

"FOLLOW ME"

**Being a disciple of Jesus in the
modern world.**

**Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth.
6 studies for small groups**

Follow Me

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Introduction

I remember one occasion when I was a child and we attended a family wedding. It would have been in the late 1960's or early 1970's and was well before the days of SatNav. As we left the church my Dad starting asking other guests if they knew the way to the reception. "Just follow the crowd," we were advised as we went off to find the car. As we pulled out in front of the church my father spotted a couple in their wedding clothes and with button-holes in their lapels getting into a car. He started to follow them as they drove away from the church and finally turned down a cul-de-sac and into their drive. It turned out that they had been invited to the wedding, but not the wedding reception, and we had followed them home. If you are going to follow someone, it is probably worth while making sure that they are the right person!

Matthew chapter 4 takes place at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In Matthew chapters 1-2 we have the birth of Christ. In chapter 3 we see the baptism of Jesus. At the opening of Matthew 4, Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Then Jesus learns that John the Baptist has been imprisoned so He returns to Galilee (4:12) and begins to preach what John the Baptist had been preaching... "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17). This then brings us to the second half of Matthew chapter 4 which contains the key verse for this series of Bible studies. Jesus spots a group of fishermen besides the Sea of Galilee and says to them, "Come follow me." This is the first group of people who are called to be his disciples.

Sometimes people are surprised to learn that the word 'Christian' only appears three times in the Bible in Acts 11:26. Acts 26:28 and in 1 Peter 4:16. However, the word 'disciple' occurs 276 times in the New Testament! Matthew 28:19 commands us to go and make disciples, not Christians, and we are called to be disciples by Jesus and not just to be Christians. In the last 50 years we have confused getting someone to respond to an altar call and saying the 'sinner's prayer' with becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ. You will sometime hear preachers talking about 'sealing the deal' when they get someone to respond to their preaching, when in fact we ought to be looking for people who commit themselves to the life-long journey of

following Jesus. Disciples are not people who just go to church, believe in God, get baptised or say a particular prayer at some point in their life. They are people committed to following Jesus, whatever the cost and wherever he might lead. The French philosopher and Christian writer Simone Weil once said, “It is much easier to make non-Christians into Christians than it is to make Christians into Christians”!

In this series we will look at what it means to be a disciple who is following Jesus: what does it mean to be faithful, holy, committed and devoted to Christ in every area of our life? Hopefully, it will help all of us to become a little closer to Jesus as we seek to follow him.

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1. Follow Me

When we were in Uganda as a family last year we had many experiences that will stick with us for years to come. However, one feature of life in Uganda which we were glad to leave behind was the dust! Southern Uganda has a very fine red dust which manages to get into everything, and once it makes a stain on your clothes it is almost impossible to get out. As Claire and I preached around Uganda we would often refer to the ‘mfufu” (the L’Ugandan word for dust) as an illustration in our sermons.

There is an old rabbinic saying which goes, “cover yourself in the dust of the master.” It comes from the idea that followers of a rabbi should walk so closely behind him that they get covered with the dust from the road that his feet throws up into the air. In order to hear the master as he speaks when he is walking along, you would need to get very close - but that means you will be covered in his dust.

The source of this saying is the Mishnah, Avot 1:4. (The Mishnah is a collection of rabbinic thought from 200 BC to 200 AD that still forms the core of Jewish belief today.) The quotation is from Yose ben Yoezer He was one of the earliest members of the rabbinic movement, who lived about two centuries before Jesus:

“Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise;
and powder thyself in the dust of their feet;
and drink their words with thirstiness.”

The overall idea here is to encourage people to make their homes places of Bible study, and to welcome itinerant teachers and eagerly learn from them. The middle line is sometimes translated as “sit amid the dust of their feet,” and understood as being about humbly sitting at the feet of one’s teacher to learn from him. This is because it was customary to honour a teacher by sitting on the floor while he taught seated in a chair. From this arose a widely-used idiom for studying with a rabbinic teacher that you “sat at his feet.” Paul even says that he was educated “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). The fact that Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet” in Luke 10:39 suggests that she was learning

from him as a disciple (apostle?), too.

