

**Generous Churches Making and Nurturing Disciples**  
**Sermon notes on the Five Marks of Growing**

**Introduction**

As you will have seen from other material our aim in the Diocese of York is to be Generous Churches Making and Nurturing Disciples.

We have agreed that we want each church to grow – to grow in Christ-likeness, commitment, partnership, influence and numbers, the Five Marks of Growing.

In support of this aim we are offering five sets of sermon notes on the Five Marks, for use from Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January to Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2013. The notes are there to help you form your own sermon, suited to your context and your own approach to preaching. Please feel free to adapt them as appropriate, adding your own illustrations and local colour.

Of course, you are not confined to the dates in the notes here, but are free to use these at any suitable time. Similarly you may wish to use these notes as a basis for discussion in small groups, either in support of sermons or as an alternative way of engaging with the material.

These notes also include suggested Bible readings, hymns and alternative collects, if you wish to use them.

You may well wish to give out the leaflets, “Generous Churches Making and Nurturing Disciples: Autumn 2012 update”, during those Sundays.

The contributors of the sermon notes are Canon Sue Sheriff, Revd Matthew Porter, Revd Dominic Black and Heather Black, Canon Richard Rowling and Canon John Young. Revd Jeremy Fletcher has kindly provided the hymn choices and alternative prayers. I want to give a warm thank you to them all for working in partnership in this way, it is really appreciated!

Revd Dr Gavin Wakefield  
Director of Training, Mission and Ministry  
27<sup>th</sup> November 2012

# Christ-likeness

Week one – Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January

## Introduction

Becoming like Christ is the fundamental call of Christian discipleship. It is not always easy to assess, but we often recognise the flavour of a life becoming more godly. How we pray and worship is a key element in this mark of growing.

## Collect of the Day

Eternal Father,  
who at the baptism of Jesus  
revealed him to be your Son,  
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:  
grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit,  
that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*or*

Heavenly Father,  
at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son:  
may we recognize him as our Lord  
and know ourselves to be your beloved children;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

## Alternative Collect

O Lord, from whom all good things come:  
grant to us your humble servants,  
that by your holy inspiration  
we may think those things that are good,  
and by your merciful guiding may perform the same;  
through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## Post Communion

Lord of all time and eternity,  
you opened the heavens and revealed yourself as Father  
in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son:  
by the power of your Spirit  
complete the heavenly work of our rebirth  
through the waters of the new creation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Hymns

Will you come and follow me  
Jesus calls us o'er the tumult  
O Jesus I have promised  
We are marching (Siya hamba)  
Love divine  
Make me a channel  
May the mind of Christ our Saviour

## Readings

Genesis 1:26-31  
Psalm 40:1-9  
2 Corinthians 4:1-6  
Matthew 4:18-22

## Sermon Notes

You have probably known some very good people over the years. Some almost 'saintly' people. But is there a difference between 'good' and 'Christ-like'? You clearly do not have to be a Christian to be good but do you have to be a Christian to be 'Christ-like'?

### *Made in the image of God*

Back in the beginning when God made us, He made us in His image. We were able to think, we were able to create, we were able to feel. Most importantly we had a relationship with Him. Sadly instead of being content with being a reflection of God and His character we wanted to create ourselves in our own image. This is very much a prevailing attitude today with people claiming to be 'their own person'!

### *Jesus*

2 Corinthians 4 verse 4 tells us that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Jesus himself is the image of God, we need therefore to become like Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1 verse 15). As God in human form it has to be to Jesus that we look for our example of truly Godliness.

Does that mean that to be 'Christ-like' we need simply to copy Jesus behaviour, to be good and kind, and wise and just? Surely that would be just an outward show? We need instead to get to the root of what it is to be Christ-like, the real heart of the matter. As we peel away all the different layers of those things that made Jesus such an amazing human being we eventually come to his relationship with the Father.

When lost as a young boy he was found in the temple talking about God his Father; when he began his public ministry he withdrew to spend an extended time alone with God; whenever pressure built and things got busy he would look at a place to pray to God. And God spoke to him. When he was baptized the Holy Spirit came upon him like a dove; when things started to come to a head Jesus went up a mountain with a select few of his disciples and God sent him Moses and Elijah; when he sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane God sent him an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22 v 43). We have several accounts of him in the temple or synagogues. He knew the scriptures.

He could discuss them and was always quoting them in appropriate or thought provoking ways. He had a close and intimate relationship with his Father and this relationship produced the wonderful deeds that he did.

### *Followers of Christ*

Jesus call to Simon Peter and Andrew was to 'follow him'. To leave what they were doing and to 'follow him'. He went on to give the same challenge to James and John and 8 other disciples. Over the next three years they did just that and it transformed them. They had to battle with very human characteristics: pride, envy, fear, doubt and jealousy. They argued over who was the greatest and Jesus had to show them that that honour belonged to a little child. They wanted to know who would sit next to Jesus in his Kingdom. They ran away when Jesus faced his darkest hour. Even after the resurrection when Jesus had forgiven Peter for abandoning him Peter still was concerned about what was going to happen to another disciple to whom Jesus was particularly close.

