

Letton Hall - The D Factor - Talk 3 - 'The Journey'

I'm a bit of a music geek...I play a few instruments, dabble in recording and buy a lot of music...according to my iTunes I have 37.5 days of music and most of that I have on CD (and can probably quote you lyrics and trivia from most of it!).

And the reason I buy CDs still is because I like to flick through the artwork...in particular I like to read the 'thank you' section because I always find it fascinating to see who the artists thank and what they say about them...lots of artists (many of whom aren't Christian) seem to thank God...the Christian artists thank God in a bit more detail...often people thank their wives/husbands, families & friends and a lot of the time they often thank other bands too and so I find it really interesting to see which bands I listen to mix with each other!

Like I said...I'm a bit of a music geek!

The reason I share that with you is because we've been thinking about this discipleship journey as being a little bit like the X-Factor and if you watch the X-Factor you'll know that as time goes on the singers end up with a mentor and probably a team of people behind them that you don't see...stylists, make-up artists, people to help them cope with their new-found fame and of course those people that have been with them for a long time like their friends and family.

And this evening we're thinking about journeys. Our discipleship journey...our journey to becoming Christ-like starts with us answering that call from Jesus to 'come, follow Him' and as we start following Jesus we begin to realise what it means and what Jesus requires of us & we call Him 'Lord' but it doesn't stop there...the journey continues.

I want to show you a short clip from the TV series 'Lost'...Who's seen any Lost?

Basically a group of people are on a plane which crashes onto a island and a large group of them survive the crash. They're all different from different backgrounds with different skills and they have to work out how to survive.

Video Clip: Lost - Season 1 Episode 5 - Live Together, Die Alone Speech

As time goes on they do learn (most of the time) to work together and journey together on the island...and eventually realise that they're not there by accident but that they have been bought there for a great cause by 'Jacob'...the island's 'god-type' figure and basically throughout the six seasons they work together and rely on each other in order for good to overcome evil.

That phrase that Jack in the clip says is key

'If we can't live together, we're going to die alone'

Discipleship isn't something we can do on our own. We don't just become a Christian, go on a youth alpha course and then we're done....discipleship is a life-long journey and a life long-journey that we need to do in community.

In the bible we're told numerous times that Jesus spent His time with people and during His 3 years of ministry. Most of the accounts we're told about in the bible involve Jesus interacting with people and being part of their community.

In particular Jesus invested His time in 12 people who were His disciples. The people who Jesus chose as those who could 'become like Him'...the people whose lives were turned upside down by Jesus and would go on to change the world.

And they weren't extra-ordinary people, they were regular guys like you and me and they journeyed with Jesus on this exciting, scary, challenging 3 years of discipleship.

In that time they saw blind men healed, people with diseases made better, dead people come back to life.

They heard Jesus teach things that changed the way they thought and they had the chance to have a go at some of these things.

[PAUSE]

Jesus invites us onto journeys of discipleship which will be challenging, scary and exciting, He will show us things beyond our imaginations and he will give us opportunities to change the world for Him.

A couple of months ago I met with a friend of my parents who I've known since I was about 13, this lady goes to their church which is a fairly average (in the nicest possible way) C of E church.

I met with this lady, Tracey because her and another lady called Jan were starting a community bus project called 'TLC' in Great Yarmouth and they wanted me to build their website.

And as I sat down with Tracey she told me the story of how all this came about and I want to share it with you...

Their journey started by Tracey and Jan feeling that God wanted them to set up a welcoming place in the community for all people...their initial idea was for a Cafe but God closed the door on this idea and in praying about this they felt God saying that their project should be 'movable' and so the idea of a bus came about.

They did some more research and really felt this was what God wanted...so they started looking for buses!

They spotted a bus on eBay in Fleet (Hampshire) which looked ideal...they had no-money and didn't want to bid on eBay so asked God if it was what He wanted to make sure the bus didn't sell...and it didn't but was re-listed.

