

Matthew 28.16-20

Making new disciples of Jesus

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 21 January 2024

Disciples of Jesus [2]

Making, Growing, Sending

┆ Last week we explored our **vision statement**:

God's name honoured, his kingdom come, lives transformed

Our vision is the thing we're aiming at, the thing we long to see, where we hope to be, what we hope to look like.

For the next three weeks we're exploring our **mission statement**:

Making, growing, sending disciples of Jesus.

If our vision is what we hope to see, our mission is how we get there, it's what *we* do to join in with what *God* is doing.

┆ We have this graphic that illustrates planting new seeds, seeing those seeds grow, then bearing fruit and scattering more seed to grow. It shows purpose and direction, but it's also deliberately circular because our mission doesn't stop this side of heaven.

A year ago we did a ministry review, with questionnaires that many of you filled in – for which, once again, I thank you. Over the summer Graham Romp and I entered all the data from all the questionnaires, and wrote a report for the PCC which I shared in September. Copies of that report are available at the back if you would like to see the full detail.

For now I'd like to share this **J**. Part of the questionnaire gave nine statements that you were invited to score – three relating to making disciples, three to growing disciples, and three to sending disciples. I've colour-coded the answers – green is the top score, red is the bottom score – to show that three of the four lowest scores were the ones that came under 'making disciples of Jesus'.

To be honest that's exactly what I was expecting, and I suspect most churches filling in this questionnaire would receive a similar result. But that's no excuse!

Something else that came from the questionnaire was to have some teaching on the vision and mission – what does all this mean, and what does it look like in practice? That's why we're having this five-week series exploring it in more detail.

Today we are looking at what making new disciples means.

Making new disciples

For us, making *new* disciples of Jesus means:

I we all share what God calls us to share: good news that through Jesus everyone can be forgiven, adopted as children into God's family, and receive new life in his kingdom.

Christ Church Selly Park Vision & Mission Document (v20)

I'm going to answer three questions: **I** what, why and how, using three words (almost) beginning with 'M':

1. What do we mean by 'making new disciples of Jesus': transformation (metamorphosis for the posh word)
2. Why do we need to make disciples: our motivation
3. How do we make disciples: our method

Transformation (what)

On the day Jess and I got married, **I** she and her Mum, sisters and best friend spent a long time doing each other's hair and make-up, putting on dresses – getting ready for the big day. It's a lot easier for the boys – we simply put our suits on and turned up. But that afternoon the transformation was complete: we were dressed and ready for the wedding.

The Bible uses various pictures to describe becoming a disciple of Jesus. One of them is about getting dressed, getting changed:

¶ You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self.

Colossians 3.10 (NIV)

That morning I took off my pyjamas and ¶ I put on my wedding suit. I've not looked that smart since.

Another picture the Bible uses is about new life:

¶ If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here.

2 Corinthians 5.17 (NIV)

At 2pm the old bachelor Ben died, and a new Ben was born: ¶ Jess's husband. I was still me, but something profound had happened – I was changed, transformed into someone new.

There are other pictures too: passing from darkness into light (Ephesians 5.8, 1 Peter 2.9); being born again (John 3.3-7); being adopted into a new family (Galatians 4.5, 1 John 3.1); becoming citizens of heaven (Philippians 3.20); being set free from slavery to sin so we can serve God (Romans 6.18-22); having our hearts of stone replaced with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11.19).

There are others – but they all have one thing in common: they describe a *transformation*. Something fundamental has changed.

We see that in the criminal on the cross. This is from Mark 15:

¶ They crucified two rebels with [Jesus], one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘Come down from the cross and save yourself!’ ... Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Mark 15.27-32 (NIV)

And yet, Luke tells us that later this happened:

¶ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’

But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’

¶ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’

Luke 23.39-43 (NIV)

The one criminal carried on insulting Jesus. But something changed in the other: he went from heaping insults on Jesus, to defending him, to asking for salvation. Even on the cross Jesus was telling others about the kingdom of God – and a man was saved. He was the first to pray something like the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner (see Luke 18.13).

That simple prayer – to summarise, ‘help!’ – is all we need to do. Jesus does the rest. Jesus’ light conquers the darkness. Jesus pays the price, he sets us free from sin. Jesus gives us his rights as God’s only Son, so we can be adopted heirs alongside him.

There is more of course – which we will look at next week; the thief on the cross didn’t have much time to learn how to live as a child of God. But in that moment his heart was transformed.

That’s what we mean by ‘making disciples’. Inviting people into the building, serving them food, sharing and showing God’s love in all sorts of ways – that’s wonderful. I love it when we do that. And we’re really good at it. But it isn’t making disciples. All those things can be a step along the way and provide many and wonderful opportunities – but unless we introduce people to Jesus we have served some needs while ignoring their greatest need.

