

I remember talking with my parents trying to explain to them my decision to resign my post of Head of RE in a Comprehensive School and go to a theological college to train for ordination. Neither of my parents were followers of Jesus Christ and while they were not anti my faith they struggled to understand it. My father's response to what I had said was "why?" He could not understand why I wanted to give up a good job which was fairly well paid with good prospects to become a Vicar! I have to confess that over the years at low moments I have sometimes asked myself the same question!

Many of us I am sure are aware that it is not always easy and comfortable being a servant of Jesus and it is especially not always easy and comfortable sharing our faith.

Perhaps you have found that out yourself. It may be that last week you invited someone to the Ladies' breakfast and were turned down. Perhaps over recent years you have invited people to things and they have not accepted and you feel like giving up. Perhaps you have been praying for years for a relative or friend to come to faith and there seems no sign of that happening. You may have had an opportunity recently to speak to someone about your faith and bottled it. Or you may be aware that your behaviour in a certain situation has not been good and you feel you let Jesus down. It can be hard seeking to share the gospel and we can get discouraged.

This morning as we continue our series under this title 'You are being built' we look at 'pointing others to Jesus' and many of us get twitchy. If we are honest many of us are not comfortable sharing our faith. Indeed if we are honest for many of us it is not on the radar. Events like the women's breakfast come up and we just don't think to invite someone. Yet Jesus made it clear that we are to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19).

We are called to be those who witness to Jesus who are pointing to others to Christ but we either don't do it or if we do we find it tough.

So what has God got to say to us in this situation?

Well let's see how it was for Paul.

As we look at these verses in 2 Cor 4 we see that he too was finding it tough.

Here was man who had been at the top of the Jewish academic and religious tree. He was liked respected and had good prospects. However, he had thrown it all away to become a Christian missionary. And for what? If we look at vs 8-9 we see just what a struggle it was for him.

These Christians he was writing to knew that because he had been in Corinth with them for 18 months and they had seen the battles he had faced with the Jews in that city. He was hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down but look at 4:1, "we do not lose heart"

As we look at these verses we see something of why Paul did not lose heart and hopefully as we look at them God's word will encourage us in our own witness for Jesus.

Paul wrote "we do not lose heart". Why was he able to say that?

1. Ministry out of God's mercy v1

"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart" v1. Paul was very clear that what he was doing was what God had called him to. "Through God's mercy" are key words. I hope we know the story behind those words of how Paul seeking to destroy the church of Jesus Christ was met by the risen Jesus while Paul was on his way to Damascus and Paul's life was totally changed. That's what he was saying in v6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." God in mercy opened Paul's eyes to see Jesus. "I once was blind but now I see." That was what God had done for Paul and what by his grace he has done for me and for many of us here. "Through God's mercy" we have become followers of Jesus. Will we then keep that mercy for ourselves?

I remember some time back hearing the story of a minister who was going down the road when he came on a lorry which had overturned and spilt its load of bags of sugar. The police had arrived on the scene and rung the company who told them to give the sugar away. So everyone who came down the road received 2 bags of sugar. The minister accepted his and was on his way home when he saw a little old man going up and down the street telling everyone that there was free sugar available and where to get it. The Minister felt very selfish.

We have something much more valuable than a couple of bags of sugar should we not be sharing our faith?

Paul's words here are "through God's mercy we have this ministry". God had made his light shine in Paul and through that set him on a path of sharing that light with others. If by grace we have been saved we too have the same ministry. Yes Paul was unique as an Apostle but we too in our day as disciples of Jesus are called to share our faith and Paul shows us how

2. we set forth the truth v2

Paul says we don't lose heart and we don't use deception or distort the word of God but "by setting forth the truth plainly" and he further spells out what that means in v5 "For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ a Lord."

But Paul knew that didn't always produce the result he might want and we may have had the same experience that when we speak to others of Jesus they just don't want to know.

a. some can't see it?

Paul knew from experience that when he shared about Jesus with people some were just not able to see who Jesus is and why he died. It was as if they were blind.

The other day at Christianity Explored we used this picture which has two pictures in it of a young girl and an older woman and the question was and is can you see it? Many can see both but some can only see one. The problem you may have found as I have is that when I'm talking with friends about my faith some just can't see it. They just can't see who Jesus is. That can be discouraging and we might lose heart because of it but as Paul reminds us here

b. some do get it.

