

Welcome

[\[Devil Wears Prada clip\]](#) How many of you have seen *The Devil Wears Prada*? I had heard for years that it's great, but only sat down to watch it in the last couple of years, and it turns out, everyone was right.

One of my favorite things about the movie is how the main character, Andy, follows all the basic beats of the classic hero's journey. Believe it or not, you can map her journey and Luke Skywalker's on the same timeline and they line up perfectly.

That's interesting because of who Andy is - at the beginning of the film, she's a woman who doesn't choose. She's swept along - that's how she ends up working at a fashion magazine even though she doesn't know anything about fashion.

And the point of the movie isn't for Andy to become a better dresser - it's for her to have *agency*. In the words of the clip we just watched, she needs to become the person choosing the clothes, not having the clothes chosen for her. Clothes represent agency for Andy.

I don't really want to talk about clothes today; I want to talk about agency. Specifically *spiritual* agency.

Like Andy, we're all living in stories, whether we recognize it or not. And when we don't understand the stories that shape us, it means we're not truly free to live as God called us to be.

So today, we're going to take a look at the stories that shape us, and learn to listen for God's call on our lives so we can live the Jesus story - a story that transforms and frees us.

Message

Here at Catalyst, we always take the four weeks leading up to Advent to reflect on who we are as a Church and dream about the future. Last year, we introduced four big ideas we're organizing ourselves around moving forward. So for the next four weeks, we're going to revisit those ideas and ask two questions: What does each mean for Catalyst and what does each mean for *me* as a part of Catalyst?

This year, we're going to be exploring how each big idea is found in the life and ministry of Jesus, and we're calling the series Proximity Warning because each big idea is grounded in a close relationship to Jesus. When we draw closer to God, our lives change. Fair warning.

We saw that when we explored our first big idea, Friendship. We saw how Jesus garnered a reputation as a 'friend of sinners' specifically because he got up close and personal with them. He shared his life with them. Friendship prioritizes proximity.

Last week, we investigated Diversity. Far from being a buzz word or a trend we're chasing, Diversity was God's idea for the Church from the beginning. We saw in the story of the Samaritan woman that when we as Jesus' disciples don't attend to those who are different from us, we miss what God is doing in the world. Diversity is essential to God's calling, and true diversity requires us to be in proximity to others.

Today, we're exploring the idea of Discipleship. When we think discipleship, a lot of us think of learning. Christian publishing houses publish a lot of discipleship curriculum, and if you were raised in Church, you probably attended "Sunday School". School and curriculum - ask our teachers here and they'll tell you those are learning words.

Learning is *part* of what it means to follow Jesus, but we've mistaken the part for the whole. The goal of Discipleship isn't just learning new information, but transformation. It's the kind of transformation we see in *Star Wars* - farm boy to Jedi knight, and in *Devil Wears Prada* - helpless and tossed by the wind to confident and free to choose. Jesus wants us to consider what story we're living. Is it the story of God?

[Scripture Slide 1] Turn with me to Luke 14. This is one of Jesus' parables, and we're going to do something different this morning. This parable shows up in two of the Gospels - Luke and Matthew. Both authors use it to talk about discipleship, but they do it in slightly different ways. So let's listen in first to Luke's version.

Jesus replied with this story: "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

"The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'

After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.' " -- Luke 14:16-24

Okay the big picture of this parable hits on a lot of the notes we've covered over the last two weeks. We see God as a king who invites *everyone* to his banquet. A God who offers friendship to anyone who's willing to come.

But I want to focus on that first group, the people who *said* they're God's friends, but when the invitation to the banquet came, they didn't show up. It's the excuses they made that fascinate me the most. None of them offers *bad* reasons not to come. In fact, they both revolve around relationships and work.

They're too busy with work, or too busy with their families, to make it to God's banquet.

In case you're unclear what Jesus is saying in the parable, he goes on to put a very fine point on it:

A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is using some obvious hyperbole here, but think about the parable and these words in light of our series. We have to ask the question, "What's keeping us from proximity to God?" Does our work keep us from God? What about family obligations? Have we packed our lives so busy with *good* obligations that we can't come when God calls?"

That's why Jesus goes on to use a building metaphor (which may sound familiar if you were here in our last series). He warns us that following him has a real cost. We can't just claim to be his disciples and keep doing what we were doing before. To follow him, we have to... well... *follow* him.

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'" -- Luke 14:25-30

What story are you living out? Do you even know? Is it the story of productivity, a story that glamorizes busyness, that mistakes a full schedule for a full life? Is it the story of materialism, a story that glamorizes work, that mistakes strong earnings for a strong character? Maybe it's the story of family, a story that centers our earthly relationships at the expense of knowing our creator.

Jesus warns us that all of those good things can get in the way of our relationship with God. They can sabotage our faith by distracting us from the transformation God offers us.

[Scripture Slide 2] I love the active language Jesus uses - we have to pick up our crosses. We are the builders. For Jesus, faith takes real intention on our part. We can hear that in the alternate ending Matthew has for this same parable:

The servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

"For many are called, but few are chosen." -- Matthew 22:10-14

Everyone is allowed to come to the banquet, but one guy shows up in regular street clothes, not wedding garments. It's a huge insult to the king, who asks, "Why didn't you wear your nice duds?"

I find it interesting that the guy doesn't say, "I can't afford a tux," or offer some other reasonable explanation (after all, if even the very poorest have been welcomed, surely a few show up who can't afford wedding clothes). No, he doesn't have a good reason. He shows up, but doesn't do the work that showing up requires. So in the end, he's not any better off than the people who made their excuses.

Do you recognize yourself in either of these groups? Are you the person who's too busy to give your faith the attention it merits? Are you a person who shows up and goes through the motions but you're not actually doing what it takes to be transformed?

[Scripture Slide 3] I want to let Matthew's clothing metaphor carry us over into the book of Ephesians, where the author compares our life of faith to changing clothes. In fact, the Greek words he uses here are literally undress and dress:

Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. -- Ephesians 4:21-24

Again, hear that active nature. Faith isn't just something God does to us. Faith is something we do. We take off the old ways and put on the way of God. God gives us the gift of freedom to choose. We take control of our schedules so we can submit them to God. We take control of our finances so we can submit them to God. We take control of our minds so that we can learn to see as God does.

This is why spiritual practices are so important for us here at Catalyst. Spiritual practices create space in our lives so we can draw close to God.

Sacred Reading of Scripture helps us learn to see as God does.

Prayer creates space in our day for God to move in us.

Giving creates margin in our finances so we can be shaped not by the story of materialism but God's story of generosity.

Sabbath creates space in our week. By keeping Sabbath, we refuse the lie of busyness and let God shape us.

Fasting and feasting create space in our spirits for God's holy community.

Friends, for us to be the Church God calls us to be, we have to resist the stories of our culture. These are the stories that have been shaping us since birth, stories that want to reduce us to commodities, to cogs in a machine. Stories that leech away our freedom.

Like Andy, we don't even realize the clothes we're wearing were chosen by those who couldn't care less what we want.

Let us take those clothes off and put on the things of God. Let us be shaped by the one who created us and calls us. Let us be a people who chooses to be free, to be courageous and open and generous. A people who chooses to be available, to cling to the God who loves us.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] We draw near to Jesus so we can be part of his new community!

1. When in the last week have I put on the things of my new nature?
2. When in the last week have I been content to wear the clothes of my old nature?
3. What in my life do I need to take off and cast away?
4. Asd

Assignment + Blessing

Sacred Reading of Ephesians 4