Again they said the same thing to God and the bus didn't sell so they got in touch with the owners who happened to be a Baptist Church. They explained that they were trusting God and had no money to buy it but felt this was what God wanted them to do.

The church in Fleet agreed to waiting for a bit longer and they set a date by which they'd either have the money to buy it or have to back out and as the agreed date loomed Tracey, Jan and her team prayed and fasted for a day...by the end of that day they had been offered a driver to bring the bus back and free parking for 6 months for when they got it to Norfolk...but no money.

So they phoned the church, asked for more time and offered a deposit. The church accepted and in August they collected the bus...with funding coming through to buy it a few days before the collection date!

[PAUSE]

Now when they went to collect it they were told that it had a fairly small fuel tank and no fuel gauge...the owners said they had never driven it for more than 30 miles on a tank...and so aware of the need to get lots of fuel the team set off.

50 miles onto the journey they got to South Mimms services on the M25 where the bus was boiling like a kettle...loosing water fast. So the team set off to find water.

One person got coffee cups from Starbucks, another a petrol can, someone else suggested buying milk and using the container.

When the team got back to the bus their driver had a huge camping water container which he'd borrow off the driver of a horse box that had pulled up to park next to them and who the bus driver worked with back in Norfolk...150 miles away!

They filled the bus with water, prayed for it and off they went...9 hours later they arrived back in Norfolk without the bus having overheated again, the water leak had been temporarily healed!

Even more miraculous was when they'd calculated the fuel consumption, the bus had completed its journey on £33 of fuel which was less than a car would have cost for the same journey...without God that's not possible!

And God has blessed that project...they've had materials to re-do the bus donated, people have given up their time and more recently a bus re-fitters in Southampton offered to professionally revamp the bus after it was broken into over Christmas whilst the TLC team 'pray in the money'. (They drove past Fleet on the way to Southampton and the bus cost £200 in fuel for that journey!)

It's an incredible story and the reason I share it with you is because that's what God calls us into an exciting journey of discipleship with Him and there's two sides to that discipleship journey.

The first is for us to become more like Christ.

Jesus invites us and His disciples to follow Him because Jesus believes we can be like Him but it doesn't happen straight away. We don't say 'yes' to Jesus and become perfect...it's a journey.

The apostle Paul write (in Philippians 3:12-14)

'I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine.

Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his.

Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached that goal but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above.'

Paul reminds us that we don't have it all sorted nor does God expect us to have it all sorted but that we should press on towards the goal which Jesus calls us too. We should continue aiming to become more like Jesus. We might find that we take 2 steps forward and one back, we might have all sorts of questions but we can still put our faith in Jesus and trust that he will help us become more like Him.

Even the people in the bible who we look up to and who are often used as model followers of God got it wrong!

Moses, the one God chose to lead the Israelites out of Egypt had committed murder and even though it was a while later that God called him Moses still didn't feel up to the task. He suggested that God sent someone else because he wasn't a good public speaker.

King David...the same David who, with God's help killed Goliath was described as man after God's own heart yet made plenty of mistakes....perhaps the most famous being the time when he spotted a lady having a bath on her roof, decided she was 'a bit of alright' and had his servants get her so he could sleep with her...he got her pregnant and then had her husband killed in battle.

These people weren't perfect but God used them in huge ways!

Likewise, as we touched upon on Monday Jesus' disciples weren't the 'ideal' discipleship material for the time but Jesus saw something in them.

We're going to have a quick look at some of the things the disciples got up too in Luke 9.

In Luke 9 lots happens so I'm going to give you some of the basics...if you have a chance to read it yourselves later then do!

In the 1st few verses Jesus sends out His disciples to have a go at the stuff He has been teaching them on their own. Luke says that Jesus gave them power and authority over all demons and the ability to heal sickness. Jesus tells them to tell people about God's kingdom

and encourages them to go between villages taking nothing with them but having faith that they will be provided with somewhere to stay when they get to a new town.

