

Meeting People Where They Are - 2

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 01 May 2016

John 4:3-15 (42)

[MW16-14]

The loaded station wagon pulled into the only remaining campsite. Four youngsters leaped from the vehicle and began feverishly unloading gear and setting up a tent. The boys then rushed off to gather firewood, while the girls and their mother set up the camp stove and cooking utensils. A nearby camper marveled to the youngsters' father: "That, sir, is some display of teamwork." The father replied, "I have a rule. No one goes to the bathroom until the camp is set up."

My wife's mother, Joy, had a rule too, a great rule

- the first time you came their house you were a guest
you enjoyed great food and hospitality and just had to sit there and soak it up
- the next time you came you were family
which meant you were thrown a tea towel and expected to help with the dishes or get stuck in to whatever jobs needed doing!

This seems to me a good rule for churches too

- the first time you show up, you're a visitor
the next time you're there you're family, you belong

Now, there will be some pretty obvious signs showing that

- so how might someone know on a second visit they belong?

[time to think/respond]

Often we're very concerned about asking people to do something

- when they've only just started coming to church
and sure, we don't want to overload people
- however, if a person's asked to do something
they think: "wow!"
I can do something, I'm useful, noticed ... I'm part of the place, I belong
- yes, it is a fine line and balance is good
but it is one way of letting people know they are wanted

One thing the Pastor said in that seminar I attended, was that in their church

- they have 'new' people visit 'new' people
they put new people on welcoming and greeting
and it makes sense when you think about it
- these people remember what it's like to be new
to come for the first time
- they'll be aware of things that are helpful and encouraging, and do them
and they'll know all to well things that are off-putting
and hopefully avoid them

Maybe like me you've come across people who after meeting you once, and only briefly

- next time they see you remember your name
makes you feel good, important
someone has remembered your name
- it impresses the heck out of me
but try as I might, I'm not very good at this

However a church community can do this through its nametags

- like I mentioned last week, when people come for the second time whether it's next week or next month
- there is a proper 'official' name-tag for them that's a sign of welcoming and belonging

After the first visit everybody is family

- you get a name-tag and you can expect a job!

We were told to set the standard high, don't be too easy

- for example in the baptism liturgy, parents make promises so this Pastor said set them to work straight away: give them a job on the day even
- all of this which has got me thinking ...

I also mentioned last week that the aim of this particular church

- is to visit everyone who comes to church for the first time within 24 hours 24 hours! - and mostly they managed!
- what they do is take one of the church's 'goody bags' (I'll explain about this in a minute) and a loaf of fresh baked bread
- knock on the door, hand over the goodies and say "we're so glad you came"
- and that's it!

These 'goody bags' are about this big, plastic, printed with the church's logo

- inside is a letter of welcome from the Pastor a 'devotional', something like 'Word for Today'
- a service or event that people might like to be part of is highlighted
- and there's some candy or chocolate (now you know it's beginning to sound like something we could do!)

These 'goody bags' are for visiting newcomers

- and they are also for 'door to door visiting' you know, knocking on all the doors in a street,
- saying, "Hello. We're from St Flaubert's on Smith St and we'd like to give you this"
- simple as that

Something else to consider is sending out purpose designed postcards

- inviting people to special events could be to everyone on the parish roll, a particular group or targeting a street or area

We can do all this because we, the church, are providing for people

- because it's about making the church THE viable alternative saying to people, we care about you
- we're not trying to sell them something or get them to do something
- we are trying to *give* them something

Just reflect for a moment

- how might we give the people of our community something??? [Slide]

For example ... the church our youngest son attends in Wellington, St Michael's Kelburn, recognised that many university students, and in fact a lot of young people in general, just don't do Sunday mornings. So they put on something they called "Nourish". This was a lunch at 1pm, open to anyone, followed by a worship service. Now you could just go for lunch and not stay for the worship – but most people stayed. It worked just like they hoped and attracted many university students – including our son who began by calling in on his way back from his Sunday morning sports training. It helped these young people discover the reality of Christian faith and integrate them into the life of being a follower of Jesus. And, get this, when someone had been attending for a couple of months they were invited, with one or two others, to provide and prepare the next Sunday lunch.

That's the kind of message we're about getting across as a church

- we are about people, we are here for people

So I encourage you to pray and think about

- what we as Christ the King Mangawhai have to give our community

I think it also means we are not to worry so much statements of faith and belief

- about stained glass windows and having nice things on the walls
we are a home for people and it needs to look like
people 'live' here!
- perhaps we need pictures of people around the place
people doing stuff, people serving, people having fun

And to keep on to it, it's about building on what I said last week

- putting ourselves in the shoes of an unchurched person
looking at things through the eyes of someone who has never been to church
- maybe even going further by inviting a 'mystery worshipper' to visit
and report on how things were
(kind of like those 'mystery shopper' things)
- and having unchurched people read any ads, information sheets, pamphlets
magazine etc that we put out

I suggest that this is what we wish to make clear, very clear:

- in a very transient world we, the church, are going to be here
to be a home for people
- and in providing this we also have to recognise that not everyone
comes in the 'front door'
- there are many ways to join, be part of, be attached to, belong to the church
and this seems to be something the Anglican church caters well for
- while we have all these plans at the 'front door'
remember there's a side door too ...
a place where people slip in and out
come and go ...

Jesus met someone at the 'side door', metaphorically speaking [Video clip]

- I invite you to observe to this meeting as recorded in John's gospel, chapter 4

[watch video]

Now I invite you to reflect on this meeting

- either silently, or with some people nearby ...

[Slide]

How did Jesus meet this woman where she was?

What might this incident tell us, how might it encourage us

- in meeting people where they are?

[time for reflection/responses]

There are a number of interesting things about this meeting

- the man and woman are alone, that's a no-no
- the woman is a Samaritan, Jesus is a Jew
- never the twain shall meet, be courteous even - these are bitter enemies
- the woman came to the well in the scorching midday sun
- usually women came in the early morning
- why did she come then?
- was she trying to avoid something?

Further, this woman had been married five times

- and was presently living with a man not her husband
- that surely tells us what kind of person she was
- and it just goes to show, there really is nothing new under the sun!

So there is Jesus engaging deeply, not just making small talk

- with this unsavoury, enemy of the Jews, woman

The woman is intelligent, witty, strong

- Jesus is straight up with her and pulls no punches

The woman then leaves her jar and unashamedly runs back to town

- to people who had probably spurned her, mocked her, gossiped about her
- she told them all about Jesus
- Jesus who she had just met!
- (a new person visiting new people?)

Because of this encounter

- and the woman's enthusiasm which overcame all obstacles
- everyone in town went to see Jesus
- people streamed out to put their faith in Jesus!

All because Jesus met a woman at the well

This week's homework/take home task [Slide]

- over the next two or three months
- try to notice the people who come to the "wells" you frequent
- how might you meet them there ...