

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight*

Next Saturday is our vision day where we consider the five priorities Finance n Fabric, Pastoral Care & Discipleship, Communications

### **What is a disciple?**

You'd think by now, reading Mark's gospel, and ignoring for a moment other definitions of discipleship, a disciple is a first century simpleton fisherman from out of town. Someone who had the best rabbi ever but kept failing to grasp the true message and instead, often messed up. These were not men and women who had it sorted.

Surely after the amazing words and deeds from Jesus, it should have been obvious that he was the long-awaited Messiah. True, as far as they could tell, he needing correcting on a few key points, but as holy men went, certainly compared to previous vigilantes and weirdo prophets, Jesus was it. The real deal.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the disciples was that if their new leader was going to get very far, to succeed where others had failed, he needed to tone it down a bit:

- challenging the authority of the occupying forces was dangerous;
- questioning the deity of the emperor was asking for trouble;
- criticising the Pharisees' double-standards would result in a whole heap of trouble;
- associating with lepers, dodgy women and tax collectors was bad for publicity;
- spending time with children surely was time wasted?
- banging on about getting killed was no inspirational mission statement

If you were going to create a new religion what would you need to do? Or perhaps let's start with something a little easier. If we think of the Dragon's Den or The Apprentice where contestants are asked to design manufacture and market say, luxury pistachio bath foam, it needs to be presented in the most attractive form possible.

What was it that attracted the disciples to Jesus? When he asked them to leave everything and join him there were little advantages about following him. Given their later doubts and scepticism about his leadership you might think they would have all left for good. What was it that kept them going? What is it that keeps you seeking? Where else can I go? is a good question to ask.

God in the form of an unpromising upstart from a backwater of low status with the wrong accent and a common name refused to compel us to believe in him. Despite the temptations of Satan, Jesus refused to use his authority to force anyone to be like him.

What was it that kept the disciples at Jesus' side.

I long for transformation in my own life but only have confidence that Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit will make me more Christ like. There are things I can do to free up or put barriers in the way of that transformation and Jesus in our reading describes the role that sin plays in damaging our relationship with God. We cannot be transformed by will power but renewing our mind is something we are encouraged to do. That will come about by changing our focus, setting our sights on excellent praiseworthy things, regularly attending prayer and bible study, being part of the vision by joining me next Saturday.

Our role is not to defend God's reputation or do a good sales job on church services. Christianity is the smell of death to some, but it is the very lifeblood for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. Something kept the disciples going and the impact of their ministry has lasted two millennia.

Our role is to signpost the kingdom of God, our words and actions are to introduce people to the topsy turvy world of Jesus.

Influence and transformation feel like impossibilities when I look at my own gifting. I spent twelve months selling life assurance for the Prudential early on in my career. Well I say selling, actually I described to plenty of people the need for life assurance to which they explained their more pressing need for front headlights a DVD player or that they didn't want some other bloke to benefit if they pegged it. My record was consistent, I sold nothing at all, ever - well unless you count fishing tackle insurance for the heady annual premium of £15 per year. Throughout my time at the fisherman's house, the husband remained face down asleep on the floor while I got his wife to complete the paperwork. Not the most promising client one might think, I hope his fishing skills exceeded his interpersonal ones

But we're back to unpromising fishermen and an unpromising Messiah.

What we are called to do is not present the gospel as shiny or a get rich quick plan or make you feel happy all the time.

Jesus offered the disciples not life assurance, but it's the assurance of eternal life

At times discipleship is about vacuuming the floor after a Confirmation service, it's about praying that a long-standing member of your fellowship dies peacefully; it's standing alongside the least the lost and the lonely, it's denying self and taking up your daily cross.

The bright lights of Bristol presents all the distractions you'll ever want to pursue happiness. But there's only so good a cappuccino can get before you start finding

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fault with it - believe me I know. Someone once said I've been to every continent on the planet but I've never neem to me..

Our culture offers comfort and security in the present life and works strenuously to avoid the death.

Much about selling requires creating demand, feeding dissatisfaction with our lot now. Contentment doesn't sell insurance, new cars even pistachio bath foam. Yet the more comfortable we become as a society the more fearful. Fearful that we have so much to lose, lose our possessions, lose our health lose our lives.

Jesus says repeatedly those who lose their life will find it.

There's a song some of you will know that asks the question, 'Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?' The devil in me just wants to say, Shan't. Perhaps thats you too.

You want to be transformed, to know Christ and to make him known. You simply lack the desire or courage. Then let's pray that you *want* to want to follow Jesus.

### **Why did the disciples fail to grasp Jesus' message do you think?**

I suggested the disciples were simple fishermen, but that's not true is it. Matthew was a tax collector, not a fisherman. Neither was Simon the Zealot. You don't need a degree, we all wear L plates

Discipleship is not simply a passive going wherever Jesus goes. We are his hands and feet. At the time of the first disciples Jesus demonstrated explained then got them to have a go. Jesus invites us to learn from him but then get on with it, have a go ourselves. Does it matter if we get things wrong? If we mess up? Jesus didn't give up on the disciples because they didn't understand, because they betrayed him, because he knew they'd fall asleep at his darkest hour. Edison invented 149 lightbulbs before creating one that worked. When it comes to mission and discipleship, Failure is an option, it has to be. Failure is an option. We can be so afraid of damaging someone's spirit that we say or do nothing yet God will give us the gifts the words to say if we offer ourselves for his service

Why did Jesus persist with this rabble given how unreliably they were? He could have drafted in a dream team of postgraduates from Trinity Theological College in Stoke Bishop.

### **What now**

The reading from James suggests the response of the disciple should be as follows  
to suffering - Pray ;  
to cheerfulness - Sing;  
to sickness - prayer and anointing

[https://d.docs.live.net/43e5f24371074332/Documents/The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity Sermon.docx](https://d.docs.live.net/43e5f24371074332/Documents/The%20Seventeenth%20Sunday%20after%20Trinity%20Sermon.docx)

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to sinfulness - confession  
to wandering - find another to bring you back

and in Mark's gospel we are to respond  
To stumbling - by cutting off, tearing it out  
But above all to Be at peace with one another.

I might have utterly failed to sell insurance to an unpromising fisherman but Jesus promises that if we follow him, he will make us fishers of men and owmen. Let's not wait until we understand everything - that day might only come the far side of glory. In the meantime, as disciples let's strive to be transformed by Christ and transform society by introducing it to Christ.

Amen