

St Peter's and Blessed Mary Vision 2024-2025

“Apprentices Walking the Way of Jesus”

Psalm 133/134 and Luke 24v13-35

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a God who speaks through scripture and the spirit, may we listen and understand the scriptures we have heard and may your Holy Spirit guide us into what it means for our lives and as a church family. Amen

Introduction

Its nearly that time of year again isn't it! What am I talking about?

-that Spring has finally sprung after all the rain we have had?

-that it is a new school term?

-or that it is time to be booking your summer holiday?

Yes all these are true....but I'm thinking of something far more important than all of these things....yes it's that time of year again for our AGM our 'Annual General Meeting' and our APCM our 'Annual Parochial Church Meeting'...APCM and AGM because we have two meetings at the same time....one to vote in our church officials and the other is the AGM of the PCC

When is it as I am know you are all dying to know...if you don't have it in your diary it is next Sunday here in church and we would love you to come if you possible can

It's a really important meeting as a church family...to look back over the last year....to look at where we are.....and where we need to go in the next year...we hear reports of what is going on and there is an opportunity to ask questions of me, the wardens and the PCC

For an APCM and AGM there is quite a lot of paperwork to do and things to get right and things lined up...

-The AGM report on all our activities

-The Financial Accounts

-the Paperwork for new PCC members and wardens

-And there will be a vision for the year ahead

I mentioned this last year.....but to make sure we do things right for you it means checking these important reference books to help get things right.....I like to mention these because I just love their titles:

-The ABC of the PCC

-The Book of Practical Church Management

-and The Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors

Last year as suggested that you might like to buy or read these...has anyone?! Ok I thought that might be the case!

Having a proper meeting once a year is a legal requirement, as the ABC of the PCC says, but legalities aside it is good that we can and do meet as whole church family and community to be reminded and

encouraged in what has happened as we look back and listen to where God is calling us to go

Looking Back

So first, I would like to look back....

This time last year in my AGM and APCM vision sermon I presented to you a theme for the year ahead....can anyone remember what that was...I hope you can as something that you might have been trying to put into practice?

The theme was, based on our Gospel reading today from Luke, the road to Emmaus story.....and the vision I suggested was to **Walk, Listen, Talk and Eat like Jesus and with other people....**

What does it mean to be a Christian Disciple? We sometimes make this complicated, but it means simply to be like Jesus and do the things he did in his life....to follow Jesus in who he was and what he did

Walking.....what does walking like Jesus mean?...in Jesus and in his ministry we always see him going to people...literally walking towards people and taking the initiative.....not waiting for them to always come to him and we are called to do the same

As I look back over the year I have been encouraged that as a church we have been walking more towards people more in our individual lives...but also in what we are doing in our groups and activities, especially during the week in our FCY groups and activities.....if you have time to pop along to any of these it is encouraging who and how many we have coming along.

Listening.....next listening....in Jesus and in his ministry we see him being a good listener.....understanding where people are in their life and then saying or doing something that met them in their need in body, mind and spirit

As I look back over the last year this is something that think we are getting better at as I've seen more of you taking loving and caring time with each other and in welcoming new people.

Talking.....next talking.....in Jesus and in his ministry we see him yes first being a good listener but then 'talking the talk' as they say with what will help people...often the telling of a story to make people think or making a point that made people stop and think and search for what is more important in life

On the Road to Emmaus story when Jesus explained the scriptures to the disciples they later reflected: ***“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us and as he opened up the scriptures.”***

As Christinas we have the words of life to offer to people and as I look back over the last year I have been encouraged by how our confidence in the bible has grown on Sunday mornings as we have listened to sermons and in our Connect Home groups.....and it is especially encouraging to have had across St Peters and Blessed Mary 4 new groups begin in the last year so that we now have 15 small groups in which we are talking about the teachings of Jesus and praying.

Easting.....Walking, Listening, Talking and lastly Eating....Eating might not sound like something very spiritual.....but if you look at the life of Jesus you will find that it is a major theme of Jesus and how he did things because it got people together and built friendship and community and for Jesus eating was and is a picture of the life that God is calling us back to now and in the future

Last year I encouraged us to take as a theme for ourselves the comment that people said about Jesus...that he didn't go to church as much as the religious people said he should have done but instead it is recorded about Jesus: "***The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'***" ³⁵ ***But wisdom is proved right by all her children.***"

Jesus didn't go to church with the right kind of people but instead was in other places with the wrong kind of people.