If you look more closely at the Hebrew text of Avot 1:4, however, it does not explicitly describe a person as sitting. It reads, “hevei mitabek b’afar raglehem.” Literally, “and be powdering yourself with the dust of their feet.” Read properly, Yoezer’s saying sounds more like it’s describing the idea of “powdering yourself” by walking through clouds of dust billowing up along a dirt roadway. Because of this, some highly respected scholars believe that “walking in your teacher’s dust” was the original intent of Avot 1:4.

When the New Testament uses the word ‘disciple’ it uses the Greek word “mathēteuō” which means to become a pupil of a teacher or the follower of the master.

Read Matthew 4:17 to 25

The first step to following Jesus is to be found in the very first word that Jesus preached in his public ministry according to the Gospel of Matthew. We are told that having returned from the wilderness, Jesus began, from that time on to preach, “Repent...”

- ✘ What do you understand by the word ‘repent’? What does it mean to you?
- ✘ Why do you think that this would be the first thing Jesus says to potential disciples?
- ✘ The word ‘repent’ implies that people are going the wrong way and have been doing the wrong thing. Why didn’t Jesus begin his public ministry with something more comforting or affirming?
- ✘ What is the relationship between the commands of Jesus to ‘repent’ in verse 17 and ‘follow me’ in verse 19? Can you do one without the other?
- ✘ As we share the Gospel with people who don’t know Jesus, how might these verses impact the way we share the Good News?

It is quite interesting to look at the metaphors which Jesus used during his ministry. To the fishermen in Matthew 4 he uses the image of fishing: He says, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” In other places he speaks to people living in an agricultural setting about seeds and weeds (e.g. Matthew 13:3). He speaks to a crowd which contains farmers and shepherds about lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14) and into a culture well acquainted with slavery about unmerciful servants (Matthew 18:23-35). The people Jesus

spoke to were closer to nature and so he told parables about birds (Matthew 6:26), Fig Trees (Luke 13:6-9), grains of wheat (John 12:24) and wineskins (Matthew 9:16f). Not many of us today are farmers, shepherds or fishermen!

- ✘ How do you think people who are not well acquainted with the Bible respond to stories about sheep, fish and seeds when these things are not part of their everyday experience?
- ✘ Are there better images or metaphors we could use when trying to share our faith in the modern world?
- ✘ How important are testimony and personal stories as we try to share our faith? If the stories Jesus told don't have direct equivalents in people's lives today, might our experiences and stories be useful?

Sometime Matthew 4:19 is translated "Come and follow me..." This is because the word 'follow' in the Greek is actually two words: "duete" and "opiso". "Deute" is an imperative or a command and means "come here" and the word "opiso" means "get behind me." This is the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 16:23 when it says, "Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" Put the two words together and Jesus tells the fishermen to "Come here now, this instant, and get in close behind me."

- ✘ In order to follow Jesus the first disciples had to get away from their old life. Matthew 4:20 tells us that they left their nets and followed Jesus. What did you have to leave behind in order to follow Jesus when you first believed?
- ✘ The word 'duete' is an imperative and has a sense of urgency. It means something like, "Come here right now." We read that in response the disciple left their nets "at once." In verse 22 we read that James and John "immediately" left their boat and their father to follow Jesus. Do we have a sense of urgency about following Jesus?
- ✘ What would you say to someone who want to take their time about making a decision about following Jesus? Why is the matter urgent? What is the harm in taking your time and leaving a decision until later?
- ✘ Are there things in your life which you still need to leave behind? Do you feel able to share this with the group? Would you like other people to pray for you about it right now?