But they also learnt from Jesus, he taught them new things about the nature of God, sometimes things he shared publicly like in the sermon on the mount, sometimes private talks for which only they and the close group of men and women around Jesus may have been ready. He explained to them things from the scriptures both before his death and after his resurrection. At their request, impressed no doubt by his relationship with his Father, he showed them how to pray in the words of 'Our Father...'

And it rubbed off on them. At the coming of the Holy Spirit Peter quoted scriptures and preached the Gospel to the masses. They developed their own pattern of worship. It was on the way to the temple 'at the time of prayer - 3 o'clock in the afternoon' that they first encountered a beggar who asked for silver and gold and instead they made him able to walk. In Acts 4 v 24 onwards they prayed a prayer of such incredible faith that the Holy Spirit once again inspired them and they preached boldly and shared all their possessions. In Acts 10 it was when Peter had withdrawn to the roof to pray that God spoke to him in a vision. Even those who had joined the disciples/apostles taught people from the scriptures, for instance Acts 8 when Philip explains things to the Ethiopian in charge of the Queen of Ethiopia's treasury.

In the book of James, when the writer is answering the questions about whether we need faith or deeds, James says I will show you my faith by my deeds. A Christ-like heart leading to Christ-like actions!

### *Being Christ-like today*

It would be easy to make a list of the characteristics we would like to see from Christ-like individuals or Christ-like churches. Generous, sharing, thoughtful, loving, just, supportive. This could also describe the local football team or WI group. They too are very good at rallying round when there is a need and often even when there isn't.

What we need are churches inspired by the relationship of their members with their God and creator. Women and men made in the image of God and renewed in the image of Christ. Men and women of Prayer. Women and men of all ages, from young ones onward who soak up the scriptures, think them through and apply them to life today.

What we need is followers of Christ, whose relationship with God is shown in their actions. Just a small group of 'Christ-like' followers turned the world upside down in their day. It would be great if we could do the same – starting with the Diocese of York!

*Notes by the Revd Canon Sue Sheriff*

# Commitment

Week two – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> January

## Introduction

Commitment has several features, including: commitment to Christ, to seeking God's kingdom, to Christ's body the Church. The outward signs might be measured in terms of those engaged in nurture courses, Baptisms and Confirmations, Vocations to lay and ordained ministries, and Stewardship.

## Collect of the Day

Almighty God,  
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles  
the wonder of your saving presence:  
renew your people with your heavenly grace,  
and in all our weakness  
sustain us by your mighty power;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*or*

God of all mercy,  
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,  
release to the captives,  
and freedom to the oppressed:  
anoint us with your Holy Spirit  
and set all your people free  
to praise you in Christ our Lord.

## Post Communion

Almighty Father,  
whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world:  
may your people,  
illuminated by your word and sacraments,  
shine with the radiance of his glory,  
that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed  
to the ends of the earth;  
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

## Alternative Collects

Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church  
is governed and sanctified:  
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,  
that in their vocation and ministry  
they may serve you in holiness and truth

to the glory of your name;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*or*

Almighty God,  
send down upon your Church  
the riches of your Spirit,  
and kindle in all who minister the gospel  
your countless gifts of grace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Hymns**

Seek ye first  
I the Lord of sea and sky  
Take my life and let it be  
Come down O Love divine  
Lord of all power I give you my will  
I will offer up my life in spirit and truth (Redman)  
All I once held dear

### **Readings**

Isaiah 55: 1-9  
Psalm 84  
Romans 12:1-16  
Matthew 6:25-34

### **Sermon notes**

Our commitments are crucial in life. Rick Warren, author of the best-selling *The Purpose-Drive Life*, wrote: 'Nothing shapes your life more than the commitments you choose to make. Your commitments can develop you or they can destroy you, but either way, they will define you. Tell me what you are committed to, and I'll tell you what you will be in 20 years. We become what we are committed to.'

Commitment is at the heart of the nature of God. The persons of the Trinity are in a committed relationship of love with each other. God shows his commitment to us not just in creating us and the world, but also in sending Christ to be one of us and then to sacrifice himself for us (1 John 4:10). Not only that, but his commitment continues in leaving his Spirit to be with us. So God is committed to us (1 John 4:13). In response he calls us to live committed lives: committed in our relationship with him and with others.

### *Committed to God and his kingdom*

Our foundational relationship in life should be with *God*. That's why Jesus said the first and greatest commandment is to love God with everything we have (Matthew 22:37-

38). Jesus told his followers (in Matthew 6) that there's no need to get bogged down in worry. In particular he counsels against worrying about basic things in life: like food, health and clothing (v.25). Instead we should channel our negative 'worrying' into positive 'seeking' of God and his kingdom. If we're committed to those things, Jesus promises, he will look after the basic things in life (v.33).

