

TEAM SERVICE – 30th June 2019

‘Growing as disciplers’

With ordinations happening all over the country this weekend the theme of vocation is fitting.

What I am trying to communicate today will be familiar to some, but I hope can be a means of God igniting in all of us a greater and more passionate engagement with what Jesus instigated nearly 2000 years ago.

Commitment and enthusiasm with regard to spiritual matters haven't always sat comfortably with some. But when we think of some of most successful people – in the world of sport we might include Serena Williams or Jurgen Klopp for example – we are unable to separate their success from the obvious and often raw passion they bring to their profession.

The question becomes, therefore: how successful or true to our roots do **we** want to be when it comes to being followers of Jesus?

Our second son, Charles, started a new job in April – working for the It software division of a highly successful company now developing a global reach. Speaking with him a few days ago he mentioned he had just had his first performance appraisal.

I asked:

“Is that to sign off on your probationary period?”

He replied:

“No in this organisation everyone has an appraisal and new goals are set every 3 months.”

Jesus was not a 21st century leadership or management guru, he never tried to set up an organisation or build a company, but he was very clear and intentional about how he drew in followers and equipped them for a whole new way of living. (And we can say confidently that his impact will always outstrip Bill Gates and whichever world leader or impresario you choose to look at.)

Let's note the headline features of Jesus short tenure as a man in the public square: we find in the gospels he:

- **Preached** about the rule of God,
- **Spent time with people** – often over meals in their homes as much as in synagogue meetings and impromptu open-air gatherings,
- **Healed sick** people
- **Brought peace** to some severely tormented souls
- **Raised the dead** on a number of occasions
- Initiated some wonderful **miracles**
- **Called** ordinary women and men to become followers.

Now when we get closer to the text, we find the most significant outcome and part of the legacy Jesus left was in the way he nurtured the understanding and support of ordinary people so that after barely 3 years they became world-changers in his name.

The **disciples became DISCIPL-ERS**, those who gave themselves to the very same outcomes they had been part of with Jesus. They began to replicate his impact.

When we ask how the answer is:

During their time in the company of Jesus the likes of Simon Peter, James, John Andrew Matthew and others had:

- **Taken on board instruction** from Jesus about how the rule of God gets earthed in everyday life,
- **Spent time** travelling, conversing, asking questions and wrestling with answers,
- **Seen** how the sick, tormented and troubled were dealt with
- Been **part of working miracles** – they took the loaves and fish and saw them multiplied as they distributed what Jesus had blessed and put in their hands. ...

It is a mistake to assume this was the privileged lot of just a dozen or so. Luke's record makes it clear that not only did the 12 go out on missions (2 by 2) when Jesus sent them, later another 70 did the same – they came to realise **Jesus is the normal Christian** > a person full of the HS and fully obedient to all

God wants in the earthiness of ordinary human life; and what he did they could do and so can we!

Listen what Jesus said just hours before the crucifixion, speaking about those in the 1st century and subsequently would achieve:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and grater works than these will he (she/we) do because I am going to the Father.” John 14v12

The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus was not the untimely termination and extinguishing of something with promise; it was the passing of the baton to those he had discipled and some of his last words make it clear they and we are to become those who discipled people all over the world.

SO how does this transformation come about in terms of ordinary people coming to have extraordinary influence and impacting the world in the name of Jesus?

25 years ago, I was introduced to a lady who I and half a dozen others met with for a couple of hours every 6 to 8 weeks over the next 3 years. We gathered at her home in West Bromwich; without fail she prepared and offered for lunch amazing homemade bread and the best pumpkin soup I have ever had. We learned she grew up in Jamaica without her mum being around with a very ordinary Windies home life and schooling. She came to the UK when aged 21, later married in this country, is a mum to 3 children. You may have seen her from time-to time on tv snippets associated with parliamentary business in the Palace of Westminster in recent years. Her name is Rose Hudson-Wilkin who was announced on Friday as the next Bishop of Dover in the diocese of Canterbury.

Ordinary people can become extraordinary practitioners of the good news of Jesus Christ (despite having to suffer the Speaker of the House of Commons at close quarters for around 10 years!)

We may not get that sort of public profile, but it is right we ask what is involved to be ordinary disciples becoming effective discipl-ers in 21st century;

people with the degree of impact for good we see unfolding as we journey through the acts of the Apostles?

I offer you a simple summary or what could become a 5-fold template to adopt:

- a) **Become a personally devoted follower of Jesus.** Some are but perhaps others have only an inkling of what that means. If the latter is closer to where you become like Nicodemus who approached Jesus to ask how he who was deeply religious might become more effective like Jesus. Jesus said: “You must be born again.” It was a metaphor to describe the outcome of saying yes to all God wants and allowing the Holy Spirit to implement a heart-level change on the inside. *We were designed to be vocational followers of Jesus* rather than occasional adherents of a common creed.
- b) **Develop an avid and in-depth awareness of all Jesus did and said in the gospels.** We are meant to be people of the book not just people with a book! Stephen Day will be glad to help any who want to know how the read, study and imbibe the Bible better.
- c) **Allow yourselves to become hosts for the Holy Spirit.** In Luke 9 and 10 we find he first disciples had started to become practitioners of Jesus’ activities. Even so just as he was about to ascend, he says to the same group recorded in Luke 24v49:
“... I am sending the promise of my Father upon you... stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Many of us have known occasional touches of Holy Spirit but need still to become filled and infused by him.
- d) **Be ready to think again** about some of the life goals and ambitions we have to allow God to move us forward and shake us out of mediocrity and comfort zones – so that he can deposit a vision and dreams we know we can’t achieve without His help. Take Romans 12v1-2 and pray the call for the renewal of how we think to heart.
- e) **Become (as an outworking) more vulnerable to the needs of others to meet, engage with and be transformed similarly by Jesus, to find him as their Saviour and Lord.** Simon Peter was a man with many faults but became also a major force for Jesus for decades after the resurrection. In one of his epistles he writes to Christians feeling under threat and discouraged:

“... in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” and “Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your cares on him, because he cares for you.”

Please stand with me. Let's be quiet and still for a few moments; then I will lead you in a simple prayer that is one way of inking in the challenge of this address. I will say it slowly to allow any of us who are ready to make that renewed and solemn offering of our lives to God this morning.

“Lord Jesus, thank you for completing all the Father needed to secure my salvation and for showing us the normal Christian life. I ask you to make me a secure and lasting place for Holy Spirit to enter, fill and empowers.

By your grace strengthen me as your disciple; equip me to disciple others in the places and spheres of influence you have given me.

For the glory of God the Father, in your name Lord Jesus Christ, I pray: Come Holy Spirit. Amen.”