

Being Christ's Body where the Spirit lives

Introduction

I have suggested that we could think of this Covid 19 shutdown as a kind of fast. And during the fast we could undertake a Spring Clean. In the first place a Spring Clean of ourselves. Now we are getting closer to normal it is time to see how we are going.

We have looked at four areas which shine a light on our life together and today I want us to take action in response to them:

1. First we look at the King and his Spirit. Acts 1.3-8

The Holy Spirit came in the place of Jesus to testify to Jesus. The Spirit empowered the disciples for their great ministry. Our great ministry. To carry forward the great message of the cross that transforms rebels into the likeness and glory of Christ and fills them to speak the Father's words as Christ did and to do the Father's works as Jesus did. The message of the cross that brings together a new reconciled people for God.

Power to be witnesses is what we read.

Do you long to see the Spirit poured out on you and all of us so we too can speak and see the gospel spread?

So we can know Jesus better. So we can know and glorify the Father, and speak his word and do his deeds.

2. The King and Disciples Mark 8.34-35

Witnesses to Jesus with the gospel of Christ crucified and making disciples – that is our commission. I raised the question whether we prefer to be called Christians or disciples?

Generally the believers referred to each other as brothers and sisters. But *disciple* was the word that described their relation to their Lord.

Disciples were not just followers. They were learners. Practical learners. They followed their teacher around to observe and listen and then to practise what they had been taught. They were a bit like an apprentice. Learning to be like the master, to do like the master and to understand like the master.

They were not casual hearers. Or occasional followers. Being a disciple was not a hobby, or recreation.

You can get the idea from Jesus himself when he spoke to the crowds just after he had told his disciples about his impending death. This is Mark 8.34-35:

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

Discipleship begins with a surrender of one's life. Denying yourself means abandoning your control over your life.

Here is a big question for us. Whose life are you living? Are you sharing the rule of your life with Jesus? Giving Jesus parts of our life and keeping other parts under our say-so is a pretend game. Jesus doesn't call disciples on those terms.

It's a wonder Jesus had any disciples. It's a wonder he still does. How come he does? One reason is that discipleship involves a close relationship between master and pupil. Jesus spent time with his disciples, especially the twelve. And they spent time with him. A close relationship developed, such that near the time of his death, he could say to them that he no longer called them servants, but friends (John 15.15).

That is still the starting place. The first half of John 15 gives a wonderful picture of the close connection between Jesus and the disciples. That is the place for us to look if we want to grow as disciples.

How encouraging is this personal relationship between disciple and Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus has disciples in the present because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives bringing the same intimate relationship with Jesus as the twelve had. Is it not wonderful that this is the heart and foundation of discipleship?

What do we need to attend to today?

1. Have you taken up your cross and put yourself to death so that Christ alone can rule in your life. Are Paul's words in Galatians 2 now and always true of you :

I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Gal 2.19-20

2. Have you put yourself in the place where someone else can teach and show you how to follow Jesus? Perhaps in a small group, maybe in a prayer triplet, maybe meeting one on one to read the Bible and pray.

3. If you are in some kind of ministry team are you being helped to learn how to minister better as a servant of Jesus? Could you grow as a Spirit-filled worker?

4. Can you draw someone alongside you to share Jesus and the scriptures with them or to encourage them in their life and ministry?

5. If you are in a ministry of some kind, can it be shared? Can you share it by showing someone else how it is done, and then handing it on to them?

6. Disciple-making is still the main activity of disciples. Keep on telling the gospel. Pray people will come to believe in Jesus. Then teach them how to be disciples.

I suggested that what we need is a renewed congregation. By which I mean disciples of Jesus who are learners, apprentices, servants. Disciples who are growing to know Jesus more and more intimately. Who are serving Jesus whole-heartedly in the power of his Spirit. Who are learning from one another. And who are passing it on to others. And who are not distracted, entangled,

double-minded or trying to serve two masters. But are dead to themselves and alive to Christ. Is that you?

