

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

John 1:35-51

7th January 2017

Spirit... may we find the word... hear the message... know the truth... that sets us free... to explore... wonder... and follow you into the world... So be it... Amen

Were you taken in... over Christmas and the New Year... with any of the catch phrases... or strap lines... or promises... from the plethora of products that we have been advertised over the season?... Did we believe Coke is it... and so had that drink on the christmas dinner table because of that... or that pepsi is lip-smakin'-thirst-quencher... etc... and so did we chose to buy that one instead... or are you more like us and simply buy whatever version of coke that sits at the end of the aisle in the supermarket... because that is the one that is on a deal that week?...

Or did you buy someone a phone as a present on the strength of the future being orange... or placed a Cadbury's fudge bar in someone's stocking because a finger of fudge is just enough to give your kids a treat...

Of course these slogans are as old as I am... but I'm not sure I've ever bought any of these products on the strength of them...

It is very generous of advertising companies to spend millions on us on catch phrase or strap line... that will persuade us to buy a particular product... that catches the essence of what that product means... as well as saying something positive and attractive about the kind of person I am if I but it...

And the church is not immune... I remember about 25 years ago... the church sold lots of key ring fobs with the corny catch phrase... 'We have the key'... and standardised their welcome signs... I have no idea how many people... if any... either came to church on the strength of that... but I can't imagine it was a lot...

And in our own way... we've been doing that here too... We have a facebook page... that tries to give a positive, active impression of this faith community... but while the congregation is busy... the page isn't particularly... We have a website... bright... contemporary... and up-to-date... that offers a modern professional image of the church...

but really hardly anyone visits... And we now have Instagram... where we are still trying to capture that all important catch-phrase to draw people in... that makes us interesting... that people would want to click on us... like that first line of a novel that captures your imagination...

We haven't found it yet...because it is notoriously difficult to turn Jesus into a catch-phrase... He offers last and first phrases... or blessed are lists... but nothing particularly concise about the kingdom... that Saatchi and Saatchi would agree to... except one thing... but it isn't a strap line... it's an invitation... come and see...

He is gathering his disciples... and we are unaware of how much of a prospectus he has offered... or catchy job title... or statement of outcomes... or having advertised in any way... Jesus simply said... 'Come and see'... and those who did... travelled with him...

It seemed to be that informal... Two of John the Baptist's disciples saw Jesus... one of them... Andrew... went and told his brother Peter... Jesus saw Philip... and Philip went and told Nathaniel... and so it goes on through the whole gospel... There are women and men... Jews and gentiles... wealthy and poor... those with authority and those with none... people of every variety... to whom Jesus offers the same invitation: 'Come and see'...

Not everyone takes up the invitation... others question it... others debate... others find their excuses... and others leave the invitation be... but those who do pick it up... follow... and invite others to do so... No strap-line... corporate kingdom branding... just an invitation... 'Come and see'...

And in all of that... do you notice one significant thing... not one person tries to prove the value of Christianity... or prove the truth of the faith... or tries to convince anyone Christianity has all the answers... There are no apologetics... No opinions offered... no one tries to persuade anyone of the cause...

They don't even say... 'He's a wonderful preacher'... or 'You should hear him talk about such and such'... or 'He's really learned, insightful, inspirational, funny'... There is nothing...

All that is said is... 'Come and see'...

And there is the kingdom truth... because ours is not to prove the truth of the faith... or even persuade others to become Christian...

The church may want to use these methods in order to keep membership going... and the church has grown into an institution that has developed the idea that we need to get as many as possible believing... but Jesus never identifies himself with that... or asks that of us... never mentions any of these strategies...

All Jesus says is... 'Come and see'...

Interestingly... despite fancy websites... and social media presence... the key factor influencing a person to attend a church for the first time is the personal invitation...

It's not the reputation of the congregation... the age of the building... the beauty of the glass... the service times or styles of worship or quality of the music... it's not even the world class preaching... They have value... but the number one reason people give for coming to a church for the first time... is that someone invited them personally... 'Come and see'...

No need to explain... no need to appeal... no need to paint a picture beforehand... just an invitation...

The kingdom is summed up in that simple invitation 'come and see'... for the invitation itself is kingdom shaped... because it is open ended... it's an adventure... Come and see: it's as if even Jesus doesn't know how it will all play out... it's all to play for...

It is experiential... Come and see... you have to be in relationship for it to work... You have to come close... be in proximity... get your fingers dirty... You can't do this from a distance... Come and see...

And it isn't firstly an intellectual pursuit... but a way of engaging with life beyond just your head... but your soul and heart and voice and relationships too...

Come and see... It's right there at the beginning of John's Gospel... and the rest of the gospel... is a litany of folk who picked up the invitation... who came and saw... again and again... from the pharisee called Nicodemus... to the samaritan woman at the well... the man born blind... to Peter... and Pilate... and Thomas...

And it is the story of how each of these gave their own response... to Jesus invitation to come and see...

But the challenge of so simple a phrase is... how many of us... have uttered that invitation to others...

Come and see... isn't a commercial... or a strap line... It is an invitation... so perhaps... in this new year... may that be a resolution for our congregation... to offer that invitation to ourselves... as well as to others... not to prove anything... just invite others... to come and see...

Bibliography

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