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Briefing 60: Tuesday 20th April, 2021.

Dear Friends,

Last week I gave some brief reflections on our commitment to prayer, service and giving. This week, as part of my contribution to a 10-year review, I want to reflect a little on where we are in fulfilling the mission Jesus gave his church to 'make disciples of all nations.' So our focus today is on evangelism and discipleship.

Over the last 10 years we have had two Cornhill Mission weeks, been part of the nationwide 'A Passion for Life' mission, and joined in town-wide initiatives such as Love Stevenage. We've also held plenty of evangelistic events in our benefice: concerts, open days, teas in the churchyard, quizzes, carol singing in pubs and nursing homes etc., as a way of proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those who have yet to put their trust in him.

Reaching new people was also one of the driving factors behind us launching the Church:Reloaded service at St Nicholas, and why we have run regular courses to allow people to investigate the claims of Jesus for themselves. Perhaps you've attended an Identity Course, a Christianity Explored course or something similar and have grown in your faith through it. We've been busy and invested a lot of time and energy and spent a lot of money on these initiatives. But what about the fruit? Have our efforts been effective? And have they transformed us in the process?

We have seen some people come to faith over the last 10 years, and have seen others rediscovering a long forgotten or dormant faith. Some of you reading this will be able to testify to that fact, and it has been wonderful to see. But whilst both churches have grown in number over the last 10 years, we have to be honest and admit that much of that growth has been from people moving into the area or changing churches, rather than coming to a new or renewed faith in Jesus. There has been fruit from our evangelistic efforts, but it has been a sparse harvest.

I suggested last week that our lack of prayer has weakened our witness, but I suspect our lack of personal witness has also been a factor to the lack of new disciples. I don't know this for certain, but I suspect that for most of us, the number of purposeful, clear evangelistic conversations we have each month is close to zero. Perhaps even the thought of sharing the gospel message with a friend or colleague is enough to send our anxiety levels rising. We may feel happy to talk with them about **God**; we may mention **church**, but how many times over the last year have we had a conversation when we spoke about **JESUS**, the cross, sin, judgement, and the hope and forgiveness that can only be found through him? How many times have we invited friends and family to come to something with us where they might hear more of the gospel? I suspect that sadly it has been very few.

But this is how churches grow. It's how churches have always grown. Billy Graham rallies or church mission weeks may be useful, but churches grow when individual Christians, convinced by the truth of the gospel and filled with love for God and neighbour, talk about Jesus to others. For most of my Christian life that hasn't been me, but it needs to be. And if the lost are to be found and brought to Jesus, it needs to be more and more true of all of us.

How might that be so? It might be a good idea to think first about why we have a problem with sharing our faith? Do we **really** believe the gospel message of Jesus? Do we **really** believe he is the only way to God and eternal life? If so, then it's a matter of prayer and perhaps some training, and finding the courage to start telling others the good news. If not, then perhaps we need to go back to basics and think through for ourselves exactly what we do believe.

What's clear from the scriptures is that coming to repentance and faith and joining a church is only the start of a life following Jesus as Lord. I hope my Sunday sermons are useful in helping you see how the teaching of the Bible relates to everyday life. It's not always easy to make practical, real-life applications that are relevant to everyone, we are all so different after all, and time is limited. That's why being part of a home group is so useful. That's why personal Bible study and reflection is so important. It's also why more discipleship training can be useful.

If I'm honest, I don't think I've put enough effort into discipling people. My hope has been that if people come to church regularly and join a home group and read their Bibles on their own, then that will be enough. But I'm not sure it is; not for everyone anyway. **So what might you need to grow in your life-long, day-to-day, obedience to Jesus?** How might what

we do on Sundays be of more help to you between Monday to Saturday? How might our home groups, or our men's and women's ministries, help you to live as a committed disciple of Jesus? Some 3 years ago I ran a discipleship program with a small group of men. It ran fortnightly for 15 months and I do think that it had a profound effect on some of those coming along. I'll be running that again, for both men and women, from June. Perhaps you'd consider coming. Perhaps you can think of something else.

Since our discipleship will, necessarily, encompass every area of our lives, including the command to tell others of Jesus, we need to take it seriously. It might be a hard road, but considering what is behind us (the cross of Jesus) and what is ahead (eternal life), and since it is also the way to experience more of God's love, joy, peace and blessing in this life now, it should be a road we are all determined to walk. Are we?

Yours in Christ,

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**Prayer is Vital
Come + pray**

Wednesday 21st from 7:45pm-9pm - Church Prayer gathering via Zoom with Jimmy Rocks (St Nicks mission partner with CMS) joining us from Brazil. Contact Dave for a link.

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm. Bring a Bible, and join us to pray for ourselves + for the church.

Private prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK. Tuesday (20th) from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday (21st) 12noon-2pm and Thursday (22nd) 10am – 12 noon.

Next Tuesday from 7am-8am. Our regular early morning prayer meeting. Contact Dave for a link.

ST MARY'S ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETINGS: will be after the morning service on Sunday 25th April. Please put the date in your diary and do your best to come along.

ST NICHOLAS APCM: Karen Walker and Mike Wilton were re-elected as Church Wardens, Matthew Isaac and Irina Teoh were elected to serve on the PCC, and Elaine Forster was re-elected as Electoral Role Officer. A copy of the Rector's Report to PCC is available to read here: <https://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Rectors-report-to-APCM-2021.docx.pdf>

WAYS TO SERVE IN GOD'S CHURCH FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND PRAYER.

If God is prompting you to serve, please don't wait to be asked please get in touch. There are plenty of ways your talents and skills and energies can be put to use in the church. Take a look below:

1: Treasurer for Graveley: Honesty and integrity, and a confidence with numbers, spreadsheets and online banking required. If you worship at St Nicholas and could do this role, we can co-opt you onto Graveley PCC.

2: Helpers and teachers for Sunday morning children and youth work: Be part of the team helping to teach our children and young people the good news of Jesus. Patience, kindness and a DBS check required. Parents of children- would you please consider serving as a helper in a different group to your children? **We need people now!**

3: Catering and refreshments coordinator for St Nicholas. We'll soon be able to open the kitchen again – can you put together a team to offer refreshments after morning services, and be able to coordinate food for other events such as Newcomer's Lunches, Christianity Explored courses, etc. Is that you? Are you willing to play a part in these There is no kitchen at **St Marys**, but we love refreshments after services, so would you help provide these?

4: Evangelism Team. We want to re-establish our team doing door-to-door visiting, expanding it to include running termly enquiries courses for those investigating the Christian faith. Is God calling you to serve in this way?

5: We also need more **welcomers and stewards** (contact Karen Walker), more **musicians and singers** (contact Judy Brown) and more people to help with the **audio visuals** (contact Anthony Taylor, Edwards Kaahwa or Paul Drakes)

BIBLE BY THE BEACH COMES TO STEVENAGE: For the last few years, a number of us have gone to this conference in Eastbourne. This year it is on line and just for one day: Saturday 1st May. We are hoping to be able to broadcast the main sessions in St Nicholas Church with the hope that people (in groups of 6 or less) can discuss them outside afterwards over a coffee or (weather permitting) a picnic. More details will follow, but why not pencil the date in now and come along.