

Discipleship in Today's World: 'Just what is a disciple?'

David Watson in his book *Discipleship* (written 25 years ago) asks why the Christian church is so ineffective. He goes on to say:

'the vast majority of western Christians are church-members, pew-fillers, hymn-singers, sermon-tasters, Bible-readers, even born-again-believers or Spirit-filled-charismatics – but not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually to become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed, and the resultant impact on society would be staggering.'

These words are as challenging today as they were when first written! Over the coming months we will be looking at what discipleship means for us in the 21st century, if we are to impact society today as Christians.

Let's not forget that the gospel word for disciple is *mathetes* in Greek, which means 'learner' (ie pupil or apprentice). The first disciples were called to be alongside Jesus to observe his life and teaching. It was just the same for any rabbi with his students. They spent all of their time with him, to observe and learn from him, in order to become like him.

This is still true for all disciples in the 21st century; we are called to life-long learning alongside Jesus. This is not primarily about information gathering, but about learning to live the life of Jesus in every aspect of our lives. What would Jesus do if he had my job, my family or next door neighbours, or leisure time? A few years ago the wristband *WWJD* (what would Jesus do?) was very popular among some Christians. It is certainly the right question we need to ask ourselves in any given situation of everyday life.

'A disciple of Jesus is one who practises his presence and arranges his or her life in such a way as to live as Christ would live if he were them.' (Dallas Willard).

The Rev Paul Hardingham begins a new series on discipleship

He chose the cross road.
Darkness, desertion and desolation
Pierced him like the thorns on his chosen way.
In his broken, bleeding body,
Through the heat and dust and mockery,
Through the heaving crowds of feeble men
He stumbled with his death tree.
Up, up, up the steep and cruel high road
To the skull place of the outcast
Where the cross road had its end.
In the nailing and the piercing,
In the searing suffocation,
In the bearing of the whole world's filth
His cross road set me free.

Daphne Kitching