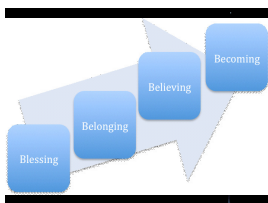


**THEME:** HOW DOES JESUS UNDERSTANDING OF SERVICE HELP US DISCOVER WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST (THE 4<sup>TH</sup> B!)

**READINGS:** John 18:15-27/ John 21:1-14/ John: 21: 15-17

## SERMON

My Dad was a British navy gentleman of a by-gone era, and because of his gentleman ways, he Belonged to the Anglican Church for many years. He was churchwarden and did many good deeds. But the faint stirrings had sensed whilst he belonged, were radically fanned into new Belief one day by the Holy Spirit. Being born again for some is not a helpful image, but this was what happened to Dad at the age of 60, and then for the remainder of his days, he Became a passionate follower of Christ. I was fortunate to have as a Dad, someone who Became a saint. My Dad was very aware of his failings, but by the time he died at 80, he had through the many twists and turns, the highs and lows of life, joys and defeats, become a prism for God's light to shine through. His gift was the first B (Blessing), he made people feel welcomed, safe, loved unconditionally. And because he had about him, as David said last week, the wiff of Jesus, strangers poured out their story to him...and he would offer his.



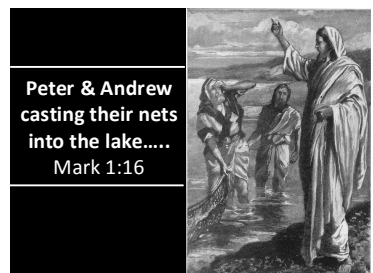
There may be some of you who are new today, so to bring you into our discussions over the last four weeks, we have been looking at a theological model called the 4B's.

It goes like this.....

We have said often that this linear way of looking at things is too simplistic, as actually the 4B's are better understood as a DNA helix. But doing it in a linear way makes it more easily understood, and actually, the story of Peter's journey of faith, can be tracked in quite a linear way. Who was Peter then? Peter, before he became a disciple of Jesus?

Peter was a fisherman and as Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon, who was to become known as Peter... and his brother Andrew. They were casting their nets into the lake." Mark 1 (end) In the Luke 5 account, Jesus asks Andrew and Simon Peter to then row him out so he can preach to the crowd on the bank; later he says, "go further out to fish". They say they have not caught anything.

They let the nets down and the boat begins to sink with the number of fish. Peter realizes there is something different about this man, perhaps recognizes something of



the otherness of God in Jesus. He bends down on knee and says I am a sinner. We don't know what in Jesus caused this response in Peter, but a relationship is born...and in John 1, Jesus says, "come and discover some more about me....."

Our ministries of blessing, if modeled after Jesus, can equally cause a response in others. In our own lives, others may recognize something in the blessing of our conversation, in the blessing of our presence or our action; they may experience something of the otherness of God working in us... the aroma of Jesus, and want to respond by finding out more. As a church over this year, we will look at which of our ministries facilitate blessing.

In my faith journey, the head of Amex took me under his wing. I was living in a foreign country (Belgium), feeling pretty lonely and they involved me in their family. I hung out more with his family and experienced the Christian love in their house, experienced the Christian values he lived by as a senior executive. This led me in time to then go to a church service with them (which seemed very foreign) and also a homegroup at their house. They sang horrible choruses like 'Bind us together', and I thought this is really naff. A few months later, I was in London for a wedding, and was sitting with a mix of around 12 people all chatting away, some who had a Christian faith and some who were my mates and didn't. A big discussion on God developed. My friends who did not have a faith, were able to poke serious intellectual holes in the Christians, but something clicked in me that day. I knew a line had been drawn in the sand, for I no longer saw myself agreeing with my friends who did not have a Christian faith. Somehow (even though I did not fully understand this Christian stuff in terms of Belief), my allegiance had begun to change. I had begun to belong, even whilst I did not fully believe, nor counted myself as having Become a follower of Christ.

So leaving my story, back to Peter; he has met Jesus in John 2. Skipping through the Gospel, we next engage Peter in Mark 8:29 at an important place in his faith journey. Jesus asks, "who do you say I am?" "You are the Messiah" Peter replied. This is very much a moment of **Belief**, where Peter is faced directly with this question. Up to then, Peter has **Belonged** to the group of disciples, has through Belonging, seen miracles, been involved in some ministry without fully understanding, heard parables and not understood. But now is a moment of articulating what he as begun to consider and experience. "Who do you say I am?"

I suggest we come to **Belief** in different ways and at different times, but for all of us, at some time, we need to face this question and respond to it. Is Jesus who he says he is? Have I seen enough of the Christian life to feel I can now decide? Do I have enough evidence from what I have read about this Jesus, to now make a step of Faith? Am I all but following Christ, but just have not 'symbolically/formally' asked him into my life as my Lord, Saviour and Friend? (The Drummer) We call this in Christian jargon '**conversion**'. From my own perspective, this happened after 6 months or so of

belonging to the Bind us together singing group. But before the bind us together group, I had experienced blessing for six months from my Amex friend and his family. Before that I had searched for 12 years in philosophy and other religions. We need to have in our ministries here at St George's key moments, where people are faced by that question, Who am I? Who do you say I am? But key ministries that allow space to question. I will be asking you later on, to consider if you have not already done that, to reflect on whether you wish to give your life to Jesus today as Peter did in that moment.