Motivation (why)

When I took my first communion service, I was handed a little bottle of **J** hand sanitiser. Dutifully I put some on my hands and rubbed them together until dry – as I still do. Then I said the communion prayer, broke the bread, and handed a piece to everyone.

Afterwards Jess asked what sanitiser I had used. Turned out it was cucumber and mint. It smelled fresh to me, but had imparted a bitter taste to every piece of bread I gave out.

So we embarked on a mini-mission: to find a hand sanitiser that wouldn't leave a bitter taste in the mouth. We bought a handful of different brands, including, thankfully, this one.

Hold up a bottle of Ecohydra.

It has the advantage of being (a) extremely effective, (b) free of alcohol so it doesn't dry out your hands, (c) odourless and (d) tasteless. We had a winner! I've been using it ever since for communion – but it really came into its own in Covid times when we not only washed but also sanitised our hands before eating every meal.

I bought a dispenser for church – and now two dispensers for this church. We have a dispenser at home by the front door. And to anyone that asked, I sang its praises and encouraged them to buy some. I was quite the evangelist. The product was so good, I couldn't help myself!

That's the first of the three 'C's of motivation: **compulsion**. Sometimes the best evangelists are new Christians – they are full of wonder and excitement because they've just found Jesus. It's effective because it's so natural... they can't help themselves! It overflows, it's not perfect or precise but it's honest, it comes from deep within them – so people listen.

That excitement is raw, emotional – and it doesn't last forever. If your Christian walk is like mine, you will get glimpses of it every now and then. Sometimes you'll burn hot with it when you see God do something amazing. But like the honeymoon period in a marriage ends, and husband and wife need to work out how to live together for the rest of their lives – so it is with us and God.

I think that's where the next 'C' comes in: **compassion**. It means 'suffering with' – sharing the pain of someone else, walking with them, loving them. It's one of the words that best describes how Jesus was with all sorts of people.

Mark says:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Mark 6.34 (NIV)

We see there at the proper outlet for compassion. Jesus healed all who came to him. He spoke gently to those at the bottom of the social pile. He turned no-one away – except those who rejected him. And if you know your Mark, you'll know that what follows verse 34 is the feeding of the 5,000 – he fed people too – but first he gave them the food they *really* needed: he taught them about the kingdom of God.

That shouldn't surprise us. In Mark 1, when Jesus' fame was growing because of his healings and exorcisms, he disappeared off to a quiet place. His disciples sought him out to get him to come back – there's so much need! So many people to heal! So much hunger! But Jesus said:

'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.'

Mark 1.38-39 (NIV)

He still healed people, he still cast out demons, he still fed people – but his compassion motivated him for his real mission: to teach others about the kingdom, to call them to repent, to turn back to God – for that was their greatest need, and he loved them.

As we lose our compulsion, the bubbling over that means we simply can't help but tell people about Jesus, we need to learn (and pray for) the compassion that Jesus had for others. It's not at all second-best – but it takes more effort, so it's easier to give up.

When *that* starts happening we need to hear the challenge of the final 'C' of motivation: **J command**. We share the gospel, quite simply, because Jesus commands us to.

J Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Matthew 28.18-20 (NIV)

Having received **all authority**, this was what Jesus commanded us to do: **make disciples of all nations**.

Friends, you might not like it. Like me you might find it difficult. It might be the last thing you want to do. But if Jesus is Lord – and he is – then we don't have a choice. If all else fails, our motivation for making new disciples is this: Jesus told us to do it. And he promised to be with us, by our side, helping us every day.

Method (how)

Which brings us nicely to our third 'M': method. How do we do this thing? Some of us are gifted evangelists and it comes easily or naturally, but most of us are not – myself included. So how do we do it? I have three 'A's to help us out **J**: always, appropriate, and. Yes, the third 'A' is 'and'. We'll find out why in a moment.

When I was training to be a vicar, I did a summer placement with a vicar in **J** Reading. In my final week, three sisters visited because they each wanted their children baptised, and also to be godparents for each other's children.

We sat in the vicar's study and started to chat. As he talked about baptism, it was clear they carried a lot of shame and an awareness of their brokenness, so he got his Bible out and shared the gospel with them using a handful of Bible verses about our sinfulness and the forgiveness we have in Jesus.

I've never seen anything like it. They were ready to give their lives to Jesus, right there. The vicar gave them a booklet each to read, prayed with them, and off they went.

That's unusual but could happen to any one of us. If a friend who knows and trusts you asks about baptism, what will you say?

Tomorrow morning when that person asks what you did over the weekend, what will you say?

