

Summer 2007 - King's Centre Church, Sheffield

Engaging with our world : People of Peace (Luke 10:1-20)

Guilt-free evangelism

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Intro

Last Sunday Allans were on holiday – went to Trent Vineyard. Their welcome brochure says “we are a **church full of activists** eager to extend the kingdom of God, to bless those around us and to serve as God leads”. I hope we are too!

The plan for this season from Easter to Summer is like last year – to think about how best we can engage with the world we live in, as full-time disciples of Jesus.

We know, or are getting to know, some of the ‘stuff’ of being a follower – so what shall we DO about it? How do we share the good news about Jesus with a broken world? How do we live out, in our everyday lives of work, rest & play – the reality of what it means to be in the kingdom of God? How do we live out Jesus’ commission to us... To live a lifestyle of mission, evangelism and service

In other words – this season is broadly ‘OUT’ focussed.

- Autumn term – Covenant – UP focused to learning & letting the truth sink in
- Spring term – Heroes of Faith = IN focus – stories of Christians across the ages who worked out God’s calling for them and had the courage to live it
- This term – OUT focus – in light of what we know and those who have gone before us in living out their callings – how can we best engage with our world?

I wonder....

Let me run some ideas past you – see if these ring any bells....

- Have you ever gone out for a beer with someone, or gone to the park with someone and their kids...and you start to share life together? To connect, to talk a little deeper than just ‘hello, how are you?’
- Have you ever found yourself in a friendship with someone, not a Christian – maybe you know them through work, or socially. Perhaps they know what you stand for, or they can see that you are acting in a different way to others around them. And they are interested. They are favourable towards you. They’d like to get to know you more, and investigate what your philosophy or approach to life is.
- Perhaps you have made a friend through your kid’s school, or the gym, or you fish next to each other, or walk the dog and get to know each other. And there is just a ‘click’... You’re drawn to them, they are drawn to you – and you get the feeling that there might be an opportunity here to share something deeper – your faith, the good news about Jesus that makes such a difference in your life...
- Or you get into a philosophical conversation – maybe over a pint or a coffee – and your friend is genuinely interested in your ideas, in the Christian perspective... Might be coming from the opposite perspective – but open...
- Or you have this person who it just seems like hard work with. You don’t have anything much in common with them You find that when you try to share a bit more of your life, your faith, with them they simply aren’t interested – or perhaps they are even a bit rude. “Talk to the hand, the face ain’t listening”

Person of Peace strategy for evangelism

If you do recognise these kinds of situations in everyday life – you shouldn't be surprised to hear that Jesus also encountered them, and teaches us just what to do about them. Today I'm sharing a simple strategy taught by Jesus, about how to identify the people who God wants you to share the good news with, and the people to leave for another time or another person to concentrate on.

Its called the 'Person of Peace' approach.

NOTE: This principle is outlined very well as the **LifeShapes™ Octagon** – explained in the book *A Passionate Life* – [click here for more details](#).

Reading Luke 10:1-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a **man of peace** is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

A person who responds to you and your message (however you express it – words and/or actions)

A Person of Peace is someone who hears what you have to say, or the way you are acting – and wants to know more. A person who responds favourably towards you, and therefore the stuff you stand for in life. There is just grace in the relationship – it feels positive both ways

Jesus taught that there are people like this all around us – most of the time. This kind of reaction is the work of the HS in a person (even if they don't realise it). Think of Rowan Williams' definition of mission – "Finding out what God's doing and joining in". Its Just the same with Person of Peace. They'll respond to you positively (even if its tentative to begin with) because God is already on their case, through his spirit at work in our world

Sometimes God allows bizarre circumstances to set up encounters with People of Peace. Sometimes you might connect with someone because of hard circumstances too.

Be strategic & aware

The fact is, you and I can't answer every need. There is too much need out there! We can't try and pursue every person we encounter, or every person on the bus, who doesn't yet know Jesus. Because that isn't practical.

Jesus didn't tell his disciples to stand on a soap box on the street corner, the scatter-gun approach. He taught us to look for the Person of Peace, who is receptive to you personally. **The person whose harvest time is now.**

And concentrate on them – eat with them, enter their house (their live & cares). Invest in them. Sow into them something of the kingdom.

Its simple. You already know people who like you, who connect with you. Don't spend too much time trying to convince those people who don't. Concentrate on where the grace is. Some people will actually pursue YOU, not the other way around. They want to be friends with you, maybe they see something different about you. That doesn't mean we ignore other people – it's a matter of timing – you might need to sow gently and then leave it up to God. But this is a really liberating principle that Jesus taught.

