

**TRANSFORMING LIVES
THE DIOCESE OF WAKEFIELD
28 NOVEMBER 2007**

There is a bumper-sticker which says: "Carpenter of Nazareth is looking for joiners." That is complete nonsense and I will try to explain why.

Why are we all here?

- We are getting ready for the *Transforming Lives* journey which begins soon with Lent 2008 and helps us accelerate towards take-off at Pentecost 2009.
- We are working together to build a vision
 - of the God who makes a difference;
 - of a faith which makes a difference;
 - of a world which can be different, that is, transformed;
 - for making connections between God and the world, faith and life; and
 - for giving confidence to one another as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We are here to appreciate the rôle each of us has in the process.
- We are here to look at exactly what we're expected to do on Sunday 27 January 2008.

Let's look at the text which is part of the Gospel to be read at all church services that day. The part we are all going to speak about is Matthew 4. 18-22:

- 18 *As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,
Jesus saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother,
casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen.*
- 19 *And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'*
- 20 *Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*
- 21 *As he went from there, he saw two other brothers,
James son of Zebedee and his brother John,
in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets,
and he called them.*
- 22 *Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.*

In the Old Testament God calls lots of people: eg. Abram, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.

In the New Testament Jesus calls people to be his disciples and he keeps calling today.

Simon and Andrew, James and John were certainly not among the landless poor of their day – Zebedee, father of James and John, had hired servants. To these fisherman we are told that Jesus gave a curt military order – an order which the four in this story apparently could not refuse: "Come after me!"

If you were to look on to Matthew 9. 9-13 you would read about the call of Matthew (or Levi). This man is altogether unsavoury; he's betrayed his own people. Jesus not only calls this 'small man' to follow him, he goes to dinner with him and his very unsuitable friends, "people of the land", whom common belief put down as cursed by God because

they did not follow his Law. Some were Matthew's colleagues in the tax-farming trade. In John's Gospel the followers of Jesus are described as a "rabble, which cares nothing for the law, a curse is on them" (John 7. 49). By taking a meal with them, the Lord not only shows courtesy, he demonstrates intimacy with them.

Jesus called a mixed bunch of people - middle-class fishermen, traitor scum, political radicals – and a whole range of others followed him irrespective of class, wealth, poverty, native intelligence or education. He called them by name because he had work for them to do, each and all. He calls today because he has something for you and for each of your hearers to do. That's what we mean when we say that Jesus calls us by name: Mary, John, Robert, Pauline.

And Jesus calls them to be disciples, learners, active followers. They were not becoming disciples of just another rabbi because, although Jesus will teach them over the next three years, the heart of his calling was to invite them to share an apostolic task, proclaiming the Kingdom of God. "Here comes the Kingdom and it's nearby wherever you go!" (For 'homework', it may be good to read Matthew 10.)

One of the reasons we are focusing on discipleship is that being a disciple of Jesus matters today. Being a disciple means we must never turn all our gaze inwards on the Church because being a disciple is about living as a friend of Jesus in the world. If only we were more conscious, from archbishop to the newly-baptized, that we are *all equally* disciples we would begin to think more clearly about the Church. Disciples belong to a community of people who live, not for the sake of their community but for the sake of God's good news which the community embodies. The Church is here for God (worship) and for people (the world God loves). In the society of today the Church is one of the few bodies that can build communities. But, sadly, many churches remind us of worn-out public institutions – ecclesiocracies - sucking people out of involvement with their neighbours (removing the salt and extinguishing the light) and dragging them into endless activities which keep the institution propped up and keep disciples away from the world God loves.

The whole purpose of *Transforming Lives* is to make connections between a real and living faith in God and the world God loves. Disciples make connections to transform lives. We'd be delighted to see more people in the pews but this is not about getting more people to join the Church in order to keep the Church going. *The Carpenter of Nazareth is not looking for joiners: Jesus of Nazareth is calling disciples.*

Now Method. How are we going to handle this passage from the Gospel?

Two main elements jump out at us:

- Calling by name
- Becoming disciples for a purpose

Richard will explain how we might tackle that in an all-age context?

- Short addresses are more difficult than long ones. So prepare well and pray. No short-cuts!
- Beginning and endings are the most difficult parts of any address. Know exactly how you will start and how you will finish.