Throughout the Bible we find examples of people who commit themselves to God and to serving him. A good example is seen in Psalm 84 where the psalmist sings of 'yearning and fainting' for God (v.2); of living close to him ('dwelling in his house' - v.4); of finding 'strength in him' (v.5), and 'trusting' him (v.12).

In the days before the abolition of slavery in America, a fine black slave was among the men being sold at auction. As the bidding began the slave noticed a foreign-looking man was leading the bidding for him, consistently increasing his offer with every counter-bid. He began to shout and curse at the man, saying, 'If you buy me, I will never work for you. I'd sooner die than work for you. If you buy me, I'll try to kill you!' He knew that if he was bought by a foreign buyer, he'd probably be separated from his family and relatives, and most likely never see them again.

But still the man went on bidding and eventually the slave was sold to the foreign-looking stranger. He paid the money over to the auctioneer, received the bill of sale, and walked over to the slave. The crowd parted, waiting to see what would happen next. As the man reached the slave, he stretched out his hand with the bill of sale in it. 'Take it' he said, 'I bought you to set you free. You are now a free man. '

The slave looked blank for a moment and then, as we realised what had happened, he fell on his knees before this unknown benefactor. 'Sir' he said, 'I will serve you and go with you wherever you want. Your home will be my home; your concerns my concerns, and your wish my command. I am yours.'

As we consider God's committed love to us, and the way Christ has freed us from the slavery of sin and death (Romans 12:1), our natural response (like the slave in the story) should be to commit or re-commit ourselves to him. In the New Testament, the main biblical mark of commitment to God and his Kingdom is baptism, as we give ourselves to God as 'living sacrifices' (Romans 12:2) and identify with the death and resurrection of Christ and say vows of commitment to him.

(If an adult has recently been baptised or confirmed, do consider hearing or reading their testimony.)

(Preachers may wish to ask those not ready for such a commitment to find out more, perhaps by attending an Alpha, Emmaus, Start course etc . This would be a good opportunity to encourage people to do something in the service to (re)commit their lives to Christ, and to seal that in baptism, or confirmation or re-affirming baptismal faith.)

### *Committed to Others & Church*

Christ also calls us to committed relationship with *others*. This is the second great commandment (Mt 22:39). That means that followers of Jesus should take their

friendships seriously, treat work-colleagues well and work hard at getting on with next-door neighbours. Family relationships (especially marriage and parenting) are particularly important as it's here that we especially live out committed relationships and model these to children and others (Ephesians 6:21-6:4). We can easily go wrong in all these human relationships so we must take care, pray and be full of grace.

The church is called to be a community of committed relationships, as we learn to love, care and support each other. This is modelled beautifully for us by the earliest Christians in Acts (2:41-47). A church community like this is very attractive. Others will want to join. The community will grow.

So one sign of growing in commitment will be stronger human relationships. Those relationships will be strengthened as we learn to serve, give and forgive each other (Rom 12:9-16). That's why a growing commitment to Christ will also work itself out in a growing commitment to his body, the church.

William Wilkerson once said:

*The church is full of bones:  
wish bones - who wish someone else would do the work;  
jaw bones - who talk a lot but do little else;  
knuckle bones - who knock what everyone else does;  
back bones - who get on and actually do the work.*

(Preachers may wish to challenge everyone to show commitment to Christ's church by renewing the giving of their time and energy and money. Everyone can give something of their time and energy: eg. in serving refreshments, mowing a lawn, welcoming people, visiting the sick, leading prayers, and for some they may even wish to consider vocations to lay or ordained ministries. And everyone can give something financially - some a little and some much. The important thing is that we show our commitment by being generous, as God does to us.)

### *Conclusion*

A growing *church* is a church growing in commitment. We therefore shouldn't be afraid to pray and work for this. Similarly, a growing *Christian* is a Christian growing in commitment.

How are we doing? Are we growing in commitment?

*Notes by the Revd Matthew Porter*

# Partnership

Week three – Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January

## Introduction

Partnership is about working with other churches, locally and globally, schools, community groups, people, organisations for the common good, peace and justice. It's about loving our neighbours as ourselves.