If you don't get involved in gossip – and I hope you don't – when someone notices and asks why not, what will you say?

Peter writes **¶: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have** (1 Peter 3.15). That's the first 'A' **¶: always**. You never know when the opportunity might arise – what will you say? Have you thought about how you might share the gospel with someone?

In my last job I had a phone call from a distressed man whose wife had died from Covid. It was lockdown but I was allowed to do funeral visits outside. They'd already had a humanist funeral, but now he was unable to sleep, afraid his wife wasn't at peace. He wasn't a Christian, so he called the local vicar – me – in desperation rather than hope.

We sat in his garden and chatted, and prayed, giving thanks to God for his wife and those who were supporting him.

As I was about to leave, he asked when church was reopening and said he wanted to come along. We were about to reopen our Place of Welcome on the grass outside church, so I told him – and blow me down he was the first one there. Then when the building reopened he started coming to services – and last I checked he was still going.

I did not read Romans 3.23 as the vicar had done in Reading: **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** That would not have been appropriate. Instead I read this with him:

I Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4.6-7 (NIV)

The second 'A' is: **I appropriate.** The good news about Jesus has many facets and aspects – a grieving widower doesn't necessarily need to hear that he's a sinner in need of forgiveness.

But he might like to know about Jesus' peace and protection.

We need to discern which aspect of the gospel is appropriate in any given situation – and God helps with that. I didn't plan to read that passage, but it came to mind as we spoke and as I listened. Our next series will look at different facets of the gospel – and I hope that will help us learn how so share it appropriately.

The final 'A' is: **and**.

¶ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1.14 (NIV)

That may just be my favourite description of Jesus in the Bible. It combines the glory and humanity of Jesus in one, how he is at the same time utterly different and yet one of us – and how he is **full of grace and truth**. That's why the final 'A' is ¶ **and**.

¶ I'm happy to confess that I love salt. I love a salty flavour, but salt also brings out other flavours. It makes sweet things a little sweeter, it counteracts the bitterness of green vegetables, it helps release aromas. Apparently it enhances colour and texture as well – and of course it is a preservative. Salt is good!

Except we aren't allowed it any more. I add salt to my baked beans because I find them bland now it's been removed.

Salt is good... but too much salt spoils the meal. If I made my baked beans with 50% beans and 50% salt – I don't even know what would happen, but it would be disgusting.

Paul puts it like this:

J Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4.5-6 (NIV)

Often that's understood as meaning we shouldn't be boring – but what if Paul is talking about the right proportion of grace to truth? We should be *spread arms wide full of grace*, sharing God's love and mercy, lavishing it on others as he has on us – *mime sprinkling salt* seasoned with truth. How easy it is to be full of grace – it's attractive, winsome – yet keep quiet about the truth.

But a little salt is good. People need to hear the truth about the state we're in, the need for repentance and the wonderful promise of new life and forgiveness in Jesus – the truth that sets them free.

Invitation

¶ We make new disciples because we are **compelled** by the love and wonder of God we have received ourselves, because of our **compassion** for the lost, because we are **commanded** to by Jesus.

We make new disciples by **always** being ready to share our faith, in **appropriate** ways, full of grace **and** truth.

I'd like to close by talking about invitation.

¶ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon... And he brought him to Jesus.

John 1.40-42 (NIV)

In his commentary on John's gospel, next to that last verse (John 1.42) Archbishop William Temple wrote this simple phrase:

¶ The greatest service that one man can render to another.

See <https://accessinspiration.org/library/2430>

Do we believe that? As a church, do we *really* believe that the **greatest service** we can offer isn't to feed people – vital though that is – but to invite them to see Jesus for themselves?

§ Billy Graham was an incredible preacher and evangelist. Over decades he preached to hundreds of millions of people. Some of us here probably heard him at Villa Park in 1984. But for most of us, that's not what making disciples looks like.

Albert McMakin was the son of a farmer. He came to faith in Jesus and was so full of excitement he § filled his truck with his friends to take them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. But one of his friends refused – he was good looking and far too interested in girls to be bothered with Jesus or religion.

Albert didn't give up – eventually he persuaded his friend to come by letting him drive the truck. He was spellbound, and went back night after night, eventually giving his life to Jesus.

The year was 1934 and Albert's friend was Billy Graham.

See <https://saltforsermons.org.uk/albert-mcmakin-billy-graham/>

Some of us are here because of Billy Grahams – but *most* of us are here because of Albert McMakins, who invited us to come and see for ourselves and didn't give up when we said no.

It isn't easy, but neither is it complicated. Jesus is what people need the most, and making disciples is the mission he's given us – so let's pray and ask him to help us do it.