my beloved. I'm not going to ask you any questions. Wherever you have gone, whatever you have done, and whatever people say about you, you're my beloved. I hold you safe in my embrace. I touch you. I hold you safe under my wings. You can come home to me whose name is Compassionate, whose name is Love."

If you keep that in mind, you can deal with an enormous amount of success as well as an enormous amount of failure without losing your identity, because your identity is that you are the beloved. Long before your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, your teachers, your church, or any people touched you in a loving as well as in a wounding way—long before you were rejected by some person or praised by somebody else—that voice has been there always. "I have loved you with an everlasting love." That love is there before you were born and will be there after you die.

A life of fifty, sixty, seventy, or a hundred years is just a little moment in which you can say, "Yes, I love you too." God has become so vulnerable, so little, so dependent in a manger and on a cross and is begging us, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you really love me?"

That's where ministry starts, because your freedom is anchored in claiming your belovedness. That allows you to go into this world and touch people, heal them, speak with them, and make them aware that they are beloved, chosen, and blessed. When you discover your belovedness by God, you see the belovedness of other people and call that forth. It's an incredible mystery of God's love that the more you know how deeply you are loved, the more you will see how deeply your sisters and your brothers in the human family are loved.

Now this is not easy. Jesus spent the night in prayer. That's a picture of the fact that prayer is not something you always feel. It's not a voice you always hear with these ears. It's not always an insight that suddenly comes to you in your little mind. (God's heart is greater than the human heart, God's mind is greater than the human mind, and God's light is so great that it might blind you and make you feel like you're in the night.)

But you have to pray. You have to listen to the voice who calls you the beloved, because otherwise you will run around begging for affirmation, for praise, for success. And then you're not free.

Oh, if we could sit for just one half hour a day doing nothing except taking a simple word from the gospel and putting it in front of us—say, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." Say it three times, and we know it's not true, because we want many things. That's exactly why we're so nervous. But if we keep saying the truth, the real truth—"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want"—and let that truth descend from our mind into our heart, gradually those words are written on the walls of our inner holy place. That becomes the space in which we can receive our colleagues and our work, our family and our friends, and the people whom we will meet during the day.

The trouble is, as soon as you sit and become quiet, you think, Oh, I forgot this. I should call my friend. Later on I'm going to see him. Your inner life is like a banana tree filled with monkeys jumping up and down.

It's not easy to sit and trust that in solitude God will speak to you— not as a magical voice but that he will let you know something gradually over the years. And in that word from God you will find the inner place from which to live your life.

Solitude is where spiritual ministry begins. That's where Jesus listened to God. That's where we listen to God.

Sometimes I think of life as a big wagon wheel with many spokes. In the middle is the hub. Often in ministry, it looks like we are running around the rim trying to reach everybody. But God says, "Start in the hub; live in the hub. Then you will be connected with all the spokes, and you won't have to run so fast."

Community

It's precisely in the hub, in that communion with God, that we discover the call to community. It's remarkable that solitude always calls us to community. In solitude you realize you're part of a human family and that you want to lift something together.

By community, I don't mean formal communities. I mean families, friends, parishes, twelve step programs, prayer groups. Community is not an organization; community is a way of living: you gather around you people with whom you want to proclaim the truth that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God.

Community is not easy. Somebody once said, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives." In Jesus' community of twelve apostles, the last

name was that of someone who was going to betray him. That person is always in your community somewhere; in the eyes of others, you might be that person.

I live in a community called Daybreak—one of over a hundred communities throughout the world where children, men, and women who are mentally disabled and those who assist them live together. We share all aspects of day today living. Nathan, Janet, and all the other people of our community know how hard it is and how beautiful it is to live together.

Why is it so important that solitude come before community? If we do not know we are the beloved sons and daughters of God, we're going to expect someone in the community to make us feel that way. They cannot. We'll expect someone to give us that perfect, unconditional love. But community is not loneliness grabbing onto loneliness: "I'm so lonely, and you're so lonely." It's solitude grabbing onto solitude: "I am the beloved; you are the beloved; together we can build a home." Sometimes you are close, and that's wonderful. Sometimes you don't feel much love, and that's hard. But we can be faithful. We can build a home together and create space for God and for the children of God.

Within the discipline of community are the disciplines of forgiveness and celebration. Forgiveness and celebration are what make community, whether a marriage, a friendship, or any other form of community.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is to allow the other person not to be God. Forgiveness says, "I know you love me, but you don't have to love me unconditionally, because no human being can do that."