2. The Call to Holiness

In 2006 I joined the gym at Cogan in an attempt to get fit. I knew that in the next 12 months I was going to be physically tested by the Army, and wanted to get into the habit of training. In order to join the gym you had to go through an 'induction' where you were shown how to use the weights machines and running machines safely, and where you worked out a programme which suited you. On the same induction as me was a man in his early 30's who had a serious weight problem. Apparently he had been told by his doctor that if he didn't change his lifestyle then it was going to have serious health implications for him in later life.

We turned up to our induction with me in an old pair of training shoes, a faded t-shirt and a pair of running shorts I hadn't worn in 20 years. The other man arrived in an outfit which put me to shame! A brand new tracksuit, expensive running shoes, an iPod fastened to his upper arm in a special carrying pouch and a special jogging bottle for his isotonic drink. I felt like quite a scruff. However, as the weeks went by and we would bump into each other from time to time it became apparent that his trips to the gym were not producing fruit for the other man. He would arrive at the gym and spend most of his time standing and talking to people rather than actually doing any exercise... in fact, I don't ever recall seeing him on a treadmill or a cycling machine. He had put on the tracksuit, could say he was a gym member... but it had made little difference to his lifestyle.

There are many people in the church who are like that man. At some point in their life they met with Jesus and resolved to follow him. They joined a church and were baptised and were able to say that they had become a Christian, but in truth it made little difference to their lifestyle. The right clothes and the right membership don't make for radical change by themselves. We can be comfortable adding a little religion and a little church to our existing life without allowing it to radically change us into followers of

Jesus.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-25

- ✘ How do you define 'holiness?' What does this mean practically?
- ✘ Holiness can sometime be misunderstood as merely being 'good' and keeping to God's Laws. What are we set our minds on according to verse 13? What does this mean?
- ✘ If grace is the free gift of God's mercy, and holiness is the striving to be more Christ like in our lifestyle and thinking, are they mutually exclusive? How can grace and 'works' go together in the Christian's life?
- ✘ The word in the New Testament which we translate as 'holiness' is sometimes translated as 'sanctified'. What does 'sanctified' mean and how is it different to 'holiness'?
- ✘ The Scribes and the Pharisees strove to be holy in every area of their life through their good life and adherence to the Laws of Moses. However, Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." What was the problem the Pharisees and Scribes had? Why wasn't their attempts at holiness enough for Jesus?

Already we have three related words for the way we live our lives: Holiness, Sanctification and Righteousness. They all mean something slightly different, but all share a common theme. It is an idea which comes from the Old Testament of being distinct or separate or set apart. It is the idea of being different to those around us in the world. When God delivered His people Israel from their bondage in Egypt, He distinguished Himself from the "gods" of Egypt. God wanted his followers to be distinctive and different to the followers of other gods as well and so he called them to be separate, holy and distinct. The Hebrew word we translate as Holy is the word 'Qodesh' and it comes from a root word which means something like "to make clean."

Read Hebrews 12:14-28

- ✘ In the English Standard Version of the Bible verse 14 is translated as, "strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." It

then goes on in verse 15 to say, “See to it that no one falls short of the grace.” Here we have the idea of striving and being holy again put alongside the idea of grace. Our works and God’s grace are combined to produce discipleship. Can you think of other places in the scriptures which talk about works and grace going together? What about passages which might suggest that works and grace are mutually exclusive?

- ✘ In verse 14 two ideas are combined: living in peace with other people and holiness. There are other places in scripture where how we live with other believers and unity is directly linked to holiness. Many Christians, when asked about holiness think about sins such as sexual immorality, drunkenness, lustfulness or idolatry. Do you think of disunity as a serious sin which works against our holiness?
- ✘ Read **Galatians 5:19-26**. Do you think that jealousy, dissensions in the body of Christ and factions are as serious as sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft? Why does Paul list them together?
- ✘ How important is holiness to you? How much thought, attention, and effort do you devote to the pursuit of holiness? Are you intentional about putting away everything that is displeasing to God and living a holy life?
- ✘ [if applicable] How important is your children’s holiness to you? (A good gauge— do you care more about their school report, their sports results, and their earning capacity, or about their purity of heart and life?) Does their sin drive you to your knees?
- ✘ How concerned are you about the holiness of the body of Christ? Does it grieve you when you see yourself or others treating sin lightly?
- ✘ What one thing could you change in your life today in your pursuit of holiness?

