Bold discipleship

Benjamin Ryan

When I was asked if I wanted to share my ideas about bold discipleship, I honestly had a bit of trouble picturing it. I thought about it and all that came to mind were examples that didn't seem quite right. When I though about it some more i worried a bit about what had come to my mind earlier and if it was what might have come to others. i think there is a very important distinction to be made between Bold and Aggressive discipleship. I feel like the best way to explain myself is through a comparison between two different Archetypes.

First, there is a member of the clergy who goes around town intercepting people. They are very friendly and talkative with anyone who is willing to return eye contact, but they are not the biggest on the whole listening thing. Every day they wander around and strike up a conversation with anyone but especially those who seems like outliers. They ask how are you? Who are you? What are you doing? And inevitably quickly get around to, Are you a Christian? When it comes to that question, regardless of the answer, unless, it matches their exact denomination they start to pray for your soul. They go through an entire ritual and, claiming you for their particular brand of Jesus and proceed to tell you that if you know what’s good for you, you’ll seek out their church and get some good moral guidance. Then they wish you a blessed day and move on.

In the next town over there is another clergy member. This minister loves God deep in their bones in an incandescent and multifaceted way. They love the church, their community, and they preach on Sundays as you would expect. Outside of Church they’re not as talkative about God in public. As a member of their community, they provide acts of service, bringing people food, providing counsel and comfort when needed and occasionally providing vulnerable people with shelter or asylum. They are utterly and unapologetically themselves and make space for others to do the same, especially when it’s hard. They go to protests and vigils wearing visible signs of their calling, not as an attention seeking display but to signal their willingness to help and a show of support from the church. They do all of these things because of their own personal call and connection to God but they never preach unless asked. When they converse with people they listen, they ask question and do not condemn or ridicule others for differing from them. When someone asks them about their relationship to God and the church, they are excited and their enthusiasm is infectious.

Which of the two would you call the bold disciple? Who would you prefer to be? The first might believe in the work they are doing but it is not done with love. It's aggressive, self righteous and patronizing but not bold. We have no right to lay claim to others for any reason. Without the agency to say no thanks or leave blessings mean nothing or worse can cause serious harm. Preaching at those who do not wish to be preached to is not bold discipleship but harassment. As a visibly queer young person I have felt the difference and can only imagine how much worse it could be for others who have more cause to be distressed. When I speak to other young people outside of the church the first person is often all they can picture. They can’t fathom the church as a place of love, joy and community because the Cold, Abrasive, Unkind, version is all they have ever had the chance to encounter.

being a Bold disciple is not accomplished in great acts of confrontation or saintly behavior. It's in the little daily acts of compassion and love for others. It's in saying this is who I am, this is what I believe, I will stand with you if you need me, and if you care to listen, I will talk.