

GROWING IN CHRIST?

To be strategic, we need to have a vision of what we are being strategic about!

As I pondered this week's blog topic, I stumbled on the idea of a three-part mini-series on our mission statement – *Growing in Christ, Together with community, Sharing God's love*. It's said that if you ask three Jewish rabbis a question you will get four opinions – and maybe that might be true if we asked around what those three statements actually mean!

So here is an attempt to explain what I mean when I use them (e.g. on my e-mail signature and on the newly designed logo for Sanderstead Parish).

What does it mean to grow in Christ?

In 2015 Ian Paul wrote about discipleship on his *Psephizo* blog (<https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-discipleship-anglican/>). Angela Tilby had recently written in the Church Times against the use of the word discipleship, saying it was not an Anglican concept and was imported from American evangelicalism.

A search of BibleGateway website for the word "disciple" reveals that it appears 294 times in the New Testament, across all four Gospels plus 26 times in Acts. The concept of being disciples of Christ in the early church and now is obviously a key one.

The Greek word translated as "disciple" in the New Testament is ***mathētēs*** (μαθητής), which literally means a learner, pupil, or student. Unlike a modern classroom student, an ancient *mathētēs* attached themselves closely to a master teacher to **imitate their entire way of life**, thought, and habits.

Quoting Higton and Alexander who wrote a report on Leadership in the church, Ian Paul reflects their own thinking about Mark 1:18 where Peter and Andrew are invited to become "fishers of men":

*"Simon and Andrew respond by leaving what they are, and beginning their journey towards this mysterious fulfilment – towards what they will be. They become, in that moment, disciples. They become learners... **They are captivated by the possibility of transformation.**"*

Are we “captivated by the possibility of transformation”? Of ourselves first but also of others?

This is one of the many things I love about Jesus – he meets us where we are but loves us too much to leave us there!

Addressing whether this is Anglican, Ian Paul goes on *“What word do we claim to be authentically Anglican that sums up our calling to be a church being led and leading others in radical conversion of life, taking up your cross, faith, prayer and holiness, self-denial and the service of others, following Jesus, loving enemies, peace-making, justice, attentiveness to scripture, obedience to the divine will and being formed in the likeness of Christ?”*

The word is, of course, disciple and the process of growing as a disciple is discipleship!

(By the way, an interesting homework exercise would be to find all the verses in the scriptures that are alluded to in that list....).

This is a biblical model of being church.

Ian Paul goes on to describe three aspects of discipleship.

- **It involves change** – from our wholly human nature towards the perfection that is Jesus Christ himself, the perfect human being and the perfected life; change means growing in Christ.
- **It is a journey** – a commitment to learning which is lifelong, there is always more of God and what we can learn and how we can grow; new knowledge and understanding, new gifts.
- **It takes place in community** – the rabbi or teacher would have a group of disciples, or apprentices, seeking to become like him; we grow in Christ together in the *ekklesia*, the gathering of believers, often translated as “church”.

Growing in Christ, becoming disciples who learn and grow and become more like the master, are ones that overflow into the world around them.

A final quote from Justin Welby, former Archbishop, that making disciples is not a response to falling attendances but rather, *“Witness and evangelism are expressions of the overflow of the love and joy of the grace of God into our lives, and the life of His whole Church and His whole world”*.

Hopefully, we can see that the three parts of our mission complement one another. To grow in Christ is to grow fuller of his grace and knowledge of his love – and the more you pour into a vessel the more we overflow that same grace and love.

And that attracts others who do not yet know him!

What does this look like?

- **Bible study and other studies together** – e.g. in Home Groups – if you are not in one, ask about how to join.
- **Regular prayer** – in Home Group or maybe form a triplet to commit to praying together.
- **Reading Christian books** about growing in faith and discipleship.
- **Listening to teaching** – in church with the sermon, maybe supplemented by the thousands of talks and podcasts on the internet.
- **Engaging teaching with your questions** – don't let the preacher go without raising the questions that what they said might have raised (or contact me for a coffee and chat – I love to talk about this stuff – and it helps me grow too!)
- **Witness course** – which will run in September, it's a 3-6 session course that helps explore your own faith journey, how to write it down and ultimately how you might share that with others.
- **Asking for gifts from the Lord** – pray to be filled with the Spirit constantly, to be ministered to by him, but also be open to new gifts that he might bestow (eg prophecy or healing).
- **Alpha** – come on an Alpha course starting in September, either as a helper or as a guest; it's an opportunity to explore the Christian faith, hear testimony etc – I always get something new from the Alpha course even 20 years on and having been involved with over 20 courses.

There is no time limit to growth in Christ. Learning to be an apprentice of Christ, seeking to be like him, is a life long journey. All can engage and grow.

If it's stalled of late, today is a new day to get started again!

Jesus was at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha was busy with preparations. Essential work. Her sister Mary was sitting at the feet of the master, listening attentively to his teaching. Jesus does not rebuke Martha, but gently suggests the following:

“Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Mary took time out to grow in Christ.

Go, and do likewise. There is always more of God.

Amen

Your brother in Christ

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