3. The Call to Love

When I was about 15 I went to my first 'proper' disco. We were on holiday in Great Yarmouth, staying on a camp site, and each night there was a youth disco held in the camp club-house. Early on in the holiday I had met a girl of about my own age at the swimming pool and we started chatting. I asked her if she was going to the disco that night, and was thrilled when she said, 'yes'. That evening my heart was all a-flutter as I put on my best clothes (striped green and blue polo shirt, tank-top jumper and flared jeans - it was 1978!) I splashed the Brut aftershave all over and made my way to the disco. The young woman I was hoping to meet was sat across the other side of the room with a group of her friends, and it took me about an hour to pluck up the courage and make my way across the dance floor. With everyone watching I approached her and said, "Hi! Would you like to dance?" She slowly looked me up and down, before replying, "No!" I thought she must have misheard me over the noise of the disco, so I asked again, "Are you sure? Would you like to dance?" She laughed and once again the answer was, "No." Shame faced I made my way back across the dance floor - with everyone watching: my teenage heart (and hopes) were dashed with a single word! Is there anything as painful as young love?

In the modern world in the West, when we talk of 'love' we most often refer to a syrupy sort of emotion we feel towards another person. Most often, love is confused with infatuation - that elated, "high" feeling we get when we "fall in love." However, as we know, the Bible talks about love in very different terms. In Greek there are 5 different words which we could translate as 'love' in English. They are Agape, Eros, Phileo, Storge and Xenia.

'Xenia' is the kindness and thoughtfulness we show towards strangers or acquaintances when we are kind towards them. Another way of translating it would be 'hospitality' and is a key concept of loving neighbours and strangers in the middle-eastern world. 'Phileo' means to have a deep affection for someone. A fondness based in the heart. What the Greeks meant by Phileo love is what we normally think of the words "brotherly love". 'Storge' relates to natural, familial love such as the love between a parent and child. In the

Whilst not appearing in the New Testament, the negative form of storge is used twice: Astorgos means “devoid of natural or instinctive affection, without affection to kindred.”

‘Eros’ was the word often used to express sexual love or the feelings of arousal that are shared between people who are physically attracted to one another. By New Testament times, this word had become so debased by the culture that it is not used even once in the entire New Testament.

Agape is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the types of love in the Bible. This Greek word and variations of it are found throughout the New Testament. Agape perfectly describes the kind of love Jesus Christ has for his Father and for his followers. This kind of love is not natural, and can only come from God, and we can only exhibit it as a result of God moving and working through us.

Read John 13:31-38 and John 14:15-24

- ✘ In John 13:34 Jesus says, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” In John 13:1-17 and John 13:18-30 we see two examples of Jesus’ love for his disciples. Describe them in your own words.
- ✘ What does this mean for us when Jesus says that we are to love one another ‘as I have loved you’? How literally did he intend us to take that?
- ✘ From the end of John 14 onwards we see the arrest of Jesus, the torture, trial and crucifixion. In this context, when Jesus says, ‘love one another ‘as I have loved you’, what does this mean for us?
- ✘ Foot washing, understanding, suffering and dying are the examples of love Jesus gives us in these passages. How do we live out that kind of love as Jesus commanded us to?
- ✘ What examples of Phileo, Storge, Xenia and Agape have you experienced in your Christian life from other believers?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

- ✘ Paul wrote these words to the dysfunctional church at Corinth. Spiritual gifts were being abused and used badly, people were taking one another to court, there was sexual immorality, greed and disunity in the fellowship. At the heart of Paul’s letter he gives this exegesis of love,

and the word he uses for 'love' is Agape. What would a church look like if it took Paul's words seriously and tried to follow Jesus' new command to 'love one another'? How would it be different? In verses 4-8 Paul lists 16 attributes of true love: list them for yourself

