

# Growing maturing disciples who ...

[Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]

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Eph 4:1-16

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## ***Introduction***

This is my launch of the year vision sermon. Unlike Barack Obama I have to give it three times and I don't have a tele-prompter to help me!

If I asked you in what way you related to and understood Jesus, there would be any number of answers. The question is not "how well" – which implies a qualitative value judgement – but in what way, in what manner?

In what way do you relate to Jesus?

There are, it has been suggested, four ways in which followers of Jesus relate to him, depending on what function we see Jesus having in our lives.

We can see Jesus as Saviour, Teacher, Lord, or Friend.

So I ask you to reflect for a moment on which of these roles have you experienced the most and do you understand the best?

And secondly in which of these would you like to see yourself growing in the year ahead?

- Jesus as my **Saviour**: he forgives my sins and sets me free.
- Jesus as my **Teacher**: he teaches me wisdom and guides me in the truth.
- Jesus as my **Lord**: he lives at the centre of my life.
- Jesus as my **Friend**: he understands and comforts me.

Would like to turn to the person next to you and just say which of these ways you have experienced the most, and which of these you would like to grow in.

Over the past few months I have spent time with the Staff Team and the Pastorate thinking and praying a lot about where is God taking us as Christ Church. One of the things that has happened is that John McPetrie (our operations manager and my right hand when it comes to finance and fabric and general administration of CC), Jeremy Jobling recently joined us as Assistant Minister, and I have started meeting weekly with the Wardens (Paul Bradnum, René August and Marc Gammon – elected to the ministry of lay oversight and leadership responsibility) for this season. We meet to study the Scriptures and pray together. These have become the high light of my week. They are times when I come before God with the leadership of the church to pray and seek God together.

Out of this I had a growing conviction that the vision God has for us as we start this year is that we are to be “growing maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples”.

That is our vision:

***Growing maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples.***

Let me say three things about this vision.

### ***First it is dynamic.***

As a church we want to see people growing as followers of Jesus. There is movement. None of us has arrived. We are all on the journey.

As many of you know my favourite text in the bible is Phil 3:12ff

*“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

*(Philippians 3:12-14)*

I am on a journey. I am pressing on. Miles have been covered and goals reached, but there is more. There is more to take hold off - more to press into. We are moving from here to there. There is a dynamic to this vision.

### ***Second the vision is about Community***

On the journey – in the move as we press on to take hold of the prize we need support and encouragement and challenge and help from one another. We need each other to help us on the journey. We can't do this alone.

That is why we meet together here in church on Sundays in **Celebration Mode** to worship and express our corporate love for God and be reminded of his love and purposes for us.

We meet in **Connect Groups** during the week to link in and connect with one another and God in a setting where we can experience being in community with others on the journey – with others pressing on to take hold of that for which God in Christ took hold of us.

And we meet in **Small or Cell Groups** (4 – 8 people usually) where the size and stability of the group lends itself to a greater degree of intimacy and accountability. There we can urge each other on to take hold of the prize.

There are other ways in which we urge and encourage each other to grow in maturity as followers of Jesus – there is Spiritual Direction and Mentoring, there are courses and conferences, weekends away and retreats.

As a church our vision is that we are a community of people on a journey and we want to be those who are not only growing and maturing ourselves but we want to be sowing into the lives of others. That is in fact how we grow best – when we are investing intentionally and prayerfully in the lives of others on the journey.

So there is a **third question** we should consider and that is who am I going to invest time and effort in to see them grow and mature as a follower of Jesus?

So the vision is dynamic – it is about movement and growth. The vision is about community – it is about us growing and encouraging and investing in each other to see others grow.

### ***Third it is about maturing***

***We seek to be a church that is growing maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples.***

From our reading today – verse 11 of Ephesians 4 ...

*"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God **and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Our goal and our aim is to grow more and more like Jesus. That is obviously not something we get by going on a course, or having a mentoring, or going

on a weekend at Volmoed, or coming to worship on Sunday, of helping in Children's Church or in Feeding the Hungry... it involves all of that and more. It is a commitment to a life style. A life that seeks in all ways to follow Jesus.

