

## Intimacy leads to Affirmation [week 2 of discipleship series]

Matthew 3:13-17

Today we continue with the series on 'discipleship' and we explore the first of the six core themes that become interlinked as we focus on our growth as disciples. They are not a straight 'tick-box of discipleship' checklist, but these themes are evident throughout our journey - our apprenticeship as we called it last week. These are themes that are revisited as we grow - a spiral of discipleship as we journey to become more 'Christ-like'.

A reminder that if you missed last week's talk, they are available on the e-notices and can also be downloaded from the website.

Today we focus on Intimacy with God leading to affirmation.

Jesus often spoke of the Father and the way in which he spoke highlighted the intimacy between Father and Son - John 5:19 - 'The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing.'

An amazing picture of the closeness of relationship between Father and Son and a model of apprenticeship. It's not a 'job' but a 'relationship' that we are drawn into. Intimacy is such a beautiful word to use... it speaks of much more than just friendship, but a depth and closeness of relationship - and that's the place we are called to.

Jesus shows us what God is like, and he shows us too what we can be like as we journey to become more 'Christ-like'.

But where do we start?

William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940's said this:

"It's no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it - I can't. And it's no good showing me a life like Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it - I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like that. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like that."

It's the work of the Spirit that helps us become more like Jesus. He gives us new birth into God's family and helps us take on the family likeness. But not everyone's path of discipleship will be exactly the same, but for all of us, there does need at some point to be a realisation of God's love for us personally. We speak of God's love, we sing of God's love, but we need to really know and accept God's love, deep down.

Our growth, spiritually, does not depend primarily on our effort, but rather on our responses to the invitation that God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) gives to draw us into the image and likeness of God.

To do what Jesus did (the work of an apprentice), we need to live as Jesus did and this is where we turn our focus towards the reading from Matthew 3.

This passage contains three things that happened to Jesus which, if we develop them in our own lives, can become the basis that will enable us to become more like him.

In Jesus' baptism we see:

*Obedience:* John tried to stop Jesus being baptised, but Jesus replies: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness."

*Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit:* The Spirit came down as a dove and rested on Jesus. We don't need to earn the gift of the Spirit - it's freely given.

*We hear the Father's affirmation:* "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Now, remember that Jesus didn't perform any miracles until *after* his baptism. Jesus was simply available to share in everything the Father was doing. The Father's affirmation was evident - Jesus didn't have to work for it.

Even with the best loving, supportive parents, it can be hard for us to comprehend, and accept God's amazing grace - his affirmation.

We need to realise that we work *from* the Father's affirmation, not *for* it. This concept is so alien to us in today's society.

How we feel about ourselves affects how we hear/accept the Father's words of affirmation. The older we get, the harder we find accepting words of affirmation - negative experiences of life can get in the way. It may be that there are people here today that are finding it hard to hear God's words of affirmation - we are his beloved and he's pleased with us. If that applies to you, please don't leave here today without allowing someone to pray with you...

At the morning service, Peta spoke on this same theme and quoted a chorus which I think fits in so well as we look at affirmation in discipleship -

"I am a new creation, no more in condemnation. Here in the grace of God I stand."

We must never tire of hearing God's voice and words of affirmation, we must never think that we will get to a point when we will no longer need to hear those words. And perhaps it's when we become more intimate with God that we will begin to hear and accept (and believe) his words of affirmation.