## Collect of the Day

God our creator,  
who in the beginning  
commanded the light to shine out of darkness:  
we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ  
may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief,  
shine into the hearts of all your people,  
and reveal the knowledge of your glory  
in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*or*

God of heaven,  
you send the gospel to the ends of the earth  
and your messengers to every nation:  
send your Holy Spirit to transform us  
by the good news of everlasting life  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Post Communion

Generous Lord,  
in word and eucharist we have proclaimed the mystery of your love:  
help us so to live out our days  
that we may be signs of your wonders in the world;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

## Alternative Collect

Lord of all power and might,  
the author and giver of all good things:  
graft in our hearts the love of your name,  
increase in us true religion,  
nourish us with all goodness,  
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Hymns**

Longing for light (Bernadette Farrell)  
Beauty for brokenness  
Judge eternal throned in splendour  
Thy kingdom come O God  
Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost  
Christ is the world's true light  
The kingdom of God is justice and joy

## **Readings**

Jeremiah 29:5-7  
Psalm 133  
1 Corinthians 12:12-26, (or v.31)  
Matthew 22:34-40

## **Sermon notes**

(You can select from these – and other – partnerships, or invite the congregation to come up with the partnerships they think of.)

Bonnie and Clyde  
Batman and Robin  
Romeo and Juliet  
Beavis and Butthead  
Barbie and Ken  
Mickey and Minnie  
Jack and Jill  
Thelma and Louise  
Tom and Jerry  
Torville and Dean  
Starsky and Hutch  
Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy  
Adam and Eve  
Hansel and Gretel  
Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck  
Superman and Lois Lane  
Romulus and Remus  
Anthony and Cleopatra  
Morecombe and Wise  
Marge and Homer Simpson

"Two are better than one." (Eccl. 4:9)

"You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together, we can do great things." Mother Teresa.

There is an unbelievable power in partnership that goes beyond addition to multiplication.

This principle of partnership, of two being better than one, is

found over and over in the New Testament. In fact, the word "saint" appears ninety-nine times in the New Testament...and it is always plural. Every time you read the word it is "saints." Because you can't have just one. A saint ain't! Saints come in twos.

We are conditioned to think that Darwinian competition is the driving force of modern society but cooperation is probably more important. The world changed in the 20th century. There was a time when a well educated person probably could understand the technology of the time and knock something together in their garage. Today there is no one on the planet who knows everything there is to know to put together the mobile phone you have in your bag. At the heart of most human achievements are partnerships, where individuals or organisations have come together to achieve more than they ever could individually.

“Our success has really been based on partnerships from the very beginning.” Bill Gates

“Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”

Edmund Burke (British Statesman and Philosopher, 1729-1797)

Even on a Sunday morning a complex of partnerships is taking place, St Paul describes the church as a body and as within the human body, there are so many different parts and so many different functions in the church (1 Cor 12). Yet, they all work together to make the body of the church alive and active. We are all in partnership with one another.

On a typical Sunday we have (*add your own number*) people doing various things? Let me mention some of the roles or functions we need every single Sunday: Vicar, Reader, organists (or other musicians) choir members, Churchwardens, welcomers, sunday school / Junior church leaders, coffee making, flower arrangers, cleaners, Intercessors, servers. All of us need to partnership every Sunday so that we can worship God, fellowship with each other, and grow in grace and knowledge.

But when should we seek to work in partnership and with whom?

Sometimes it is about working with other parishes, denominations or others in the community to achieve something that we cannot do alone.

### **Middlesbrough Deanery Fellowship**

Many of the parishes in Middlesbrough find it difficult to maintain a regular study group. It is often the same few people meeting together year on year for Lent groups. There was a growing desire amongst the laity to get to know one another. Whilst on holiday in a small village in the Southwest Ron and Marion Marshall were invited along to a fellowship evening. On the Sunday Morning there had been perhaps 20 at the parish church. They were taken aback when they arrived on the Wednesday night to see the village hall heaving and full of life. The Vicar explained that a few years earlier churches in the local area had got together to invite a speaker and out of it a regular fellowship meeting had been born. In the autumn of 2011 the Middlesbrough Deanery

Fellowship was born. Since then 50-60 people have come together from across the deanery every month for study, worship and fellowship. In what can be a polarised deanery, one of the great joys of the fellowship is that it has brought together worshippers from across the traditions.

### **Together Middlesbrough**

In the Autumn of 2011 Middlesbrough Deanery held a service at The Ascension in the heart of East Middlesbrough focussed on the growing levels of poverty in the town, which happened to coincide with the announcement of large scale public sector cuts. In February 2012 in partnership with the Church Urban Fund the group which had planned the service organised the 'Bridging the Gap' conference calling churches and Christian projects of all traditions together to discuss the inequality in the town and what the church was and could do to address it.

The partnerships created across church denominations has led to the formation of Together Middlesbrough. This is a joint venture between the Diocese of York and Church Urban Fund, with board members from the diocese, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough, the Methodist circuit, the New churches as well as Teesside University. There is significant energy and will to work together because there is a common goal. The task is large and churches have recognised that we need each other, if we are going to make an impact on poverty in the area.

