

Sermon, St Mary the Virgin Stoke D'Abernon, 10a.m. 5/3/17 (Lent 1)

Matthew 28:¹⁶⁻²⁰

Jesus's last words (surely important) were 'go and make disciples'.

What is a disciple? The best definition I ever heard was "someone who has followed Jesus to the point of reflecting him".

Explain about a rabbi surrounded by disciples who shared his every moment 24/7.

'Amazed' Define disciple.

It's a thrilling and exciting process. The Bible talks about us 'being transformed from one degree of glory to another', and it is about becoming more like Jesus and closer to Jesus. How did the church ever gain a reputation for its worship being 'boring' or 'irrelevant'?

How have you grown and changed in your faith over the last two years?

A church where people are maturing in this way will be Jesus focused, Jesus centred, and will reflect Jesus character, priorities and values.

“Go and make disciples of all nations”. But in reaching them so often we act as if what Jesus really said was 'go and make worship *attenders* of all nations'. You see, Christianity as originally conceived was never an attendance event.

Making worship attenders in itself tends not to make disciples. If you make disciples, you *always* end up with worshippers. I don't want to set worship and discipleship against each other. *The holistic approach of the Bible*. But I've witnessed too often the *true* statement that worship is what we are all about, heard as if attending services is what it is all about. Jesus said 'make disciples'. In other words, wherever you are, *be* church, don't just *go* to church.

Discipleship is not a religious activity, it is a whole life activity. (*examples*) It therefore can't be learned on Sundays alone. We need ways of working out for our own circumstances the things we learn on Sundays. That means trusting Christian relationships, friendships, mentoring relationships, or small groups. It also means spiritual disciplines (*give examples*). All of it centred on Jesus Christ first, neighbour second and church after that.

Otherwise the danger is that church begins to exist for itself and becomes self-serving.

Description of a fish conservation group, that has volunteer leadership & help, & so limited skills & time, and what time it does have has to be spent on 'activities to get the membership involved'. What little time is left has to be spent on fundraising. 'To put it another way you can end up spending all your energy on free fly tying demonstrations and casting clinics while the rivers are being dammed. I've seen it happen.' (Sex, Death & Flyfishing, by John Gierach p 224.) My fishing club that has got into the habit of appealing to members to come to its monthly meetings to boost the numbers. Why? This is exactly what happens to churches when they become an end in themselves, focused on keeping the institution going, rather than on Jesus who loves us, and the outsider, passionately.

When, because we are disciples, we are worshipping God with our whole lives, 24/7, in the way we do our job, and how we treat our family, our neighbours, our friends, and our enemies, in every community we are part of, not just the local community, our Sunday worship is transformed. It becomes a focusing together of the glorious worship of our whole lives. You very rarely hear anyone say that worship like that is boring or irrelevant.

How have you changed, grown, in your discipleship in, say, the last two years? What are you willing to do to experience the joy and privilege of 'going on being transformed from one degree of glory to another'?

Matthew 28:

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."