Then the disciples return to Jesus and tell about everything they've done and Jesus takes them off to be alone together but a big crowd follow Jesus...and later on in the afternoon the disciples suggest that Jesus sends these people home to find food & sleep.

Jesus tells the disciples to give them something to eat and they reply 'well, we only have five loaves and two fish'.

And It's almost like even though they've been out healing people and casting out demons they've forgotten what Jesus is capable of and with Jesus' instructions they manage to feed five thousand people with these 5 loaves, two fish and have plenty to spare!

Later on in the chapter we're told a boy who has an evil spirit in him. The boy's Dad says that he begged Jesus' followers to force the spirit out but they couldn't and (before healing the boy) Jesus tells the people that they have no faith.

Much like us the disciples get it wrong...one moment we feel like we're doing with God the next it feels like we haven't made any progress at all but Jesus sticks with us.

Peter, the disciple was Jesus' right hand man. Jesus called Peter when he was fishing (as we read on Monday) and he is the disciple we know the most about. Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter which means 'The Rock'...a significant name to have been given (with no reference to the wrestler!)

We know that it was Peter who walked on water, Peter who, upon being asked by Jesus who he thinks Jesus is replies 'The messiah'.

Yet at the same time this is the same Peter who when walking on water loses his faith and begins to sink, the same Peter who shortly after saying Jesus is the messiah objects to Jesus describing his death and resurrection and is rebuked by Jesus

....and the same Peter who says he won't ever deny Jesus yet when accused of knowing Jesus denies Jesus 3 times...just as Jesus said he would.

I often think it's easy to look at the disciples and think 'how did they get that wrong?', 'How could Peter start sinking when he was already walking on water?' 'How did they think feeding 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish would be a problem for Jesus?' but actually I find it really encouraging that the disciples make mistakes & get it wrong because it shows us that discipleship is a journey that we go on.

I find it encouraging that there were times when the disciples didn't have faith in what Jesus could do because sometimes we all lack faith,

We make mistakes.

We all things up.

We all have doubts and forget what Jesus can do

And we have to come back to God time after time and say 'God, you know I'm trying but I've done it again.'

But this is where the second part of our discipleship journey comes in because in order for us to become more like Jesus we need to continue our journey of discipleship in community.

Think about the stories that you enjoy. Perhaps in the last few weeks you've seen 'The Hobbit', maybe you enjoy the Lord of the Rings, perhaps the Chronicles of Narnia

...When I was younger I used to really love the Famous Five books.

I showed you a clip of Lost at the beginning because it's one of my favourite TV shows.

There are so many books, TV shows and films but all have 1 thing in common and that is that people journey together. The adventures the characters in LOTR, Narnia, Lost and the Famous Five go on are adventures they go on together.

The phrase that crops up time and time again in Lost is 'Live together, die alone'.

As we enter into a discipleship journey we need to go on that journey with other people. The relationship Jesus has with His disciples is something we need to model our own Christian relationships on.

It's an open honest relationship. A relationship where Jesus can praise & encourage His disciples but also at times tell them that they suck and they need to do things differently.

When I moved to Peterborough when I was 18 I was fairly quiet, not confident at all and I don't think I really understood why Park Road had agreed to taking me on for a year (and actually the minister later admitted to me that they saw something in me but felt they were still 'taking a risk').

And had I been left on my own to do things I don't think much of that would change but because I was part of a community God used those people I was working with to challenge and grow me in the areas he wanted me too.

My first 'sermon' was when I was 17, I planned about 6 pages of material and read 6 pages in less than 7 minutes...which is pretty fast...so fast that actually I don't think anyone had time to take in what God was trying to say through me.

Likewise when I first got told I was leading worship for the first time I stood about 3 feet away from the microphone and concentrate more on making sure my vocals couldn't be heard rather than actually leading worship or playing guitar.

