Sermon – November 1, 2026

In all the passages of Holy Scripture there are some that soar to the heights of poetic brilliance like the 23rd psalm, or the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians or even, the Beatitudes, the passage that we have heard this morning.

But there are also passages that are not so beautiful, and are almost clunky when they are read. Ironically enough, this morning we have heard both. We have heard the mystical beauty of the Beatitudes, and we have heard the less than smooth opening of the 5th chapter of Matthew.

Before one of the most famous passages of the Bible Matthew presents us with a 29-word introduction of sorts, stressing Jesus' departure from the crowds, his climbing a mountain, taking a seat, and then the statement, "he began to speak, and taught them, saying…."

Why would Matthew spend so much energy constructing such a strange introduction to what is perhaps his Gospel's most transcendent words? The answer is that these 29 words are not an introduction. They are not even a segue way from one part of his Gospel to another. Instead they are to stress to whom Jesus spoke these words. Notice the beginning of this passage: "When Jesus saw the crowds…." That small, seemingly insignificant, piece of information is pivotal.

Four chapters of Matthew have preceded this passage, and have covered everything from the genealogy of Jesus dating back to Abraham, to the preaching of John the Baptist, to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. But this is the first specific sermon recorded in Matthew, and it was given not to the crowds, but to the disciples.

By this point in Matthew Jesus had crowds following him. He had taught the masses before, but their response was singular; the crowds sought Jesus for his power to heal. In other words, the crowds followed Jesus because of what he could do for them; not for his words, nor his call to the kingdom of God.

This morning we hear that when Jesus once again saw the crowds he sought a separate place. Once his disciples had joined him, he began to teach.

In the Gospels there is a distinct difference between the crowds, and the disciples. The word *disciple* in the Bible never means just someone who was merely interested, or intrigued, or sought Jesus because of his power. The disciples were those who listened to Jesus, and truly heard his words, and endeavored to follow him, and his teachings.

The word *disciple* is one thing. It carries with it fairly positive connotations. It describes a certain diligence, and commitment. Within the church, at times, it is even synonymous with the word *saint*.

But the word *discipline* is another matter all together. Its connotations are much less endearing. It carries with it the sense of arduousness, even harshness. At times it can be synonymous with the word *punishment*.

That is unfortunate because what makes a disciples faithful is discipline. A faithful disciple practices disciplines.

You already have disciplines, and you may not even realize it. This morning you got up, got dressed, left the comforts of your home to come here to pray, and worship. Many of you do this weekly. That is a discipline.

Starting in January we are offering weekly groups to explore central disciplines that faithful disciples of Jesus have practiced for centuries.

These disciplines have provided opportunities for the saints, both the unknown, and the hallowed to grow in their love, and devotion to our Lord.

They are simple practices: Turning, Learning, Praying, Worshipping, Blessing, Going, and Resting. Seven simple practices that, when done deliberately, and with focus, and intention, can transform our lives.

The Way of Love that we have announced in the past weeks will offer you a chance to become a more faithful disciple by exploring these disciplines. I invite you to find yourself seated with Jesus, where you feel the opportunity, to paraphrase the Gospel, that Jesus has begun speaking, and teaching you, as one of his disciples.

I invite you to discover these basic disciplines, and in doing so, I believe you will grow as a disciple.