

Sermon series week 4

Let it Show: Disciples are Different

Regulars here will know that this week we're in week 4 of a series of sermons on 'discipleship' – thinking about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

We're 4 weeks in to this series on discipleship, time I think to do a quick recap.

So let's see – who can remember what we've been talking about the last three weeks?

The overall theme of the series is about 'Stepping out of the Boat'. Phil who put this series together gave it first week the title: 'Challenge yourself: walk on water'. The main reading that week was the story of when Jesus walked on water, and Peter saw him and wanted to do the same. Jesus encouraged him, and Peter did – but then he started to doubt, and started to sink, and called out to Jesus to save him. So the question is: what does it mean for each of us to 'step out of the boat', to dare to 'walk on water' – trusting that Jesus can make possible things we couldn't dare to do on our own?

The second week was 'Come and see'. Anyone who has ever been on an Alpha course will be very familiar with this theme. 'Come and see' what this talk about Jesus is all about, and what might happen if you come and see. The main story was about how some of the first disciples first met Jesus, and how they responded in different ways. (Incidentally, we run Alpha courses, if you're interested in trying one out, and

there are also plans for a Youth Alpha group in Caversham in the autumn.)

The third week, last week, was about 'walking with Jesus: living with God'. The main reading that week was about prayer, Jesus teaching us how to pray and giving us words to pray with, the prayer we call the 'Lord's prayer' because it was Jesus the Lord who taught us it. Something I particularly remember from Penny's sermon at the big joint parish service we had here at St Peter's was when she talked about how important it is just to spend time with God: like being at the source of a river, not just sitting downstream. 'Come and see' goes along with 'Come and be': being with God.

If you're feeling you haven't really been keeping up with all this, or want to think about it some more, then do check out the sermons on the parish website.

It's taken a while to get on to today's theme, but now we've got there: 'Let it show: Disciples are different'.

Susan has just read for us the main reading for this week. There are two others we could have had as well, if you want to have a look at them in your own time and think about what they teach us about being a follower of Jesus.

What is today's main reading about?

How do you feel if someone does something nasty to you?

Or if they want to take your things?

And what should we think about people who are obviously rather nasty and do bad things? We all come across people

like that, and we hear even more about people like that on the news.

And what about the people who, even worse, are out to get *us*?

What's the natural response to all this?

Jesus says something very different to the natural response. He quotes what people of his time would normally say: 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' – people should be paid back equally for what they do – and 'you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy' – the natural way to react.

But he says NO, if you want to follow me, you shouldn't be like that. If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other. Be generous, do not refuse when people ask you for things. Even love your enemy, and pray for people who do nasty things to you.

Can we do this? Is it asking too much?

Can we be kind and generous even to people who are being nasty and mean?

Can we pray for the person at school, or the person at work, who everyone knows is a bully?

Jesus doesn't say much about what will happen if we do, but he clearly thinks it's very important, and the basic reason for that seems to be that if we behave like this we really *are* following the path God wants us to take *because* this is also how God behaves. This is how God feels about the world.

Psychologists might say that if we behave in these sorts of ways it's really good for us too, and it can also transform situations; and they will give all sorts of reasons for this based on human psychology. There's probably a lot to be said for all that, but we don't need to overthink it.

The challenge this week is simply to listen to what Jesus says, and give this kind of living a go. What happens if we try it out this week at school, at work, at home, or wherever else we go?

Try it out and see. Stick with it and see. See what it does to difficult situations. See how it changes you, whether or not it changes the difficult people. See how it changes your relationship with God. See how it changes how you see the world. If it's already part of how you live, think more deeply about what difference it makes.

That's this week's discipleship challenge. Can we rise to it?

The next part of today's service is George's baptism.

This is the day when George starts on his journey of faith, which hopefully in time will lead to him learning about Jesus, and then deciding whether or not he will follow Jesus himself.

As we move to the font, we're going to sing 'One more step along the world I go' – a first step for George, but as we sing it we might think about where we are on that journey, and how we are walking it with God.