And I'm not sure that even now I'd say I'm good at those things (and maybe that's a good thing because if a talk or worship set goes well I attribute it to God!)

But I know that God uses those things in me even when, like Peter I have doubts. I also know that God has used people to develop those gifts.

I remember one afternoon at Park Road where Chedz got me practicing a sermon I'd written for that Sunday coming up....Chedz sat at the back whilst I stood at the pulpit...and every so often he'd stop me, make a suggestion and encourage me to try again and that was hugely helpful to me...to the point where I still write the word 'pause' in my talks today and use bold and italics for different words to remind me where my emphasis is!

And it's one of the real privileges of being a youth worker because I get to encourage young people to use their gifts and watch them grow in them, whether it's a gift for leading worship or organising people at a holiday club!

We can only grow as disciples if we grow with each other and if we have authentic relationships with each other & with Jesus.

Jesus spent time with His disciples and encouraged them to spend time in fellowship. There's a reason the stories, movies and TV shows we love all show people journeying together and that's because we're called to work together.

In Acts 2 at pentecost we're told that the disciples were all together in one place...later on in the chapter we're told that *'The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and everyone felt great respect for God. All the believes were together and shared everything'*

We're also told

'They met together in the temple every day. They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts.'

How authentic are your relationships with other Christians? Do you have Christian friends?

[PAUSE]

When I was 17 I started going to a youth group with some Christian friends I met at college. This youth group was in a very lively church and the structure each week was to have some worship, a talk and a time where people could respond to God.

Over time the friends who invited me invited their other friends (who weren't Christians) and some of them became Christians at the group.

I remember one evening where one of our friends who had become a Christian at that group a few months previously gathered myself and a couple of us in the back room at this church and broke down crying, explaining that he couldn't do this Christian thing anymore and that he had been struggling with it and was giving it up.

After that evening he started hanging out with other people and we didn't really see much of him.

And I guess whilst getting together to worship and hear from God was great we missed the fellowship side.

What would have happened if he'd felt able to share his doubts before they got too much to cope with?

The flip-side is that I've also been in groups of friends where we're really honest with each other and can support each other and be honest with each other during difficult times!

Jesus calls us to be part of a community because that's how we grow. It's not about hundreds of people getting together on a Sunday morning to face the front during some worship & a sermon and then maybe some light conversation over tea and coffee it's about real relationships.

Turn to the person next to you and ask them how they are!

What responses did we get?

How do you usually respond when someone asks how you are?

Do you say you're fine or do you say how you really feel?

We need to go on this discipleship journey together. We need to share our hopes & fears with each other. We need to gather together with other Christians and spend time getting to know each other more. I believe Jesus had 12 disciples so He could know each of them individually...we can have 300 friends on Facebook but we can't know each of them well...I certainly can't maintain that many *real* relationships.

The groups in the books, films and TV shows that we love aren't massive groups of people...they are small groups who know each other intimately.

The early Christians gathered, most the time in small groups in each others homes. Paul's letters are often to churches he knew of and loved and those letters are full of encouragement but also areas that the people need to be challenged on and he could write those because he knew them.

We can only grow as disciples if we're part of a Christ-focused community where we know each other well enough to encourage but to also challenge.

We need to remember that it's not about one of us being better than another it's about all of us being on that same journey with Jesus and that at different times God uses us to challenge each other.

There were times when Peter was the model disciple and times when he was challenged on his words or actions...we're just the same.

As you go on your discipleship journey's with Jesus gather together. Get to know each other well.

Pray together. Read the bible.

Discuss where you feel things are going well.

Discuss where you're struggling with your faith.

Ask uncomfortable questions to each other and answer them honestly, I've got a couple of friends who do this and I **hate** their questions but know how incredibly helpful they are for me to grow.

Hang out with Christian mates and develop authentic, honest friendships and God will use those to help you become more like Christ and reach others for Christ.

Prayer and Response