Mature – also has the sense of completeness, being well grounded and well rounded. The dictionary definition is = *fully or highly developed, perfected, worked out.*

This vision about growing maturing disciples recognises that there is a process - and the aim - the goal - the target we keep in our sights - the beacon we use to keep us on track, is coming to the fullness of Christ. It is about being developed, perfected, rounded, worked out.

It is not about him just being our Friend. It is about him being our Saviour and our Teacher. It is about Jesus being Lord at the centre of our lives. It is as the life of Christ being worked fully into us.

As Paul puts it in his letter to the Philippians

*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,** <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.*

I have been enormously helped and excited by material Andrew Vaughan introduced me to called Renovaré – the Latin word for “renew”.

They recognise that in the Gospel we see Jesus living a full and complete life with God. When we read the Gospels we see Jesus operating in six distinct areas.

- We see Jesus praying, and we listen to his teaching on the life of intimacy with God.
- We see Jesus battling with Satan in the wilderness, and listen to his teaching on the importance of a pure heart.
- We see Jesus ministering in great power, and we listen to his teaching on comfort, wisdom and strength that comes from the Holy Spirit.

- We see Jesus helping the sick and the needy, and we listen to his teaching on the importance of caring for our neighbours.
- We see Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and we listen to him reading from the Scriptures.
- We see Jesus integrating the sacred and secular while observing the ceremonies of his faith.

So from the life of Jesus there emerge six distinct areas of life:

- Devotion to God – prayer and intimacy with the Father.
- Virtue and purity in thought word and action.
- Empowerment by the Holy Spirit.
- Compassion towards people in need.
- Proclamation of the good news of the gospel.
- Harmony between faith and work.

If we are aiming to grow as maturing followers of Jesus (I use the term “follower of Jesus” for “disciple of Jesus” because a disciple is some one seeks to be like his teacher his rabbi) we need to grow in each of these areas.

- Praying and growing in intimacy with God.
- Striving against sin and growing in purity of thought and action.
- Ministering and healing in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Showing compassion and doing acts of mercy as we respond to those in need.
- Proclaiming boldly the good news of the gospel and reading and studying Scripture.
- Learning how to integrate and unite the physical and spiritual.

In the course of the history of the Church there have *movements of the Spirit* when God has taken a group of individuals into a particular area of mission. Where they have pushed into one of these aspects of the life of Jesus and high lighted this aspect of being a follower of Jesus and doing what he did.

- So in the 4<sup>th</sup> century for example men and women fled the city life and founded cloisters and monasteries where they emphasised the importance of solitude, meditation and prayer. Antony of Egypt was an early leader of the these “Desert Fathers and Mothers”. There are those who down the ages have continued to remind the church of the importance of the inner life of prayer and meditation and continued what is termed the contemplative movement in the church.

Here at Christ Church we value that and have a place for quiet days and retreats and Lenten and Advent mediations. We have space and time set aside for prayer meetings and make resources available to help us grow in this dimension of the life as we seek to be followers of Jesus.

- In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century John Wesley and his friends formed a group nick named the “Holy Club” and began focussing on moral laxity and the need for Christians to over come sinful habits. They developed a “method” and the church once again took sin seriously. The purifying effects of the Methodist were dramatic and it grew into a holiness movement.

We take this dimension of being followers of Jesus seriously. We want to deal with sin in our lives and encourage and support one another in gaining mastery over sin through the support we get in cell groups and in mentoring and accountability relationships.

- In the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century the Church witnessed a new outbreak of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women who were called “Quakers” because they shook with the power of the Spirit. The active presence of the Spirit in the lives of these believers led to many conversions and healings. The active role of the Spirit was at the centre of their worship and it propelled them into evangelism and mission and social concern. It was the birth of the charismatic movement.

We cherish that tradition here at Christ Church. Along with other church this parish was deeply effected by the charismatic movement of the 70s and 80s and the Toronto Blessing of the 90s and we seek and welcome the empowering and equipping of the Holy Spirit to take us into vibrant worship and propel us outward in mission and service.

- In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Francis of Assisi and a groups of his followers abandoned their former lives of luxury and indulgence and went about the Italian countryside caring for the sick, the lame and the poor. Countless people followed their example and an order called the Franciscans was born and continues today. This was the birth of a social justice movement.