3. The King and his Church 1 Cor 12.12-13

Last week we looked at the body of Christ.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1 Cor 12.12-13

The analogy here is about a human body: we are many parts of one body, who is Christ. The church is this body. Together we are members of Christ himself because this is his body.

It is also a new human race. As Ephesians 2 tells us.

The Creator who set up the first human has set up a new version. The first humans were made in the image of the Creator. The new version is the image. He is the image in such a way that he is the Creator and a human at the same time.

This new race grows and increases. But wonder of wonders it is not left to grow on its own like the old humans were. Its life comes from Jesus. Its life is Jesus. It turns out that the new race is actually the new human. Its whole origin is all from Christ.

The new race, the church, is somehow one with Jesus. Jesus embodied in a body of people. Jesus and his body. So united that the life of Jesus fills his body. So one as to say that the complete being of God the Son fills it in every way. Jesus and the church: distinguishable but inseparable.

Here is a wonder. Christ the new human has taken to himself a renewed humanity united them together in himself made them his body, made them parts of his own body, brought them into the Father's presence with the same full and free access that he has. But not only that: there is movement in the opposite direction. The church is where God dwells by his Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit among the people of Christ marks that body out as God's dwelling place. A holy Temple.

The holy Temple, because this is the eternal gathering around God. The experience in advance of the culmination of the gathering together of all things in Christ. This is why the gathering of the church is so crucial. It is a gathering in the presence of the Holy God who dwells in our midst by his Holy Spirit and sanctifies us as his holy temple.

This gathering has a Godward aspect: praise, thanks, listening to his Word. It also has a mutual aspect: building each other together to be like Christ. From this centre flow all the work and ministries of the body.

Make sure you are a living limb of Christ's body. Make sure you draw your life from him. Make sure you are being united by his Spirit with all the other limbs and body parts. Make sure you are part of the building up and growing of his body. When you work out what to do in the church, make sure it is Christ's body that you are working in.

Now some of us may need to change our mind about this. We do not attend church. We do not even belong to a church. We are parts of the body Christ's church. We, together are the church. And especially so when we meet together.

No missing parts. Do you need to change your mind and practice? To join, belong, grow, build? Do you need help to do this?

4. King and the Gospel Acts 4.2-31

We looked a few weeks ago at how the King got his gospel out into the world. He did it by filling his disciples with the Holy Spirit. And by giving them a message to tell. And wherever the message was told two different things happened: lots of people believed. And lots of people opposed it – often violently.

There is one occasion that gives us a great clue as to how the message and the disciples kept going. It is the prayer meeting recorded in Acts 4 which we have just heard read.

There are four things to note here.

1. They raised their voices together. The word translated “together” has overtones of strong bonds and passion. They really were together in heart and spirit on this.

Why? Because

- they knew Jesus was the Lord of all;
- he had sent them to tell the news;
- the Spirit had come upon them;
- they had seen the power of the gospel in action.

2. They prayed that the Lord would give them boldness to keep on speaking, ie to keep on doing what he told them to do in the first place.

3. The speaking was done because the Holy Spirit filled them and they spoke.

4. They prayed that the Lord would keep on stretching out his hand to do powerful works in his name (which is what had got them in to trouble in the first place). Does this seem remote to us? If we think of raising the dead and healing congenital lameness, maybe so. But what about calling on the Lord for all the unbelieving spouses represented in this congregation? Or for all the children and teenagers caught up in the powerful web of social media. How old does one have to be, to be filled with the Holy Spirit and have fire in their belly for the Lord Jesus and his gospel? Might not the Lord stretch out his hand to these people? To our children and young people?

These things were written for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. For us who are still the bearers of the King’s great Gospel. Who are still the people of his Spirit. Before we worry about where or how to have church, let us put on these shoes of the gospel. Shoes that include the great speaking Spirit in us. Shoes that are prepared with the gospel in our heart and mind and on our lips. And shoes that lead us to passionate united prayer for boldness to speak and the plea to God to act in power.

What might change if we prayed like this with passion and unity, and God answered?