- Pray quietly before you speak. Something like this: “Lord, I don’t deserve to be doing this. Speak your word as much to me as to everyone else today. Amen.”
- At the beginning, do not apologise for being there: “I’ve never done this before so I want to apologise before I start ...”
- Do not explain why you are there: “When the PCC had a discussion about this it was suggested that I should do this because I used to be a Sunday School teacher ...” Leave explanations to the vicar.
- Do not try to break the ice with a silly joke, particularly one that you can’t tell in less than 20 words. Unless you have natural timing, it won’t work.
- Get straight in to the Gospel: “Tell them the tale”.
- We’re suggesting two points to take from the Gospel for you to explain:
 - Jesus is calling you by name to let him transform your life and
 - You are being called for a purpose to share with others in transforming lives.
- Illustrate only when necessary (you don’t have much time). If you do illustrate, jump straight in with it (“A woman sitting next to me in the bus on Friday said ...”) and do not introduce it (“I can illustrate this by telling you the story of what happened to me on the bus last Friday ...”).
- Explain in simple terms the big strategy Lent 2008 to Pentecost 2009.
- Explain the next steps from Lent to Easter 2008 and make it exciting and attractive.
- At the end, do not keep circling like a plane “stacking” at an airport. Know where and how you are going to land and then do it.
- Make sure there is literature available and that your news sheet and/or magazine backs this up.

GROUP WORK

1. Imagine the congregation and the service at which you will be making your presentation. Describe it briefly to others in your group. (What is the building like? Is it welcoming to outsiders or just to regulars? Are there some ‘We’ve-seen-this-before-and-it-won’t-work’ people? What about those who were greatly helped by *Everyday God* in 2006? Etc.)
2. In groups of 2 or 3, buzz about how you would fill the structure overleaf?
3. Do you understand the basics of *Transforming Lives*? If not, now is the time to ask.

Robert Paterson
 is Chaplain & Researcher to the Archbishop of York and
 Vice Chair of Theological Education for the Anglican Communion.
 He was ordained in 1972 and was Principal Officer of the
 Church in Wales Council for Mission & Ministry from 2000 to 2006.

Introduce the key idea



Understand the Gospel



Find meaning for today in the Gospel

Briefly explain Transforming Lives

Conclude: What should I do now?

SOME IDEAS FROM OTHER PEOPLE

Thoughts to get the little grey cells working, not quotes for the address.

... Christians in the West have largely neglected what it means to be a *disciple of Christ*. The vast majority of western Christians are church-members, pew-fillers, hymn-singers, sermon-tasters, Bible-readers, even born-again-believers or Spirit-filled-charismatics - but not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually to become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed, and the resultant impact on society would be staggering.

David Watson: Discipleship, (1981)

... many within the Christian church want the comfortable compromise of conditional discipleship. In the long run, it is we who want to call the tune.

David Watson: Discipleship, (1981)

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.

John Milton (1608-1674): Areopagitica

Dallas Willard calls the issue of poor or non-existent discipleship the elephant in the Western Church. It's there in the middle of all we do. We walk around it, make allowances for it and try to live with it. But we rarely name it as the biggest obstacle in our missional task, and are even less likely to intentionally try [sic] to shift it.

The plain fact is that the Church in England and Wales is lacking in discipleship. We have much to learn from Christians in other parts of the world.

James Catford, Chief Executive of the Bible Society, in interview with Stephen R Holmes, in The Bible in Transmission, Summer 2002

If Christianity isn't the quest for (or defense of) the perfect belief system ("the church of the last detail"), then what's left? In the emerging culture, I believe it will be "Christianity as a way of life", or "Christianity as a path of spiritual formation".

The switch suggests a change in the questions people are asking. Instead of "How can I be right in my belief so I can go to heaven?" the new question seems to be "How can we live life to the full so God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven?" Instead of "If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would spend eternity with God in heaven?" the new question seems to be "If you live for another thirty years, what kind of person will you become?"

I'm not certain any postmodern churches exist quite yet. But even in modern churches we can feel a rising tension, a fomenting discontent: Why aren't we making better disciples? Why aren't people becoming more holy, joyful, peaceful, content and Christ-like? Why ... are so few of our good Christian people good Christians? Why is Prozac needed by so many? Why are the most biblically-knowledgeable so often so mean-spirited? Why are our pastors dejected so often? Why do our speakers (both human and electronic) have to blare so loudly to get a response, and even then, why is the response so shallow or temporary?

Biblically the real challenge for the church is to make disciples i.e., those who are actively and consciously following the way of Jesus), not to make converts (those who take a tentative first step toward Jesus).

Richard V Peace: Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge, in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, January 2004 (vol 28, no 1)