We all have wounds. We all are in so much pain. It's precisely this feeling of loneliness that lurks behind all our successes, that feeling of uselessness that hides under all the praise, that feeling of meaninglessness even when people say we are fantastic—that is what makes us sometimes grab onto people and expect from them an affection and love they cannot give.

If we want other people to give us something that only God can give, we become a demon. We say, "Love me!" and before you know it we become violent and demanding and manipulative. It's so important that we keep forgiving one another—not once in a while, but every moment of life. Before you have had your breakfast, you have already had at least three opportunities to forgive people, because your mind is already wondering, What will they think about me? What will he or she do? How will they use me?

To forgive other people for being able to give you only a little love—that's a hard discipline. To keep asking others for forgiveness because you can give only a little love—that's a hard discipline, too. It hurts to say to your children, to your wife or your husband, to your friends, that you cannot give them all that you would like to give. Still, that is where community starts to be created, when we come together in a forgiving and undemanding way.

This is where celebration, the second discipline of community, comes in. If you can forgive that another person cannot give you what only God can give, then you can celebrate that person's gift. Then you can see the love that person is giving you as a reflection of God's great unconditional love. "Love one another because I have loved you first." When we have known that first love, we can see the love that comes to us from people as the reflection of that. We can celebrate that and say, "Wow, that's beautiful!"

In our community, Daybreak, we have to do a lot of forgiving. But right in the midst of forgiving comes a celebration: we see the beauty of people who quite often are considered marginal by society. With forgiveness and celebration, community becomes the place where we call forth the gifts of other people, lift them up, and say, "You are the beloved daughter and the beloved son."

To celebrate another person's gift doesn't mean giving each other little compliments—"You play the piano better"; "You are so good in singing." No, that's a talent show.

To celebrate each other's gifts means to accept each other's humanity. We see each other as a person who can smile, say "Welcome," eat, and make a few steps. A person who in the eyes of others is broken suddenly is full of life, because you discover your own brokenness through them.

Here is what I mean. In this world, so many people live with the burden of self-rejection: "I'm not good. I'm useless. People don't really care for me. If I didn't have money, they wouldn't talk to me. If I didn't have this big job, they wouldn't call me. If I didn't have this influence, they wouldn't love me." Underneath a successful and highly praised career can live a fearful person who doesn't think much of himself or herself. In community comes that mutual vulnerability in which we forgive each other and celebrate each other's gifts.

I have learned so much since coming to Daybreak. I've learned that my real gifts are not that I write books or that I went to universities. My real gifts are discovered by Janet and Nathan and others who know me so well they cannot be impressed any more by this other stuff. Once in a while they say, "I have good advice: Why don't you read some of your own books?"

There is healing in being known in my vulnerability and impatience and weakness. Suddenly I realize that Henri is a good person also in the eyes of people who don't read books and who don't care about success. These people can forgive me constantly for the little egocentric gestures and behaviors that are always there.

Ministry

All the disciples of Jesus are called to ministry. Ministry is not, first of all, something that you do (although it calls you to do many things). Ministry is something that you have to trust. If

you know you are the beloved, and if you keep forgiving those with whom you form community and celebrate their gifts, you cannot do other than minister.

Jesus cured people not by doing all sorts of complicated things. A power went out from him, and everyone was cured. He didn't say, "Let me talk to you for ten minutes, and maybe I can do something about this." Everyone who touched him was cured, because a power went out from his pure heart. He wanted one thing—to do the will of God. He was the completely obedient one, the one who was always listening to God. Out of this listening came an intimacy with God that radiated out to everyone Jesus saw and touched.

Ministry means you have to trust that. You have to trust that if you are the son and daughter of God, power will go out from you and that people will be healed.

"Go out and heal the sick. Walk on the snake. Call the dead to life." This is not small talk. Yet Jesus said, "Whatever I do, you can do too and even greater things." Jesus said precisely, "You are sent into the world just as I was sent into the world—to heal, to cure."

Trust in that healing power. Trust that if you are living as the beloved you will heal people whether or not you notice it. But you have to be faithful to that call.

Healing ministry can be expressed in two words: gratitude and compassion.

Healing happens often by leading people to gratitude, for the world is full of resentment. What is resentment? Cold anger. "I'm angry at him. I'm angry at this. This is not the way I want it." Gradually, there are more and more things I am negative about, and soon I become a resentful person.

Resentment makes you cling to your failures or disappointments and complain about the losses in your life. Our life is full of losses— losses of dreams and losses of friends and losses of family and losses of hopes. There is always the lurking danger we will respond to these incredible pains in resentment. Resentment gives us a hardened heart.

