

JOHN 1.40-41: LET'S BRING OTHERS TO JESUS

[Chelmsford 30 January 2011]

Let me begin with a story: 'Once upon a time a group existed who called themselves fishermen. There were many fish in the waters all around. Week after week, month after month, and year after year, the fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing. They loved slogans such as 'Fishing is the task of every fisherman', and 'Every fisherman is a fisher'. There was one thing, however, they didn't do. They didn't fish' Have you got the point? Jesus said: '**Follow me and I will make you fish for people**' (Mark 1.17 NRSV).

In our church's mission statement we have said: '*We exist to go Christ's way and make disciples*'. But the truth is that we are not very good at making disciples. When I say we, I am not just talking about our church – but about many other churches too.

Let me share with you some statistics:

- It has been estimated that in spite of the combined efforts of all churches & evangelistic & missionary agencies put together, it is taking 1000 Christians an average of 365 days to win one person to Christ.
- It has also been said that if each Christian led one person to Christ each year, the whole world would be converted in 6 years!

Earlier this month I was sent a copy of a document entitled *21st Century Evangelicals: A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK*.

It is a fascinating survey: for instance, 58% of Evangelicals meet once a week in small groups – a further 19% meet once a fortnight.

As for evangelism, over 90% of evangelicals agree that all Christians should be actively involved in evangelism – with 70% believing this very strongly. But when it comes to actually talking about their faith to someone who wouldn't call themselves a Christian, not all put their belief into action.

- 29% said they share their faith at least once a week
- 10% at least once a fortnight
- 20% at least once a month
- 32% a few times a year
- 10% never – or hardly ever!

Against this backcloth let us now hear God's Word:

John 1.35-42: 6.5-11; 12.20-26.

Did you spot the common thread binding these three stories together?

- First they all involve Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter.
- Second, in each of these three stories Andrew is bringing somebody to Jesus

This morning I want to preach a very simple sermon on bringing others to Jesus Hopefully, it might help some to actually start fishing!

1. ANDREW BROUGHT HIS BROTHER TO JESUS

1.41,42: "At once he (i.e. Andrew) found his brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah'... Then he took Simon to Jesus"

Once Andrew had met Jesus - & discovered him to be the Messiah, i.e. the one in whom all God's promises were being fulfilled - *he couldn't keep the good news to himself*. He was so full of it, that he had to share it - and in the first place he shared it with his brother.

Good news is for sharing

I shall never forget my embarrassment when I passed the 11+. My mother told everybody on a London bus.

I have yet to meet a man or woman who has just become a grandparent who has kept that piece of news to themselves. People just can't help themselves – they are so excited that they will tell all and sundry.

Good news is for sharing.

- In the words of Alistair McGrath, an Anglican theologian: "*The fundamental motivation for evangelism is that of generosity - the basic human concern to share the good things of life with those whom we love. It does not reflect a desire to sell or dominate; it arises from love and compassion on the part of those who have found something wonderful and want others to share in their joy*"
- DT Niles, a great Christian leader from Sri Lanka, put it even more simply. Evangelism "*is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread*".

The fact is that *Jesus is Good News*.

The first passage we had read to us begins with John the Baptist pointing to Jesus and telling Andrew and his friend: "**There is the Lamb of God!**" (1.35) .

Jesus is "**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (1.29).

As a result of his death of the Cross Jesus has dealt with your sin & with my sin.

In him there is forgiveness - even for the direst of deeds.

In him there is freedom from that vicious spiral of sin & death, which holds us all in its iron grip.

This is good news, is it not?

And it is good news for sharing. Just as Andrew shared the good news with his brother, so let's share the good news of Jesus

- with our brothers & sisters
- with our children & our grandchildren
- with all those for whom we care and with all those whom we love.

2. ANDREW BROUGHT A YOUNG BOY TO JESUS

When 5000 people came to listen to Jesus, it was Andrew who prepared the way for the feeding of the crowd.

He it was, who said to Jesus: "**There is a boy here who has 5 loaves of barley bread and 2 fish**" (John 6.8,9).

Am I reading too much into the story to say that Andrew here saw potential in a young person, and so brought him to Jesus?
Perhaps I am. Certainly this passage is not about youth evangelism.
Yet we can perhaps use this story as a springboard to think for a moment about the importance of bringing young people to Jesus.

The story is told of an evangelist who said to a friend that two & a half people had become Christians at one of his services. "What do you mean 'two and a half?'"
"Well two were teenagers with a life-time ahead of them, & the other was a person in their 50s with only half a life-time left".
For those of us over-50 this may sound rather cruel, and yet there is a point.

What's more, it is *often in teenage years that we are most receptive to the Gospel*. Why is this so? In part it is because young people have yet to get into a rut in terms of their thinking - they are prepared to examine every new idea on its merit.
A survey of 4000 people on conversion experience showed that 17% were converted under the age of 12, 59% between the ages of 12 & 19, & the remaining 24% at 20 and over.

