

June 15th 2014: "4 Faces Of The Church: The Face That Attracts"

Luke 10:25-37

Just the other week I started to read a very challenging book by David Platt called 'Radical'. In it he talks about how, in America today, Pastors are encouraged to do all they can to build mega-churches—the bigger the better. Yet, says Platt, that's not the way Jesus did things. He was content to pour Himself into a small group of mainly 12 men. In fact, Platt goes on to say that Jesus instead of glorying in numbers made it difficult for crowds to follow Him, and often turned away from vast crowds in order to concentrate on His own small band of disciples.

One reason I believe Jesus had for doing that was because when people gather in large groups they can so easily hide from commitment, and avoid dealing with the challenges that Jesus wants each individual to take very seriously.

So we see that when Jesus preached the sermon on the mount Matthew tells us in chapter 5 verse 1, ***Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.***

He saw the crowds and immediately distanced Himself from them. He went up the mountain where it would be harder to locate Him and only small groups could gather around Him. Not that He didn't ever preach to crowds but when He had some really important teaching to give, He directed it to His main followers.

To those disciples who would become the foundation of the Church that would be formed after the day of Pentecost, and He took them aside to make sure that they would truly understand about the characteristics that would be evident in them one day. And in Matt 5: 14 onwards He gives them the following challenge as Individuals and as a group:

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Here we find one of the Lord's major instructions for His followers who make up His church. For you and me if we are committed to following Him. And this particular instruction is about "The Face Of The Church That Attracts". The good deeds we do in the name of Jesus that cause others to look at His church in action and give God the glory for what they see.

The Apostle Peter emphasized this instruction in 1 Peter 2:12 where he writes: ***Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.***

He acknowledges that those who don't believe will at times be hostile to and hard on the people of God even when we do good things for them. That shouldn't surprise us, but it must not stop us doing the good works in Christ's name.

For even though such good acts may at times seem to have little effect—be misunderstood—or even harshly condemned. The day of God's visitation will come—whether that be when that person comes to belief or when the Lord returns in judgment—and then God will be seen as the power behind our good deeds and He will be honoured for them.

Such good deeds are nothing more than believers being obedient to God's command for us to love our neighbor. And Jesus, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, stresses that our neighbor includes everybody.

People we don't know yet. People who are so different to us that normally we would never have anything to do with them. And even people who do not like us and we might well consider as our enemies. Indeed anyone who has a need that we can meet, whether we seek to meet that need as an individual believer or as part of a group of believers, is our neighbor as far as Jesus is concerned.

The problem that Jesus then highlights in this well known parable however, is that even though we may be God-worshipping people, like the priest and the levite in the story. And even though the need of our neighbor is very obvious—the poor man here was lying half naked and half dead on the side of the road. There is a good chance that we will ignore the need of others and happily immerse ourselves in our comfortable worship and cosy life thinking that God wouldn't notice.

But God does. The implication in the parable is that He noticed and commended the act of the Samaritan.

This man had to put thoughts about himself to one side in order to help this wounded man.

Thoughts about this man as a Jew and therefore his enemy. Thoughts about the danger he put himself in by stopping to help him. Thoughts about the inconvenience of the time he would have to give to him and his own plans that it would effect. Thoughts about what other Samaritans would say when they heard that he helped a Jew.

Instead he gave his time, his donkey, his money, his commitment to return and give more if needed, and his love and mercy to a stranger.

And Jesus' final words are "Go and do likewise".

That's a strong order from God the Son to those who would please God the Father who commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. For in showing love in our actions to others we become The Face Of The Church That Attracts.

I was talking to Norma Pryce's son the other day while we were waiting to see Norma and he was telling me about a programme his church runs called Pampering the Parents. Somehow they have contact with the parents of the children receiving treatment at PMH and on a regular basis they show them love in a practical way, and people see God and His church differently because of that. The Face that attracts

My daughter and her husband and family are heavily involved in the Northam church of Christ and they were telling me about a drug and rehabilitation centre in their area called new start. It seems to cater mainly for young men and recently one of the workers there who happened to be a Christian, seeing that these men were just hanging around at the weekend, bored silly with nothing to do, told them that they should find a church to go to. So a few went along to the church of Christ service. There they were not looked down on but welcomed and loved. Now regularly twenty or so men attend and four of them have already been baptized. The Face that attracts.

On Thursday morning I thought I would do some research for this sermon at breakfast club, so I asked one of the mothers who comes along regularly

what were her thoughts about the church in general before she started to come along to Breakfast Club. O she said, 'I would avoid a church like the plague. I hated the thought of church'. Can you tell me why, I asked. 'Because they were stuffy and much too pushy' she replied.

And what do you think about this particular church, I then asked with some trepidation. You're so different to that, she said. This church is so helpful. I am amazed just how much you do for others'. The Face That Attracts.

The issue that Jesus raised in His parable however, is that it is too easy for God's people to leave being part of The Face of the Church that Attracts to just a few. To pass by on the other side because there will be someone else who will do it.

That's clearly not the way the Lord wants His church to function. Of course He doesn't want everyone to be involved to the same extent, but He wants us all to share in the task. Some will be able to be there in a physical sense but others must be there for them in prayer, in encouragement, in giving, in supporting, in sharing the load when they can. Some will be able to do some things, some others.

Being part of the Face of the Church that attracts is not limited either to outreach activities such as Craft, Kids Klub, Breakfast Club etc. Or to special events like the Mission Trip to China. It also includes all we do to help people feel part of our fellowship, like welcoming strangers into our midst and making other regulars feel at home. Serving morning tea and greeting worshippers as they enter our building. We all have a responsibility before Christ to sustain and develop the Face of this Church that God uses to Attract others to Himself.

One of the main things that Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan tells us is that He notices when we do our part and when we don't. God knows about your capacity to be involved. He knows that for some of you there are so many things that you no longer can do. He will not expect more from you than you can give. But from us all who love Him and look for His appearing He seeks that we do our part for we are all the church. And to us His Church He says: ***let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.***"