Jesus calls us to gratitude. He calls to us, "You foolish people. Didn't you know that the Son of Man—that you, that we—have to suffer and thus enter into the glory? Didn't you know that these pains were labor pains that lead you to the joy? Didn't you know that all we are experiencing as losses are gains in God's eyes? Those who lose their lives will gain it. And if the grain doesn't die, it stays a small grain; but if it dies, then it will be fruitful."

Can you be grateful for everything that has happened in your life—not just the good things but for all that brought you to today? It was the pain of a Son that created a family of people known as Christians. That's the mystery of God.

Our ministry is to help people to gradually let go of the resentment, to discover that right in the middle of pain there is a blessing. Right in the middle of your tears—that's where the dance starts and joy is first felt.

In this crazy world, there's an enormous distinction between good times and bad, between sorrow and joy. But in the eyes of God, they're never separated. Where there is pain, there is healing. Where there is mourning, there is dancing. Where there is poverty, there is the kingdom.

Jesus says, "Cry over your pains,and you will discover that I'm right there in your tears, and you will be grateful for my presence in your weakness." Ministry means to help people become grateful for life even with pain. That gratitude can send into the world precisely to the places where people are in pain. The minister, the disciple of Jesus, goes where there is pain not because he is a masochist or she is a sadist, but because God is hidden in the pain.

"Blessed are the poor." Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those who care for the poor"; he says, "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the mourning. Blessed are those who have pain. There I am." To minister, you have to be where the pain is. Sometimes that pain is hidden in a person who from the outside might look painless or successful.

Compassion means to suffer with, to live with those who suffer. When Jesus saw the woman of Nain he realized, This is a widow who has lost her only son, and he was moved by compassion. He felt the pain of that woman in his guts. He felt her pain so deeply in his spirit that out of compassion he called the son to life so he could give that son back to his mother.

We are sent to wherever there is poverty, loneliness, and suffering to have the courage to be with people. Trust that by throwing yourself into that place of pain you will find the joy of Jesus. All ministries in history are built on that vision. A new world grows out of compassion.

Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate. It's a great call. But don't be fearful; don't be afraid. Don't say, "I can't do that."

When you are aware that you are the beloved, and when you have friends around you with whom you live in community, you can do anything. You're not afraid anymore. You're not afraid to knock on the door while somebody's dying. You're not afraid to open a discussion with a person who underneath all the glitter is much in need of ministry. You're free.

I've experienced that constantly. When I was depressed or when I felt anxious, I knew my friends couldn't solve it. Those who ministered to me were those who were not afraid to be with me. Precisely where I felt my poverty I discovered God's blessing.

Just a few weeks ago a friend of mine died. He was a classmate, and they sent me the tape of his funeral service. The first reading in that service was a story about a little river. The little river said, "I can become a big river." It worked hard, but there was a big rock. The river said, "I'm going to get around this rock." The little river pushed and pushed, and since it had a lot of strength, it got itself around the rock.

Soon the river faced a big wall, and the river kept pushing this wall. Eventually, the river made a canyon and carved a way through. The growing river said, "I can do it. I can push it. I am not going to let down for anything."

Then there was an enormous forest. The river said, "I'll go ahead anyway and just force these trees down." And the river did.

The river, now powerful, stood on the edge of an enormous desert with the sun beating down. The river said, "I'm going to go through this desert." But the hot sand soon began to soak up the whole river. The river said, "Oh, no. I'm going to do it. I'm going to get myself through this desert." But the river soon had drained into the sand until it was only a small mud pool.

Then the river heard a voice from above: "Just surrender. Let me lift you up. Let me take over." The river said, "Here I am." The sun then lifted up the river and made the river into a huge cloud. He carried the river right over the desert and let the cloud rain down and make the fields far away fruitful and rich.

There is a moment in our life when we stand before the desert and want to do it ourselves. But there is the voice that comes, "Let go. Surrender. I will make you fruitful. Yes, trust me. Give yourself to me."

What counts in your life and mine is not successes but fruits. The fruits of your life you might not see yourself. The fruits of your life are born often in your pain and in your vulnerability and in your losses. The fruits of your life come only after the plow has carved through your land. God wants you to be fruitful.

The question is not, "How much can I still do in the years that are left to me?" The question is, "How can I prepare myself for total surrender so my life can be fruitful?"

Our little lives are small, human lives. But in the eyes of the One who calls us the beloved, we are great—greater than the years we have. We will bear fruits, fruits that you and I will not see on this earth but in which we can trust.

Solitude, community, ministry— these disciplines help us live a fruitful life. Remain in Jesus; he remains in you. You will bear many fruits, you will have great joy, and your joy will be complete.