



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST
A PROVINCE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

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How inadequate it would be if *mission* and *evangelism* were equated with *marketing* and *targeted campaigns*; and how it would betray the Gospel, Christ, and God if *discipleship* were identified with *recruitment*.

Of course telling, announcing, sharing and welcoming are honourable and necessary for Christians and the Church. But telling, announcing, sharing, and welcoming into what? Why baptise, why confirm, why receive, why convert? As for conversion, it's God's doing anyway and not ours. And crucially, to quote a tough Glaswegian nun of my acquaintance on the subject of conversion, disciples are converted not so much from sin to righteousness as from righteousness to love. From righteousness to love.

She means that there's a wrong righteousness as well as a right righteousness. Wrong righteousness is, though it rarely admits it, self-obsessed, self-interested, anxious about the boundaries of acceptance and salvation, as though we're the arbiters, we're the policemen. Sadly this is precisely the sort of thing that others think Christians are about and that, down the ages and now, many Christians believe they should be about. Not so. Righteousness is God's. Only God offers. Only God has the right to define righteousness. In any case, as my nun says, we need to talk less of righteousness and more of love. Specifically love made actual; specifically love spelled out and defined in both the words and the deeds, in fact the whole life - and death - of the Word of God made flesh, God among us, in Jesus Christ. At root it's not a *what* that we tell, announce, share, welcome, baptise, and confirm into, evangelise and do mission for, so much as a *whom*: God in Christ who is love supremely personalised and shockingly indiscriminately offered to all, everyone, without distinctions or limits.

And we'll be poor, superficial, and even counterproductive tellers and announcers, evangelists and missioners, we'll be inadequate apologies for our churches and for the Church, if we don't see that first and always we are *disciples*.

I went to Zambia last year representing our Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East at the Anglican Consultative Council, the sort-of-but-not-quite-PCC of the whole worldwide Anglican Communion, and the theme was *intentional discipleship*. Your standing committee has thought it right that it should be the theme of this diocesan synod too. Last year we explored the five marks of mission. This year we dig deeper to discover what's prior and primary, even to mission: our identity. Our identity as Christians today is exactly what it was for Andrew and Peter, James and John, Matthew and Thomas and all the rest and ever since: disciples first. Disciples, if they stay still and listen, are taught. Disciples, by grace, learn. Disciples, if they accept the challenge, walk the road Christ walked. They make his journey of life - and death - and on the road they realise who they really are. They also learn that eternal life isn't for later but begins now.

It's not fashionable now in the world of education to talk about *pupils*. They're *students*, or *learners*. But we all know that in any given class there will be a few, or more than a few, who aren't doing overmuch studying or learning. And in church?

Gathered worship is the fount and core of Christian living. It, rather than any freestanding individual understanding of Christian allegiance, is our natural place. Our natural place is together: together with God but also together with one another. And our - usually weekly - principal gathering for worship, though first the place of adoration, awe, praise, and prayer, has also been described as our school of discipleship. We can, if we attend in both senses of the word, learn how to be truer, deeper disciples, spiritually and practically. How we listen to God, how we take notice of one another, how we apply the intellect given to us, how we follow the heart implanted within us, both within the worship and then for the rest of the week in all aspects of our lives however apparently secular, will school us, just as being with Jesus, sitting with him, walking with him, asking him questions, watching and learning from his parables and his practices, and talking to one another about what they were seeing and learning and feeling, schooled the Twelve before us.

Above all the eucharist schools Christians, if only we'll let it. The eucharist above all is tough enough, balanced enough, moving enough, touching enough, real enough, transforming enough, for discipleship in all seasons of the soul, all seasons of the Church, and all seasons of the world. Fr Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy, alias Woodbine Willie, Great War padre, slum priest, and industrial missionary, said, when he was tested to the limit and almost overwhelmed by both cynicism and death, "On two points I am certain: Christ, and his sacrament. Apart from them, I am not sure that I am *certain* of anything."

Everywhere and everything entered into and inhabited in the name of Christ can be part of our school of discipleship, benefited from best if intentionally approached and considered. Not just a church learning group – and I unreservedly commend them and their like – but also a church council or committee can be a part of the school. How do yours match up?

In this my tenth year of travelling I can't speak highly enough of my pride in our diocese. For the most part the Christian faith is expressed with great richness and in a variety of styles, both in worship and in programmes of activity and service, and this in places of wealth and places of poverty, in places of peace and in places of war. I'm pleased to see an appetite among not a few for wider learning opportunities. As a diocese we have an obligation to encourage and resource that appetite centrally as much as we can, but it will always be fed best painstakingly, regularly, and very locally, when the church learning and the church worshipping are understood and experienced as indivisible and equally vital.

In such a holistic conception of Christian discipleship there will be no compartmentalisation of ordinary churchgoers on the one hand and keen enthusiasts on the other, nor of the studious and the uninterested, nor for that matter of feeling and mind, and certainly not of worship and life.

Just as righteousness in its impoverished definition is not our goal or destination, so learning in order to be somehow qualified is also not the true end of the discipleship of Christians. It's love: love of God, love of neighbour, love transcending even family, even country, love tough enough to walk Christ's way wherever it leads. "Can you walk where I walk, and eat my bread, and drink my cup?" Christ asked the disciples, and he still does.

+ Michael Cyprus & the Gulf