Read Matthew 5:43-48

- ✘ The passages we have read so far from John's Gospel and Paul's letter to the Corinthians talk about love between disciples and amongst believers. In Matthew 5 Jesus talks about something different - love for our neighbours and enemies. How could we show true Agape to our neighbours in our community?
- ✘ Who are our enemies today? How could we show love to them?
- ✘ Are we called to love Muslim extremist terrorists? What about murderers... or rapists... or paedophiles? If so, what would that love look like?
- ✘ How attractive would a church which reflected God's Agape in our church, community and world really be to outsiders?

4. The Call to Forgiveness

The Spanish have a story about a father and son who had become estranged. The son left home and the father set out to find him. He searched for many months with no success. Finally, in desperation, the father took out a newspaper ad that read, “Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father.” On Saturday, 800 men named Paco showed up looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

In a fallen world, forgiveness is essential to maintain close relationships. We all need forgiveness and we all need to grant forgiveness, because we all sin and we all have been sinned against. But asking for and granting forgiveness are not easy tasks!

If you’re a disciple of Jesus, seeking and granting forgiveness are not optional. It is an essential part of following Jesus. He said that if you do not forgive others, our heavenly Father will not forgive you (Matt. 6:15; Mark 11:25). Theologians are divided over whether that refers to being under God’s eternal judgment or not, but either way, you don’t want to miss out on the Father’s forgiveness! Jesus said that forgiving others is so important that if you are worshiping God when you remember that your brother has something against you, you should first go be reconciled to your brother and then come back to worship God (Matt. 5:23-24). So, it is vital for you as a follower and disciple of Jesus to grapple with understanding and practicing forgiveness.

Read Matthew 5:21-26 and Matthew 6:1-15

- ✘ In the first passage Jesus talks about brothers and sisters who are angry and have fallen out. He talks about what to do if you are worshipping and remember the argument and what to do if there is a court case. We

often think that if someone has offended us, we should go and speak to them - but in these passages the situation is reversed. In each example, who is the guilty party?

- ✘ It can be difficult to go and speak to someone if we have been hurt, but how much harder is it to speak to someone if we are the one who has done the hurting? How difficult do you find it to admit you were wrong and ask for forgiveness?
- ✘ What do you think you should do if you ask someone to forgive you, and they refuse? Can you think of any scriptures which might help in this situation?
- ✘ It might seem strange to us, but there is no such concept in the Bible as an apology! The nearest word in the New Testament is the word 'apologia' which is a legal term for making a verbal defence in court. It is a self-defence or an excuse for our actions. Making an excuse for our behaviour is not a proper way for Christians to act towards brothers or sisters. However, the Bible talks a lot about confession and repentance: confession is admitting we have done something wrong whilst repentance is the turning away from the act with the intention of never repeating it again. This is very different from just saying 'I'm sorry.' When there has been a break-down in relationship, confession and repentance (probably on both sides) is the only way forward.

Read Romans 12:9-21

- ✘ In the modern church we have often thought of holiness being about what we do with our bodies, sexual morality, our attitude and use of alcohol or drugs and what we look at on the internet. Far more often the Bible talks about holiness (and Christian maturity) in terms of how we relate to one another in the church. From the Romans 12 passage, list the commands Paul gives to the church.
- ✘ Is this list what you would normally think of as the characteristics of holiness?
- ✘ In the New Testament there are nearly 90 commands or instructions which use the words 'one another' to describe our relationships in the body of Christ. How many can you think of? For example:
- ✘ "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash **one another's** feet." (John 13:14)

- ✘ ““This is my commandment, that you love **one another** as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)
- ✘ “All of you agree with **one another** in what you say and let there be no divisions among you, so that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- ✘ “Let us not become conceited, provoking **one another**, envying **one another**.” (Galatians 5:26)
- ✘ “Bear with **one other** and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)
- ✘ It is one thing to know that we ought to forgive one another, but quite another to do it! What practical steps can you think of to enable you to forgive someone , especially if they have really hurt you?
- ✘ Pause and pray, and ask God to show you someone that you might hold unforgiveness against. More importantly. Ask God to show you people that you may have hurt or offended that you need to go and confess and repent to.
- ✘ Try and do it this week!