You'll find you can identify some.....“I've got a Person of Peace at work” or “I've got a Person of Peace who lives on my road”. Great! Concentrate on them. Invest in them. Disciple them by pointing them towards Jesus – through your words, your actions, your love, your lifestyle

How to identify?

Jesus said the Person of Peace will:

- **Welcome you** (and if they don't, then shake off the dust - the things you took-on from them as you leave them behind)
- **Listen to you**
- **Serve or support you**
 - Let them!

ACTS example – Paul & Lydia (Acts 16:11-15)

- They arrived in Philippi – don't know a soul. Seek out the Person of Peace.

They find some God-fearing Jews by the river. As he shared the gospel, God opened the heart of a woman named Lydia. We don't know her words in response etc, but we do know that she received the message Paul was sharing. She invited them into her home. She wanted to serve them "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us."

- **Do remember, this is not an excuse to avoid the hard work people or the unloveable – this is a strategy for evangelism primarily, not service**

Not a person of peace?

Don't worry if a person really doesn't receive what you are saying or doing to reach out with the message of Jesus. They won't receive it gladly. It may feel like hard work, like your words or actions are hitting a brick wall. Expect this in life! Don't feel you have to labour the point! Jesus said just to shake the dust off your feet and move on – because there are others out there who are interested. Don't think you have to always pick the hardest nut to crack!

You can be persistent because you care about this person, but in the end, your can't force them, coerce them into the kingdom. That's the job of the HS – to prepare a heart to heart the gospel. Our job is to have our spiritual (and physical) eyes & ears open – looking for the People of Peace who cross our paths every day

Take heart those of you who are **waiting for your partners to become followers of Jesus**. I'd say they are people of peace for you, or you wouldn't have married them! Just look for the signs of God shifting their hearts and be patient. Remember its always God's work, not yours. We can pray, but its His spirit that makes the difference.

Sowing analogy - rocky ground or ripe ground?

We sow the seed of the kingdom. Sometimes People of Peace take years to bear fruit – but you can still tell if its rocky ground or ripe ground in which to sow, to invest.

Time

Jesus tells his disciples before he sends them out (Luke 10:2 & sowing parable) that there are specific times & places when the harvest is ripe (using the analogy of seeds and harvests). “Look around” “Lift up your eyes” he says – some sections of society, or those people that you know – will be ready to receive the gospel, others will not be ready today.

In some situations we need to sow. In others, its time to reap. You don’t get a harvest of corn or oil seed rape without first planting the seeds. Our part of God’s mission is to have His perspective showing us where there is spiritual openness (John 4:34-38)

The harvest is always plentiful

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that if we just work harder, the harvest will come sooner. Jesus doesn’t say that – he says “open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” (John 4:35) There harvest is already there!

The question is – are you looking in the right place? Sit down and think about it (use the learning circle – observe, reflect, discuss). Where are you most received? Where is the ‘grace’? Where is it easy for you, in your current situation and stage of life? For Marjorie – at present its with young families, and mums in particular. But it didn’t used to be! She used to move more in professional circles with single career-focused women – and have favour there.

Each day, the spirit of God can put people into our paths who need to hear the good news. We should be asking him to do this, and then have our eyes & ears open for when the people do cross our path. We will also have to be open to our days taking a detour, if an opportunity arises.

Team

Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs. Acts etc – always at least 2. Safety and support in numbers. Even with the Person of Peace it may be that its you, alone as it were, who has the relationship in in-roads. But seek to share the opportunity with others.

- Get your small group to pray for that person regularly
- Get that person to come to a small group social! To meet them in the flesh
- See if there are others Christians at work, in the mum’s group etc, who can share the opportunity with you
- Minimum – Make sure your accountability partner knows whats going on and can pray with you, and help you to work out when the time is right etc
- Often God will work it so that a person may find they have several Christian friends all of a sudden!

Conclusion

Being a disciple is about learning what Jesus does, and then doing the same in our lives, our contexts. That's also what Lifeshapes™ are designed to do.

Jesus didn't try to force open doors – he looked for the people who had their doors open, who welcomed him, then he entered their world with his radical kingdom, love, and message to follow him. (Think of the woman at the well, as an example).

That's how Jesus shared the gospel – shouldn't we do the same?

The Person of Peace is someone who God is preparing to meet & receive you – in a specific time, place, setting, history etc.

- Lets be alert, let's lift our eyes up to see the harvest that IS there
 - I'm sure you've been thinking of 1 or more people as I've been speaking – if not, go home and DO think about it!
 - Where are my people?
 - Where is the grace?
- And be encouraged! Jesus gave us one task – go and make disciples
 - And even then, his spirit does most of the work!
 - Our job is to walk through life with our eyes and ears open, taking the opportunities the Holy Spirit puts into our paths, to bless our People of Peace