No one would have expected Paul to become a follower of Jesus but he did and down the ages some unlikely people have followed his footsteps. One of the things we need to learn as we seek to point others to Christ is to be looking for those whom God is at work in to draw to faith.

I spoke earlier in the service about Lifeshapes and in the last of the shapes when we think about how we share our faith we talk about a 'person of peace' from Luke 10:5-6, "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". What we need to be looking for is that "person of peace" the person who, for example, when we speak of what we did over the weekend and mention "I went to church" doesn't immediately change the subject but perhaps asks a question, who seems interested in you and your faith.

Just think for again a moment about your contact people. Is there someone there who might be your person of peace? Someone who you can help and point to Jesus?

3. We rely on God's power v7-12

But having said all this Paul is very realistic. In vs 8-9 he describes some of what he has been through due to the gospel ministry. Then in v10 he wrote "we always carry around in our body the death (or dying) of Jesus." That is every day he was aware of the physical and emotional pain that sharing the gospel brought and it was like the pain of the cross, the pain of sacrifice.

He knew that it was tough and he knew that he was frail "we have this treasure (that is the gospel) in jars of clay". It is a great image because we know that when it comes to sharing our faith we are fragile. We have fears about the response we might get, fears that we can't answer questions, fears that our lives are not up to scratch and so on. We are clay jars easily broken. But that in a sense is good because when we recognise our weakness, our inability we will look for God's power to help. If we feel frail about sharing our faith that will help us to trust in the power of God. Feeling fragile we will ask God to help us see the opportunities, to have the words to say, the love to show, the grace not only to answer questions but to ask them as well. We will turn to God in prayer and ask him to work in power in ways which we can't do and we will have to rely on him. He will not let us

down. That is not to say everyone we pray for or speak to will come to faith but as we trust in God's power we will find him faithful and active.

This is the power of God at work that Paul spoke of in Romans 1:16 where he says "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes". It is God who changes lives through the gospel but yes he uses the frail clay jars that are you and I as we obey his word and seek albeit hesitantly to point people to Jesus. God can do it!

So we are to rely on God's power but then what are we to do?

4. Pointing others to Jesus

In the first of this series a couple of weeks ago we were thinking about prayer and Jesus call to his disciples to ask, seek and knock.

a. Ask – the saying is that we need to "bring our friends to God before we bring God to our friends". We should be praying about our contact people and asking God to be working in their lives. At an event a few of us went to in May we were given a cord of leather with the idea that we think of five people whom we'd like to see come to faith. The idea is that you tie five knots in the cord, ties the cord to your wrist and then you can remember to pray for those people. If you want to know more then go to 'thykingdom.co.uk'. I don't think I'm trendy enough for such things. But I can have a list of a few people to pray for. Be praying for your contact people.

b. Seek – part of the prayer should be that we will have opportunities to speak to people about our faith and as we are with people we should be looking for those opportunities. It may be that a friend shares a problem with you and you can ask if they'd like you to pray with them. Or they may share an opinion and you can add something in to the conversation about God and his grace and love. It is being alive to the opportunity but also sensitive to people. That is where we come back to our person of peace and we should be seeking that person.

c. Knock – as we speak to others about our faith, however we do it, we are as it were knocking on their door. I'm sure many of us are aware of the picture by Holman Hunt of Jesus standing outside the door and the words from Rev 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."

That is what Jesus is doing as you and I speak to others. As we tell others of what God has done for us, as we answer their questions about faith, as we listen to their concerns and lift them to God in prayer we become Jesus to them and through us Jesus knocks at their door.

And if you are here today and not yet come to faith in Jesus then today again he is knocking at the door of your heart and life and in all humility asking to be allowed in.

Friends we may live in a world where many have little or no time for Jesus but some do, we here are testimony of that. Our aim as a church is still to grow to a membership of 250 and we will only do

that through sharing our faith but we share our faith. This is the task for each one of us without exception. If each one of us helped another person to faith then my Maths suggests our church would double.

Let's not lose heart rather let's set forth the truth plainly and, although we are jars of clay, let's expect God to act to make his light shine in the hearts of others not so Christ Church can grow but because of God's mercy, because we who have experienced God's grace wish others to do the same. So in the weeks ahead will you ask, seek and knock so that God in his grace and through his power might draw others into his kingdom?