### **Middlesbrough Foodbank**

Following the Bridging the Gap conference, Middlesbrough Foodbank, a vision from within one independent congregation, spread to over 30 churches, half of which are part of York Diocese. A glimpse of what mutuality as a diocese could look like is seen in the village of Thirkleby near Thirsk where an old telephone box was converted into a Foodbank collection point. Each week people drop off groceries on their way back from the supermarket. Someone who commutes to Middlesbrough then drops the food off at the depot on their way to work. In the first two months 60 children and 97 adults had been fed.

### **Diversity is a strength**

Research shows that diverse churches tend to grow. Where there are people of differing ages, gender, backgrounds and ethnicity a new creativity is often born.

Paul and Timothy's partnership showed everyone how God could produce unity through diversity. Timothy had a Greek father and Paul was a Jew, but they worked in superb harmony to demonstrate how the Spirit blends diverse backgrounds through Christ.

One of the characteristics of effective partnerships is complementarity: different people bring different gifts to the task. Diversity can be a tension but as long as people value one another, it is usually a creative tension.

### **Partnership's beyond the Church**

The Holy Spirit goes where he wills sometimes way beyond the church. The dilemma of partnership with institutions beyond the church can be summed up in two biblical passages, 'Do not be yoked with unbelievers.' (2 Cor 6:14) And 'Those who are not against us are for us.' (Mark 9:40 and see in its context of 9:38-41)

There are people who are deeply suspicious of the church and even hostile towards us, but generally there is still a lot of good will towards the church at a local level. People see us as often as a force for good in the local community.

### **Yarm Homestart**

Homestart is a voluntary organisation that began in the 1980's to support families who were struggling with newborns. Homestart is a lean organisation which relies heavily on a large number of volunteers but needs money to pay its core administration. Despite such work being increasingly needed as the local Authority Surestart centres close, grant funding has become increasingly difficult to find. Yarm parish Church decided that one of the best ways it could support local families was by supporting Homestart. The partnership has allowed Homestart to continue helping local families and given the church a new connection to the community.

*Notes by the Revd Dominic Black and Heather Black*

# Influence

## Week four – Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February

### Introduction

As disciples we are called to be salt and light to the whole world, and reflecting God's light into dark corners. We look to influence attitudes and behaviours in our communities and wider society.

### Collect of the day – 2 before Lent

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,  
now and for ever.

*Or*

Almighty God,  
give us reverence for all creation  
and respect for every person,  
that we may mirror your likeness  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Post Communion

God our creator,  
by your gift  
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,  
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:  
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth  
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross  
and enjoy the delights of eternity;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Alternative Collect

Almighty God,  
who called your Church to bear witness  
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:  
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,  
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;  
through him who was lifted up on the cross,  
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### Collect of the Day – Presentation

Almighty and ever-living God,  
clothed in majesty,  
whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple,  
in substance of our flesh:  
grant that we may be presented to you  
with pure and clean hearts,  
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*or*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
light of the nations and glory of Israel:  
make your home among us,  
and present us pure and holy  
to your heavenly Father,  
your God, and our God

### **Post Communion**

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna,  
who lived to welcome the Messiah:  
may we, who have received these gifts beyond words,  
prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes  
to bring us to eternal life;  
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever

### **Hymns**

Christ's is the world in which we move  
Thy kingdom come, on bended knee  
Angel voices ever singing  
Lord of all power I give you my will  
Lord Jesus Christ  
Go forth for God, go forth to the world in peace  
Immortal, invisible  
Lead us heavenly father lead us.

### **Reading**

Isaiah 2:2-5  
Psalm 112:1-9  
1 Peter 2:9-12 or 1 Cor 2:1-12  
Matthew 5:13-16

### **Sermon notes**

Shortly after the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 it was decided that bells should be rung in rural churches at 12noon on the first Sunday in March. One farmer worried about the disease and losing his cattle commented that when he heard the

church bell ringing he no longer felt isolated and on his own. He realised that people cared about his plight and was grateful for their prayers-an example of how a simple act instigated by the church can reach out to people and of the influence that can accrue from such actions.

Bob Baker of the Churches Rural Project often tells people that one of the project's strengths was that through its ecclesiastical connections it had a branch in every parish. We do have a presence within every local community and interact with many people, so we all ready have influence which has accumulated over the centuries; consequently we are well placed to increase this.

How might we go about strengthening our presence and building up the influence and impact that we make within our local communities?

Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth, our faith brings a presence and as we grow as disciples we build up our profile. The image of the salt of the earth is an interesting one. In Jesus day salt was a valuable commodity and as many will be aware the Latin Sal/Salis-salt is the root of the word salary.

Jesus through the choice of this metaphor implies that his followers are valuable, valuable to him, to each other and to those to whom they are called to serve. This Christ-given sense of worth can inspire and motivate us to serve the needs of those around us, becoming instruments of transformation within a local community.

A good examples of how this is might be done is the setting up of a post office in the church following the closure of the village post office; *do add your own local examples*. To be effective there has to be an alertness and awareness of the needs of the parish. We need to be looking beyond the confines of church; salt is not much use if left in a heap.