Again this is something this parish has cherished and aspired over the years. More recently we have seen the birth of the Warehouse seeking to serve the church in its response to poverty and injustice. But this was birthed out of a long tradition and concern for the poor expressed in the faithful ministry of Feeding the Hungry which continues today. Going back in history both the SACLA health clinic and St Luke's Hospice began when people in this church moved by the Spirit were determined to sacrificially follow Jesus in his concern for the poor and needy. It continues today in the various projects under the auspices and oversight of the Warehouse and through the ministry Straat Werk and the Aids Task Team.

- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther and others proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ after discovering its message anew in the Bible. The Reformation movement was a move of the Spirit that took people back to the Bible and lead to it being translated into the common languages used by the people. People heard and understood the message of salvation and missionary movements were birthed and men and women took the message of the good news of Jesus to the far corners of the earth. We see the birth of the Evangelical Movement.

We seek to do that here, not only through the Alpha Course which has effectively brought many to faith in Jesus, but through our personal witness at home and at work and where ever God has placed us. We also lay emphasis on the clear reading and study of the Scriptures both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. We expect every member of Christ Church to have a habit of personal daily devotional reading of scripture and we encourage the study of the Word not

simply to understand but so that we might obey.

- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf allowed remnants of the persecuted Moravian Church to build a village on his estate. They developed a life of bible study and prayer integrated with work, evangelising, helping others and raising families. They experienced a powerful out pouring of the Holy Spirit. This is but one example of what we term an incarnational movement.

For us at Christ Church we often speak about Christ Church Scattered. We lay strong emphasis on integrating our faith in God into our every day lives of work and play, finances and family, rest and recreation. And the focus is not so much on taking God into our work place, but discovering that he is there already and he invites us to partner with him.

The incarnational movement is also termed the sacramental movement. The term sacrament is usually applied to churchy stuff preformed by a ordained minister – Holy Communion and Baptism. But the heart of the sacramental life is discovering God in the physical stuff of life – in bread and wine, in water and oil, but also in food and doing the washing, in computers and buildings, town planning and class rooms, courtrooms and hospitals. It also of course includes the whole dimension of our responsibility to care for the environment and be good stewards of the physical created order that God has entrusted to us.

So as I look at these six dimensions of the life of Jesus and at the ways in which over the years the Church was be reminded of their importance and there has been moments of renewal and revival, I am inspired and encouraged and challenged.

As I look back at the history of Christ Church and the Parish I am deeply grateful for what God has done and is doing amongst us. Again I am inspired encouraged and challenged to be faithful in this year that lies ahead as we seek to grow and grow others as maturing followers of Jesus.

We are privileged to be able to build on what has been done. But we need to push onward we need to press on to take hold of that for which God in Christ took hold of us.

In looking at what courses and activities we run as a church and as I plan the sermons and preaching we do on Sundays I use this scheme as a way of ensuring that we grow and develop in all areas laying appropriate emphasis at different times to different aspects of the life of Jesus.

But as I began with two questions around Jesus being Saviour, Teacher, Lord, or Friend, let me ask you the same two questions around these six aspects of growing as a maturing disciple.

In which do you feel you have the most experience and would consequently be most comfortable?

And in which do you sense you need to grow and press in deeper with respect to what God wants to form and grow in you?

Got it! Good now here is the last question. What are you going to do about that?

I invite you to join us on the journey of 2009 as we as a church seek to grow maturing disciples who are growing maturing disciples. There are all sorts of opportunities and invitations to grow to greater maturity in Christ. There are also all sorts of opportunities for you get involved and help others and be involved in them growing as maturing disciples.

In four weeks time we will collectively and corporately as members of Christ Church place our Dedication Forms and Pledge Cards before the Lord as a symbol of our desire to grow as followers of Jesus.

Over the next few weeks we are going to be exploring aspects of the Incarnational Sacramental life – of integrating sacred and secular, physical and spiritual as we look at the themes of following Jesus in our places of work, in our families and in the way we handle money.

That is the vision. That is what the road ahead looks like. Join us as we journey together and seek to grow as maturing disciples of Jesus who grow maturing disciples of Jesus.