Back to Peter! In that same passage, Jesus talks about how to **Become** a follower.... one has to follow him, give up your life for me, take up your cross with me. Peter must have gone, "say what?" and in fact tries to stop Jesus living out the journey to the Cross, and Jesus says... Get thee behind me!

I have now believed for 24 years, but this believed nature has been about learning what my decision meant 24 years ago to Become a follower of Christ. We call this in Christian jargon, Sanctification....being made holy and it comes with the double entendre...being made whole.

In the Gospel of John, we see many vignettes of this happening for Simon called Peter. One example is John 13:1-9 when it came to Simon Peter's turn to have his feet washed, he said, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus answered, you don't really know what I am doing, but later you will understand. Lord you are not going to wash my feet Peter replied. If I don't wash you, then you don't really belong to me. Peter said, Lord don't wash just my feet. Wash my hands and my head too! (John 13:1-9 abbreviated) Peter's decision of Belief had still not found wings/understanding. My decision to ask Jesus into my life, took me time find wings as I found the pull of the old life strong, even whilst the new life offered more. This ministry of Becoming at St George's will be a crucial ministry as there are so many of us who want to be helped in that process of sanctification, growing into the image of Christ, become a follower in our work place. In that context, in the last 6 months of this year, you will find a fair few things coming on stream from the Discovery and Discipleship team – they have been pondering for the last 6 months how to enable this.

I am beginning to weave myself towards the end of this sermon, but before I do that, let me restate that the journey of faith is not often linear; the way we have discussed it today is helpful for the introduction of the 4B's. And Peter has to an extent obliged us in his journey of faith by offering us a neat picture of the 4 B's. But what about us?

For most of us "Becoming" is where we may be and so let us look a bit longer at Peter and see what we can learn from his life for ours. We join his faith journey near the end of John's Gospel.....

**Reader 1:** While Peter was warming himself around a charcoal fire, someone asked him, Aren't you one of Jesus' followers? Again Peter denied it and said, No I am not. He was asked again.... But once more Peter denied it... and at that very moment a rooster crowed (John 18:15-27 abbreviated)

**Reader 2:** Then a week later or so.... Jesus later appeared to his disciples along the shore of Lake Tiberias...they went out in their boat and caught nothing. Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize who he was. "Friends, have you caught anything?", Jesus shouted. "No", they answered. So he told them, "Let your net down on the right side of your boat and you will catch some fish. They did and the net was so full of fish, that they couldn't drag it into the boat. Jesus' favourite disciple told Peter, "It's the Lord." When Simon heard this, he jumped into the water as the boat was only about a 100 meters from shore. When the disciples got out of the boat, they saw some bread and a charcoal fire with fish on it. Jesus told his disciples, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Jesus said, Come and eat!" But none of the disciples dared ask who he was, even though they knew it was the Lord. Jesus took the bread in his hands, gave some of it to his disciples. He did the same with the fish. (John 21:1-14 abbreviated)

**Reader 3:** Then when Jesus and the disciples had finished eating he asked Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than the others do? Simon Peter answered, yes Lord, you know I do. Then feed my lambs, Jesus said. Jesus asked for a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter answered, Yes Lord, you know I love you. Then take care of my sheep, Jesus told him. Jesus asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt, because Jesus had asked him three times if he loved him. So he told Jesus, you know everything; you know I love you. Jesus replied feed my sheep. (John: 21: 15-17)

What an amazing account of Peter **Becoming**, because you know you never Become fully until you serve (in this case: feed my sheep). The Big Story of the Bible, to remember our first talk of the series, was of a God who offers humankind the opportunity to be transformed from a life following 'self' to a life that blesses others. Yes of course, our personal transformation into becoming more whole, but it's to an end, to make the world a better place. We can't become a Church for ourselves!

Put yourself in Peter's sandals. When he denied Jesus three times, a wave of emotions must have flooded over him. Guilt, torment of the soul, he had been told he would be the Rock, Jesus would build the future on him. But he had turned his back on God. And then we get this wonderful coming together of different moments in Peter's life. I started off this sermon with a passage from the beginning of John's Gospel, where Jesus first met him when Peter was fishing (**Blessing**). Remember, back then, he had had no luck with fishing, and here again, at the end of John's Gospel, he is fishing and having no luck. In-between these two bookends, he has belonged, chosen to believe,

come to become a follower. But the journey isn't finished! He needs to understand that **Becoming a follower of Christ** leads to service.

Peter's personal path towards reconciliation and restoration (I swear I have used those words before to describe a Centre!) is important and we see the caring way Jesus does that by asking Peter three times, do you love me? Peter had rejected Jesus three times. This is all about restoration, making mistakes on our journey of faith, but then finding restoration to carry on. Peter's spirit is healed as he is now back in relationship with Jesus – his sin no longer blocks the relationship. Peter's memories and emotions are healed at a deep level by Jesus taking Peter back to the three times he had denied Jesus, BUT then taking him forward into the future, by offering restoration to the Father's work. Feed my sheep. Peter no longer feels a failure, guilt; he is reborn with new creative energy to serve as a follower of Christ.

I hope you begin to get a glimpse of the 4B's. In the relationship between Jesus and Peter, we see the metaphor of the potter and the clay. And that at its most basic is the "Becoming ministry". There will be twists and turns in our lives, not the same as Peter, but twists and turns all the same. Let me end with a quote from Pilgrims progress.....

***Becoming a follower of Christ leads to service.***