In the Hebrew Scriptures salt was used in the binding or the forming of a covenant (cf Exodus 30.35, Leviticus 2.13, Numbers 18.19). In likening his followers to being the salt of the earth Jesus may well be alluding to the new covenant which he would bring to fruition and which we are part of through our belief and trust in him.

There is some conjecture about the phrase salt losing its saltiness. Having always been under the impression that salt remains salt it was interesting to hear a county highways officer in the severe winter of 2010 explain that if salt was stockpiled too early then it lost its effectiveness.

It is very easy for the church to lose its relevance and thereby diminish its position within a given community. This can happen in many ways: simple exhaustion, a remnant mentality that is very much about keeping the show on the road during my life time, perhaps previous actions have soured relationships, there might be a lack of confidence. Maybe though the real problem is that the people of God forget their raison d'être, close their minds to what they are called to be.

*After the foot and mouth epidemic the rural church almost rediscovered that it had considerable influence. The Churches Rural Project was able to capitalise on this, using its church connections to help it reach out to all who work the uplands*

*to offer support and training opportunities to a constituency which has long been recognised as hard to reach. Trading Standards have on a number of occasions pointed the project's officers in the direction of a problem farm so that things can be sorted out without recourse to sanctions. Many farmers affectionately came to refer to it as the vicars' project.*

*It is not always necessary to create big ticket projects: for instance a parish church supporting a local youth group that would have folded through lack of volunteers brings influence and opens doors. The point is that things begin to happen when we cease being absorbed purely by church and look outwards seeking to serve and engage with the wider community.*

*(Do use relevant examples appropriate to your context which show how influence can be accrued by a local Christian community building up relationships, also giving the local Christian community self belief, as well as being a catalyst for transformation in the parish).*

To put it succinctly when we stop being preoccupied with church and focus on mission then things happen. The challenge then is to be effective in our mission, to be the people of God and to be seen as such people.

*Either yesterday or today many will have celebrated or be celebrating the feast of Candlemas or the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church where it is often called the Meeting of the Lord. The encounter of Simeon and Anna with the Lord is the centre piece of this celebration, two people of faith holding on to the belief that God would fulfil his promise. Simeon's joy is great to behold the moment he sees the Christ child, the promise has been fulfilled. This is an encounter that arises out of faith and a desire to seek the Christ. Simeon is confident in his faith, believes that what has been promised will be fulfilled. We could go further and say that both Simeon and Anna epitomise the salt of the earth, the loyal steadfast people of God. Luke might well have intended these individuals to symbolise the faithful people of Israel. As we seek to grow as disciples we can learn a huge amount from the steadfastness, trust and belief of Simeon, persevering and not giving up, holding onto to hope. As Christians our influence will be very limited unless its purpose is creating a meeting or an encounter with Christ.*

This then leads to the idea of being visible, the presentation is the setting for the Nunc Dimittis or the Song of Simeon who rejoices that he has seen the Light to lighten the nations. It goes without saying that we will not make much impact on society if we are not visible. Jesus makes it clear that the salt of the earth the people of God have to be seen for who they are. The short parable is in essence saying that God does not provide a lamp to enlighten the world to snuff it out by shrouding it. The lamp burns brightly bringing enlightenment to the world. As disciples we are the torchbearers. The light becomes visible and gains intensity if we live out our discipleship, refresh our faith and guard against complacency and interact with all in our parishes. As torchbearers too we are called to go into the dark places to leave our comfort zone behind. The more who see the light the greater chance there is of changing attitudes and behaviour within our communities and beyond.

Being the people of God is not just about being present in our parishes or other contexts; it is about being visible making an impact, making sure that all are aware of our existence and all that we stand for. This interaction is a catalyst for growth, a church embedded in its community upholding the values of the kingdom.

“Basically what is important for us Christians is that we have really ‘seen the True Light, received the Heavenly Spirit, found the true faith’ in this experience of the Kingdom of God. The question we must all ask ourselves sincerely, however, is ‘what are we like when we return into this world after this Heavenly experience?’” *Dmitri Archbishop of Dallas and the South commentating on the Feast of The Meeting of The Lord.*

*Notes by the Revd Canon Richard Rowling*

# Numbers

Week five – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> February

## Introduction

Jesus' last recorded command was to make disciples. We can be bold in our aims to increase the number of people associated with our churches, as worshippers and disciples. If a church is growing in numbers, it is usually because it is focusing on other Marks of Growing. Increasing numbers is often a sign of spiritual health and certainly increases the Church's potential and capacity to do God's work.

