

2026 TALK, 8.3.26, ALL-AGE MATT 16: 13-20/21-28

LENT SERIES (3): 'JESUS, THE DISCIPLES & DISCIPLE-MAKING – BUILDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SMALL GROUPS'

BUILDING THE CHURCH – BY COMMITTEE ?...

Church growth – by committee? Surely not! What a ridiculous notion... And yet, is it?... If a committee is defined as a small group of people, passionate about delivering an agreed outcome together, then there may be something to be said for this idea. However, the Vicar of Dibley, for example, shows us how problematic some committees can be...

One thing in defence of committees, is that is not just fired up individuals who deliver the most positive changes to our world. Often it is small teams working together who make the biggest difference to our world. This is true for Jesus & the disciples. From the word go, Jesus involved 12 others in his mission. & Jesus involves us also in God's mission. Jesus even said to his disciples (& to us too): "You will do even greater things than this"...

Around half-way through his mission, Jesus carried out a 'review'... He got the disciples together for a discussion, like any good committee. And it is from this small group that a core affirmation of the Christian faith emerges. The central Christian confession of faith. The confession that 'Jesus is LORD', is based on these words of Peter, combined with other gospel verses. And it becomes finally condensed into this three-word confession in the letters of Paul.

Jesus invites the disciples to get into a huddle & to use their collective brain-power to answer two simple questions. Firstly: "Who do other people say that I am?". Secondly: "Who do **you** say that I am?"... Peter's answer is a dramatic, break-through moment: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God". The first time someone has spoken out these words, although many of his disciples had perhaps begun wondering this. The truth of Jesus' true identity is now 'out there'. From now on, Jesus tells his disciples not to tell others he is the Messiah. And he starts to tell them about how he will meet his death.

So, the power of a 'pow-wow'. Call it a committee, a small group or even in political speak: a 'focus-group' meeting. **But** Jesus' response to Simon Peter's confession shows us that small groups are NOT enough on their own... What is

needed is a group **combined with** God's input. Jesus credits both his Heavenly Father & Holy Spirit for inspiring this momentous insight on the lips of Peter.

What this crucial story in the gospels shows us is this. Three things of course!

1) **We need the bedrock of Jesus** - to build anything on. When Jesus uses the words "on this rock", it is different from the word he uses for Peter. It's like comparing a large pebble you might find on a beach with a huge mountain... This kind of 'bedrock' is the underlying truth proclaimed by Peter & all the church. That 'Jesus is LORD'. That Jesus is 'the Way, the Truth & the Life'.

2) **We need 'little rocks'** like Peter, to be built together on the 'rock of ages'. Peter was the first to make this confession. But he needs to combine with others to build a spiritual dwelling place for God on earth... What better way to do this, than in a small, faith-growing mission team ?

3) **We need God's revelation**. This is God's work and **absolutely nothing** can be achieved without God's Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. It is God's Holy Spirit who brings people to faith & who grows our faith. All of this in a world that tries to stamp out believing in God. We need to support each other (eh?).

I believe Carey right now needs small groups. It's good that we already have the Ladies Group, the recently launched Zoom coffee mornings & our Hymn Café; our two prayer meetings, one online & one face-to-face. These are, I believe, all pointing the way for us. (Along with last year's Alpha - & this year's The Bible Course).

12 disciples were chosen, to journey together & to learn from each other, in the company of Jesus. It was in this group that Jesus' true identity was revealed. When small groups are designed to glorify God & to share God's love within & beyond the group, that's where God is often most obviously at work. And the size of these small groups doesn't have to be an issue. As Jesus said, "Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them".

(STORY to finish?)...