What am I saying as your vicar...don't come to church?! No but over the last year it has finally been encouraging that we are becoming a more hospitable church.....food and drink provided at groups and activities.....we have had more church lunches and social events.....and as just one example it has been lovely to see the Wednesday afternoon café group grow...do go along if you have not been

Walking, Eating, Talking and Eating with Jesus and like Jesus.....is what it means to be a Christian and to follow Jesus and I am grateful for everyone playing their part in being this kind of church family which I can tell you new people who come in do notice.

Looking Forward

So looking back.....I do hope you can feel encouraged that we have over the last year become a church family that has a vision for living a bit more like Jesus in Walking, Listening, Talking and Eating like he did.

But what about looking forward?.....what might be a good vision and next steps over the next year?

My feeling is that is that if Walking, Listening, Talking and Eating like Jesus is what it means to be a Christian and a Disciple then we need to keep doing it and make our aim to go deeper following Jesus....deeper in our understanding of God through Jesus so that we might want to follow Jesus more.

But how do we do that?

Over the centuries every generation of Christians has sought to use different names to try define what it really means to be a Christian.....to be an authentic follower of Jesus.

Originally the first Christians after Jesus were not called Christians at all but 'followers of the way'the name Christian came as a kind of nickname later.

A Christian

A Disciple

A Friend of Jesus

A Follower of the Way

What is the essence of being a Christian...what word or phrase captures things best?

In this book I have read recently by an American writer John Mark Comerit talks about authentic Christianity and authentic

Christians being those who are apprentices....see themselves as apprentices trainees to Jesus.

The dictionary definition of the word apprentice is this: **someone who has agreed to work for a skilled person for a particular period of time and often for low payment, in order to learn that person's skills.**

I think this definition is pretty good definition for what it should mean to be a Christian!

The subtitle to this book describes what it means to be a Christian apprentice:

“Practicing the Way:

-Be with Jesus

-Become like Jesus

-Do as Jesus did.”

I want to make this my vision and aim for the year, and I hope you might too.

(!) Many young people today, as you may have read, are deciding not to go to university...for the first time numbers in higher education are going down and there are a number of factors for this ...perhaps the number and range of not very useful courses

.....certainly the cost going up and the amount of debt piled up for decades

BUT positively I think many people are coming to see that learning for life and work is often best done from someone in real life...it makes sense if you think about it...as they say you learn not just by what you taught but also by what is caught.

In Jesus day Rabbi's were those whom the best of the best young intellectuals and academics might get to follow.,,,the best of the best of the best chose a Rabbi and hung them in the hope that something might rub off on them.

But Jesus was different....he did the choosing....of very different ordinary people with potential to be his apprentices.....and before they had done any learning at all.

Today we think of ourselves as a Christian and maybe a disciple but what Jesus is looking for are apprentices who want to learn a way of life from him.

Conclusion

So.....if we are called to be Christians Disciples who are apprentices.....Being with Jesus...Becoming like Jesus...Doing as Jesus did in Walking, Listening, Talking and Eating like he did...how do we become like that not just on our own but together in unity as

our Psalm today Psalm 133 talked about.....how pleasant it is when Christian brothers and sisters live in unity of living for God

We grow in these things when we grow in the spiritual disciplines that Jesus showed in his own life that helped him to know God.

As we look to the year ahead, I hope as a church we can grow in our 'Walking Listening Talking and Eating like Jesus' through the practices of Jesus to know and receive power from God

In the year ahead we will do I am sure a more things outwardly that will help us to be the church and Christians we need to be.....but I hope most of all we can have a vision for our inward lives so that we might be outwardly like Jesus.

In this book I mentioned it goes through in an up to date way the time tested spiritual disciplines of Jesus that I would love us to focus on:

- prayer** and especially on our own in solitude just as Jesus did
- fasting** to help focus our minds on God
- practising a proper **Sabbath rest**
- reading and practising what scripture teaches
- living in community
- being **generous** with all we have
- and being **witnesses** to those around us

At the beginning of May we are going to be starting a new sermon series looking at these spiritual disciplines that Jesus showed in his life and that Christians have followed over the centuries to be real apprentices of Jesus

As we focus on them and grow in them I hope we can make these things as our vision for the next year..to help us be more effective in our Walking, Listening, Talking and Eating like Jesus.

Let's pray..... Lord Jesus thank you that from your Father you received and had a vision for your life....thank you that you took time to hear that vision and to receive power to live it out....in this coming year would you teach us how to be with Jesus that we might become like him and then do as he did. Amen