## Collect of the Day

Almighty Father,  
whose Son was revealed in majesty  
before he suffered death upon the cross:  
give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever

*or*

Holy God,  
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:  
set straight our crooked hearts,  
and bend our wills to love your goodness  
and your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord

## Post Communion

Holy God,  
we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ:  
may we who are partakers at his table  
reflect his life in word and deed,  
that all the world may know his power to change and save.  
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord

## Alternative Collect

God, the giver of life,  
whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church:  
by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ  
and make us eager to do your will,  
that we may share with the whole creation  
the joys of eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### Hymns

We have a Gospel to proclaim  
Sent by the Lord an I  
Ye servants of God  
Tell out my soul  
Hills of the north rejoice  
Light of the minds that know him

### Readings

Isaiah 52:7-10  
Psalm 126  
Romans 10:1-15  
Matthew 28:16-20

### Sermon notes

- *Evangelism is less about the future size of our Church than about the future shape of our civilisation.*
- *If the Church is to declare good news it must first be good news.*
- *The key question is not, 'what kind of Church Service do I like?' but ... 'what is right for our mission in this place?'*

**Numbers can be dangerous.** The OT makes this clear (1 Chronicles 21.1-7). And the worldwide Church shows why the dangers still exist. If you go beyond the gospel promises, and leave out the little phrase 'with persecutions' in Mark 10.30, you may well be able to get people in – perhaps on false pretences. I'm referring to the so-called 'prosperity gospel'. When it comes to adding up the numbers, this seems to work – but is it NT Christianity?

#### 1. Numbers can be off-putting.

- a. Small struggling churches understandably feel depressed if we put too much emphasis on numerical growth. Having said that, a few years ago the dip in diocesan numbers was due almost entirely to numerical decline amongst the best-attended churches in the diocese. In contrast, many smaller churches were holding their own, or adding one or two here and there. Let's honour the two or three gathered together (Matthew 18.20) in an unheated country church. You are an inspiration: THANK YOU!
- b. We Anglicans are still a little bit nervous of the 'E' word. It seems un-British to be too in-your-face. But of course it all depends on what we mean by 'Evangelism' (read on!).

#### 2. Numbers are important.

We're assured by Jesus that whatever assails the Church, it will survive to the end of the age (Matthew 16.18). But visit Turkey (site of the great NT churches of Asia Minor) and you quickly see that this is no

guarantee to any particular church or group of churches. 2000 years later, are we heading down the same road?

3. It's an uncomfortable thought and is sometimes countered by the disparaging, dismissive phrase: 'we shouldn't be too concerned about bums on pews'. But that's too easy. When he was Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins put it starkly: 'If you want to pay your parish share, you'd better do some evangelism.' We need people in our churches if we're to maintain the structures and do the necessary educational and social work – as well as prayer and worship – which arise from this. I sometimes feel that evangelism is less about the future size of our Church than about the future shape of our civilisation.
4. **The gospel really is good news.** William Tyndale put it like this: '*Evangelio (that we cal gospel) is a greke word, and signyfyth good, mery, glad and joyfull tidings, that maketh a mannes hert glad, and maketh hym synge, daunce and leepe for joye.*'

Despite David Jenkins (semi) tongue-in-cheek comment above, our motives for sharing the gospel need to be examined. We're not wishing to add to the Church (Acts 2.41) for *our* sake but for the sake of those we're trying to reach with the gospel.

5. **Evangelism is about record-keeping and pastoral care as well as preaching.** In Matthew 28.16-20 Jesus makes it clear that the gospel must be proclaimed. This means using words. But it means using other tools too.

- a. *Record-keeping.* Here's a silly little story I've made up. Bill and Brenda have retired from fulltime work and offer their services to the vicar, who responds: 'We must grow numerically – the Archbishop says so. So what I'd like you to do is to walk up and down wearing a sandwich board, declaring that Jesus loves everyone - and hand out tracts which spell out the message.'

Well of course the vicar didn't say this. What she *did* say was: 'We have a lot of young families through our church via baptism and we don't follow them up. Would you be willing to go through the church records and on the anniversary of every baptism send out a small present for five years following each baptism. Something that every child and family would appreciate. And then in early December please send a personal letter to those families, inviting them to the Crib Service.'

In the same way we are wise to keep - and to use - records of those who arrange funerals and weddings, and of children who attend Sunday school (whatever term your church may use for that) and so on.

- b. *Pastoral care.* A few years ago, Bishop John Finney undertook research into the way people come to Christian faith in Britain today. One key factor was good pastoral care. We all love to be loved! As every pastor knows this is time-consuming and energy-sapping but it is one of the reasons for having a Church. *If the Church is to declare good news it must first be good news.* This doesn't mean that clergy should become chaplains to their congregations; it does mean that they, together with the PCC and church wardens, should ensure that the church has good systems in place to

ensure that everyone – including members who are no longer attend – feel wanted and a part of the body of Christ.

Every church experiences the ‘revolving door syndrome’ to some extent. It’s good pastoral care that not only wins people but holds them. They experience the good news in practical ways and find the abundant life of which Jesus spoke (John 10.10).