Teenagers are a receptive group for the Gospel - and therefore they should always remain a key target group for the church.
As a church we have all sorts of activities for young people – one of the great encouragements is that we are getting large numbers on a Tuesday night to Ozone. This term we have been averaging 45 and there are currently 59 on the register.
What's more, a good proportion are non-church young people.
I know from Martin that his concern is not just to entertain these young people, but also to share Jesus with them

Some people have complained that as a church we neglect seniors.
This is not true. We do much for older people – and we long to see older people coming to Christ too.

But we do need to win young people for Jesus. If we don't bring young people to Jesus, then this church will not have a future.

3. ANDREW BROUGHT SOME 'SEEKERS' TO JESUS

John tells us that some Greeks came to Philip, wanting to see Jesus.
What does Philip do? He tells Andrew about it - "**and the two of them went and told Jesus**" (John 12.22). Philip was clearly uncertain what to do - but not Andrew. He immediately set about bringing them to Jesus.

Who were these Greeks? Almost certainly we can describe them as "*seekers after truth, seekers after God*".
Dissatisfied with pagan superstitions, they were searching for reality. They couldn't take seriously all those legends about gods & goddesses romping around Olympus. And yet they couldn't discount the idea of God himself.

They knew there had to be something more to life than eating/drinking/making merry. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, many of them came to Jerusalem at the time of one of the great Jewish feasts – they couldn't actually take part in the temple worship, but they could observe it. They were attracted by Judaism's lofty monotheism and its simple moral code.

John tells us that some of them, while they were in Jerusalem, heard of Jesus. So they came to Philip and said: "**Sir, we want to see Jesus**".

I believe that there are many people outside the church longing for reality, longing for God. Church attendance may have gone down, but God-hunger is as strong as ever. People are looking for reality – they are looking for meaning, purpose and direction in life. Many of them too are looking for community.

We need to be out there - mixing with such seekers after truth - pointing them to Jesus, who is "**the way, the truth and the life**".

But **HOW are we to bring others to Jesus?** If the truth be told, most - if not all of us - long to bring people to Jesus, but on the whole we just don't know how.

1. We need to make contact.

The greatest problem many Christians have is that they have no friends outside the church. The older we grow in the Christian faith the more likely we are to lose meaningful contact with non-Christian people.

True, every day we bump into non-Christians - at work or at the school gate - but we bump into them like a billiard ball smacks into another - and then smartly moves off in another direction.

To all intents and purposes many of us live in Christian ghettos.

We need to break down the walls of those ghettos:

Or to put the same thought another way:

2. We make contact by building bridges of friendship

People will not become Christians in this church because of services we put on, because of posters we put up, because of advertising space we buy in the local paper.

People will become Christians because of personal contacts - because of personal friendship.

Let me give you another statistic: "80% of church members join due to existing contacts with church members". John Finney, who was the Anglican bishop of Pontefract, made this comment on this statistic: "*Friends seem to be effective when they are examples of two things - faith and normality*" ([Finding Faith Today](#) 44). He went on "*If 'friendship evangelism' is one of the most natural and effective means of evangelism, are too many churches so over-busy with their own internal life that their members do not even have time to look after their own families let alone love their neighbours? Friendship needs time*" (47).

3. *We build bridges of friendship by exploiting our network of relationships*

Apart from church, most of us link into at least three distinct areas of relationships: family, work or school, and leisure.

Just think of all those you know who fall into these categories:

- **The Family:** father/mother; husband/wife; children; brother/sister. We scarcely need to make friends with our family members. But here are people who need to become the focus of our prayers - especially the prayer that we might find an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with them
- **Work:** The boss; the manager; the secretary; the colleague/partner. **School:** School friends; evening class students; teachers/students
- **Leisure:** Football/cricket team; golf partner; sailing club/tennis club

Here are people to befriend - people to bring to Jesus!

It is only as we cultivate friendships, that we shall be able to follow Andrew's example, and bring people to Jesus.

In our vision statement, we say: “*We want to be a strong and vibrant town-centre church where every member is passionate for others*”. Let me encourage you to turn this vision into reality by playing your part – and bringing others to Jesus.

Andrew said to Peter: “**We have found the Messiah**”. We too need to tell our family and friends of Jesus – of the difference that he has made to our lives.

Like Philip, we need to challenge friends and family to ‘**come and see**’ (John 1.46).

- Come along and have a meal with some of my friends in my life-group – come along and see that Christians are not a peculiar bunch.
- Come along with me and try out our Alpha course, and see that Christian believing is not unreasonable.
- Come along with me to one of our special services – come along, for instance, to next week’s baptismal service; or, in April perhaps you will say, come along to one of our Easter services.

None of these things are hard, are they? None of these invitations need be threatening!

Let’s seek to be like Andrew and bring others to Jesus!