

## Meeting People Where They Are - 1

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 17 April 2016

John 3:1-17

[MW16-12]

There is a wonderful story about a young family moving into a new house. The move had been scheduled weeks in advance, but when the day approached the husband announced that an important meeting had been called at the office, and he would be unable to help. Consequently, the wife had to handle the move by herself. After the moving van had pulled away, the wife found herself standing in the living room of the new house surrounded by boxes to be unpacked, appliances to be hooked up, a screaming baby, and a five-year-old who decided to throw one of his metal toys through the picture window. Fortunately, the child wasn't hurt, but the jagged glass was scattered everywhere and a brisk wind was blowing through the opening. The wife was now so upset that she simply had to tell her husband what was happening. When she called him on the telephone, a secretary informed her that he was tied up in the meeting and could not be disturbed. The secretary asked, "Would you like to leave a message?" This didn't help her at all because from past experience the wife knew that he could be extremely lax about returning telephone calls home. So she figured out a way to get to him. She replied, "Just tell him the insurance will cover it. Call home for details." The moment he got the message, he called home.

Do we meet people where they are?

- by 'we' I mean our church  
not the church as a whole, not the Anglican church  
our church, Christ the King, Mangawhai

Do we meet people where they are?

Do we expect people to come to us?

- to make the first move, do things our way

Do we kind of meet people half way?

This is serious stuff - a big question

- and it's important for the new mission we have embarked on  
so I invite you to take a couple of minutes and reflect by yourself  
or talk to the people around you

- consider this: [Slide]

In what ways are we meeting people where they are in what we are doing/being at Christ the King, Mangawhai?

In what ways are we expecting people to meet us?

In what ways are we meeting people half way?

[time for reflection/discussion ... any comments???

I've been thinking about this for some time now, seriously thinking

- and so I went back over the notes I took at a seminar  
led by a Pastor with experience in growing a new church and new congregations  
- specifically a new Anglican church ... not something you often hear about!

The main thing for me was it is all about ...

- meeting people where they are!  
understanding where people are coming from  
allowing for that, ministering to that

This involves many things

- some of which are so obvious, taken for granted  
that we probably don't even notice
- we were told that with starting a new church, or growing a new congregation  
the most fruitful area, the best opportunity is with people who are  
unchurched, disassociated, disaffected (repeat)

'Unchurched' is pretty straight forward

- people who have never been part of a church

'Disassociated'

- people who may have had links with a church at some stage in life  
may be baptised, Sunday School, youth group  
may have even been regular at worship, involved in church activities
- but kind of drifted away  
university, got married, family, job, busy with other things

'Disaffected'

- people who were pretty involved in church life  
had a disagreement, falling out, got burned
- something happened that put them off, drove them away

If you wish to grow, we were told, this is the area to target

- and to do this, you need to ... meet people where they are!

So, what are some of the things to consider ...

What does the church look like outside?

- well cared for? attractive? inviting? a place that looks like a home for people?  
what do the building and grounds 'say'?

How do you find out about the church and its activities?

- where is it advertised? what kind of advertising?  
newspaper - but not necessarily the 'church' page  
radio, posters, magazines
- what about a website?  
(well we have one of those now!)

Then, this is kind of important, can people find the church?

- how easy is it really  
who thinks it's pretty easy to find our church?
- the reality is that it is not as easy as we might think

This Pastor had big signs out on the corner of the road the church was on

- then a sandwich board outside the church itself  
directing people to parking and the church door

- there is a map showing how to get to the church on the Pastor's visiting card and on all church pamphlets etc
- we were told "don't assume people know where you are or how to get there"!

In fact that's probably a key point: DONT ASSUME!

Then when people get here

- which door do they enter, where do they go, what do they do? we know where we are going, but what about a new person (eg people at a funeral and toilets)
- in this Pastor's church they had the greeters/welcomers outside the building! you knew you were in the right place visitors meet people first, and the church is people, right!
- there are also BIG signs with directions church, Sunday school, nursery, restroom not discrete, they stand out, you can't miss them
- there's also an information table and a visitor's book they expected visitors/new people every week and were ready for them

All church members wear a name-tag

- visitors are given one with a green dot so the Pastor knows to make sure to talk to these people as do other church members
- next time the visitors come, there will be an 'official' nametag for them if they are local, not out of town, they are visited within 24 hours

That's all "churchy" stuff

- this new church also did other things 'out in the community' thinking 'outside the square'
- like a series of talks in a local coffee shop on a particular book or movie that was catching many people's interest
- holding a Labour Day party on the section next to their new church lectures and panel discussions on real, topical issues in a place where people are comfortable
- the church's point of view is put forward, along with other points of view

Back in the church, they provide a range of programmes for children

- a nursery with qualified carers which even has a silent paging system, so parents don't have to worry
- this church is a 'start up' church and started out with all this in order to provide for people's needs

Anglicans, are often described as the people of the book - the Bible and the Prayer Book

- this Pastor printed the entire service every week not because they had no prayer books, they did and gave those out too
- but it means people do not have to juggle books try to find pages, get lost, feel stupid
- as they said: "if you feel stupid, why would you come back and feel stupid again"!

The key thing was to be constantly thinking and working from this point of view:

- put yourself in the shoes of an unchurched person  
look at what we do and how we do it  
through the eyes of someone who has never been to church
- try to see things like someone who has never been involved in this kind of thing

A final, crucial point in this regard is:

- when people have come to church, come to an event  
make sure to meet them!
- talk to them, help them to feel at home, listen to them

It may be that sometimes they are not quite the people we might have had in mind

- however we are to meet them  
because these are the precious people God has placed in our circle

Plenty to think about?

- you bet!

I'd like to conclude by reflecting on how Jesus always met people where they were

- in fact he's the ultimate expression of this  
as God with us
- I invite you to watch and listen as Jesus meets Nicodemus (from John 3:1-17)  
[video clip]

I invite you to take a moment to reflect, either silently or with those around you [Slide]

- in what ways did Jesus meet Nicodemus where he was?  
in what ways did Jesus expect Nicodemus to move, do things Jesus' way?  
in what ways did Jesus meet Nicodemus half way?

[Time for reflection]

Jesus could have said: 'Go away! It's late!'

- Jesus could have said: 'I don't deal with people who sneak around in the dark'  
'Come back tomorrow', 'Make an appointment'
- Jesus understood the risk Nicodemus was taking in order to talk to him  
a Pharisee and well-regarded leader meeting with this upstart
- Jesus respected that, respected Nicodemus

Jesus answered Nicodemus's questions

- treated him as a real person, challenged him even  
and left the door open
- Jesus left the door open for Nicodemus  
and brought him further along the road

May we do the same as we build on what we are doing at Christ the King, Mangawhai

- sharing the good news and ministering to people  
as we meet them where they are
- so for homework I ask you to pray and reflect on what we can do, practically  
to meet the unchurched, disassociated, disaffected people of our community  
just where they are [Slide]