- c. *Hospitality.* As I understand it, this is the real driving force behind so-called ‘Fresh Expressions’. We wouldn’t dream of inviting a vegetarian for lunch and serving only meat. The needs of our guests are paramount. In the same way churches exist for the sake of those who don’t usually attend (according to the great Archbishop William Temple). The key question is not, ‘what kind of Church Service do I like?’ but ... ‘what is right for our mission in this place?’ In fact, of course, most churches of reasonable size can cater for a variety of tastes – from traditional to ‘messy’ church.
- d. *Liaison with schools.* Many schools – not only church schools – are very welcoming and only too pleased to invite adults who can communicate the Christian faith effectively. Hence initiatives such as *yoyo* in York – and of course many local clergy go into very many schools. But perhaps some churches can be more imaginative? I think, for example, of a church drama group which offered Assemblies to various schools. From my own experience, I’d say the very best Assemblies were when I took in a young Christian, who was also a gifted musician. The children sat up and took notice.
- e. *Further liaison with schools.* Several years ago Isabel (my wife) and I started an after-school service called SEEDS (St Edwards Eat Drink Service) for our local primary school. It’s been going for nearly 10 years and has proved a useful link with families. Over the years we’ve had several baptisms of older children – and of the occasional parent too. Several families have become strong members of our fellowship, making a real contribution to the life of the church.
- f. *Door-to-door visiting.* Of all church activities, this is the one with least appeal to most of us. But the Mormons are growing fast and this is their main strategy. I don’t recommend the way they set about it but the principle can be used, perhaps in the following way. A few years ago I encouraged churches to try ‘prayer-visiting’. Several took this on board and made some very good links. I can’t include detail here but I’d be happy to give information to anyone who asks – if we get more than 3 requests I’ll ask for the details to go on the Diocesan website!
- g. *Off the premises.* Some of the best church outreach meetings I’ve been to have taken place in pubs. Given notice, most pubs will welcome having a full bar/lounge on an otherwise quiet Monday night and will provide sandwiches at a reasonable price. The church’s task is to find a stimulating speaker who might give a personal testimony and be prepared to take questions.

Other possibilities ... To encourage families we organise football for all ages and both sexes in the large sports hall at our local leisure centre during some school holidays, and book Water World on the occasional Sunday evening.

## 6. Evangelism transforms the human landscape.

Dame Cicely Saunders was asked how she overcame the obstacles in the way of translating her vision of small caring units, which became expert in palliative care, into reality. She replied that, were it not for the inspiration of the teaching of Jesus and the inner strength given her by the Spirit of Jesus, her great idea would have died. (

But how did she come to this faith? Answer: because of the Christian witness and positive lifestyle of fellow medics when she was a young woman. Their witness indirectly led to the Hospice Movement.

The same kind of story is true of William Wilberforce who, when young, was a worldly man-about-town, Eglantyne Jebb who founded *Save the Children*. And so we could go on. In part it is this that I have in mind when I say: *Evangelism is less about the future size of our Church than about the future shape of our civilisation*. We Christians do well to remember this in today's world, when so many wish to establish their impeccable atheist credentials.

7. **Britain is a tough mission field.** I recall a conversation with a black Methodist minister from Kenya who was working in Britain. He was pretty demoralised. He told me that in his own country he had established and grown many flourishing churches. Over here he could see no obvious fruit for his labours. We sometimes berate ourselves for current statistics which are not altogether encouraging. The TV series *Rev* tells it how it is for many.

I recall a comment of the great Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. He was a true Christian statesman with wide knowledge of the world. It was when he returned to UK that he first experienced what he termed 'cold contempt for the Gospel'. Our calling at such times is to keep praying, keep witnessing, keep serving – and, as far as possible, keep joyful. And from time to time we are wise to lift up our eyes to survey the wider scene. Sociologists refer to the 'European exception': the Church struggles in Europe, while it flourishes in many parts of the world. The worldwide Church is growing – fast. It flourishes in some surprising places, including China. It remains true that the Christian Church is the largest movement that our world has ever known. This is not stated in a spirit of competitive superiority; it is simply to note a significant fact.

*Notes by the Revd Canon John Young*

**Other resources.** Canon Robert Warren's thinking is seminal, as is Bob Jackson's. Robert has just brought out a book entitled *Developing Healthy Churches: Returning to the Heart of Mission and Ministry* (Church House Publishing). Ashgate has just published David Goodhew's *Church Growth in Britain*. (Bob and David were vicars in York and Robert advised Archbishop David Hope on his *Living the Gospel* initiative.)

If you want something much shorter, you might try *The Archbishop's School of Evangelism* from the *York Courses' Archbishop's School of...* series (other booklets in the series are on Prayer, the Sacraments, Bible Reading, Healing & Wholeness, Life after Death, Christianity & Science).