5. The Call to Generosity

Over Christmas, there was a column in The Sunday Times written by Andrew Marr. It asked the question why so many comfortable, middle class British Muslims give up the comfort and advantages of a Western life to go and join the extremists in an uncomfortable and dangerous situation in Syria? Furthermore, why are so many rich and comfortable Westerners so miserable with life? The answer, the (atheist) columnist said, was because there was a giant hole at the centre of Western civilisation: once you take God out of your life, then the future becomes very bleak. At one we saw this life as a short period of time during which we might suffer pain or hardship, but it was nothing compared to what was to come when we got to heaven. Once you took away God and the hope of heaven, then all we had to look forward to was the pleasures of this life, and frankly, that wasn't enough for most people. The columnist wrote how the world's richest people are actually amongst the unhappiest because they have discovered that possessions and luxury are ultimately unsatisfying... especially as we grow older and the end of our life comes nearer. As I read the article, I felt I was reading a modern day version of Ecclesiastes chapters 1 and 2!

Andrew Marr came to some incredible conclusions for a non-believer. He wrote:

“For a medieval Christian, everything had meaning — plants and trees had symbolic meanings; the lives of animals told exemplary stories; saints haunted the wildwood; and the turning year was itself a daily parable of death and resurrection. Our culture is often glibly described as essentially Christian. It really isn't, not in any serious sense. We have been freed from that enchanted world and scattered out into an almost wholly material civilisation, a city centre in which the only thing left standing is the market. Individually, we aren't going anywhere except the “care homes” that are anything but

homes. It's too thin gruel. Material satisfaction matters. A lot. If you are lucky enough to be close to the top of the tree, then ever-better skiing holidays, larger second homes, whatever takes your fancy . . . well, life's pretty good. But as Niall Ferguson pointed out on these pages, even white, male, middle-class Americans are going through a period of angry disillusion. And for the vast numbers of people for whom material improvement is small-scale, slow in coming and never as lavish as advertised, then the gruel is cruel."

Essentially, the writer says that if you don't believe in God or heaven, then materialism is all you have - and that is not satisfying at all. However, if you are a believer then you understand that you are only in this world a relatively short time and you can't take your wealth with you. The conclusion the Bible comes to when faced with the question of money and wealth is you may as well use it wisely and generously here on earth because it is no use to you in the world to come! You may as well please God and help your brothers and sisters here and now.

- ✘ The starting point for generosity with others is God's generosity with us. Take some time to read the following Scripture passages, and then describe, in your own words, the generosity of God:

Luke 15:1-32

John 3:16-21

2 Corinthians 8:9

Ephesians 2:1-10

Philippians 2:5-11

1 John 4:7-12

- ✘ In Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-37, we read about the generosity of the early church in Jerusalem. One phrase in the original Greek that appears in both places to convey the common life of the church is translated "had everything in common" (2:44) and "shared everything" (4:32). While some have advocated communal living from these verses, the aim and motivation of the early church's common life seems to be directed elsewhere. What is the aim and motivation of this sharing or common life?
- ✘ Acts 4:33-37 describes the generosity of some within the Jerusalem church who sold personal property to help others in need. What do you think is going on here? How does it strike you?
- ✘ What needs do you know of presently within our Church, either at the overall level or in your immediate relationships? How could you be a

part of generously meeting those needs? Do you want to be?

- ✘ In his first letter to the young pastor, Timothy, Paul talks about the source and dangers of our possession. Read 1 Timothy 6:1-10 and consider how Paul's words related to the passages in Acts 2 and 4 above?

Read Matthew 6:1-8, Mark 12:41-44 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

- ✘ More important than how much we give is the attitude with which we give. How would you describe your own attitude to giving? Is it joyful?
- ✘ What do you think about the concept of tithing or giving 10% of your income to church? What scriptures do you know which teach about tithing?
- ✘ Is a 'rule' about how much you should give more or less likely to make you a disciplined giver?
- ✘ Is it more or less likely to make you a generous giver?
- ✘ Is it more or less likely to make you a joyful giver?
- ✘ When was the last time you thought seriously about your giving or reviewed how much you give? Is it time to do it as we begin a New Year with all its challenges ahead?

6. The Call to be Fishers

Over this series of Bible studies we have been considering what it means to follow Christ. How do we follow Jesus practically in the modern world? What does a real disciple look like? As we finish the series we look at the second half of the sentence in Matthew 4 where Jesus calls the first disciples to follow him. The full verse says, “Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.” (Matthew 4:19)

When I was 13 (in 1976) Britain experienced a heat wave in what was one of the driest, sunniest and warmest summers of the 20th century. That year we went on summer holiday to Torbay on the south coast of England, and had a wonderful camping trip. One day my dad announced he was taking the boys in the family fishing, and we hired a boat and some fishing gear. We headed out of Brixham harbour and lowered our mackerel line with 6 hooks on it. Within seconds we pulled up a line, and every hook had a wriggling fish on it! We lowered the line again, and again it was almost instantly filled with fish. In just an hour we caught 96 mackerel and one gurnard, a number which I’ll never forget! The fish were taken back to the campsite, and we gave them out for free to anyone who wanted fresh fish for supper that night. The gurnard (which is one of the ugliest fish in creation!) we kept for ourselves and baked it with lemons. For some reason, the hot water had brought all the fish close to the surface and they were easy to catch.

Sadly, fishing for people is not as easy as that. In our evangelism and mission it takes time to build relationships with people and earn their trust. It then takes time to explain the Gospel to them and help them to come to a point of accepting Jesus for themselves. However, it is clear from the New Testament that part of following Jesus is being a fisherman or woman!

Read Matthew 4:17-23 again.

- ✘ Verse 23 shows three distinct elements in Jesus' ministry: what are they?*
- ✘ What are the differences between the three parts?
- ✘ How do these three parts work together?
- ✘ Which part of this ministry do you think you are most suited to and why?
- ✘ We sometimes talk about 'mission' and sometimes about 'evangelism' as if the two terms are interchangeable, but they are not. What does mission mean? What does evangelism mean? How are they different?
- ✘ What does 'witnessing' mean?
- ✘ Are you more comfortable with the idea of being an evangelist, a missionary or a witness? Why? Maybe you don't want to be any of these three! Why not?

Read Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:46-53 and Acts 1:1-8

- ✘ These three passages are about commands given to Jesus' 11 surviving disciples after the resurrection. Do you think the call issued in these passages also applies to us or was it just for those 11 men? Is the Great Commission given to the first disciples also our commission?
- ✘ We read in the New Testament that crowds often followed Jesus because of the miracles he performed rather than the teaching he gave. (Matthew 19:2, Mark 4:24, John 6:2). Once the crowds gathered, Jesus was then able to speak to them. However, in the modern church our evangelism is almost exclusively through words, either spoken or written down. What do you think is the place of the miraculous in the modern world?
- ✘ A time-honoured, effective method of evangelism is your personal testimony. Just telling about your spiritual pilgrimage. The sceptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed. Are you able to share your testimony in a way that is short, clear, concise and interesting? Have you thought about it and how you would tell your story to a non-Christian?
- ✘ If someone listened to your testimony and said, "I want that for myself,"

do you think you would be confident and competent at leading them to the Lord? Do you know how to pray with someone to receive Christ as their saviour? What are the essential elements?

- ✠ If you have time, why not have one or two people from your small group share their testimony?

