

Thought for the Day: 12-18 July 2021

by Colin Harding

Band of Brothers and Sisters

MONDAY 12th

I often find what Jesus is saying in the Gospels unclear and confusing! But... I take heart from the fact that the disciples, who spent three years on the road with Jesus, regularly failed to grasp the point of the message being delivered.

I also wonder what it must have been like to have been one of the disciples. To hang around with Jesus 24/7. With God.

The title this week was originally a nod to a WWII book, *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose, and made into an HBO drama series by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks (some of which was filmed on the former De Havilland site in Hatfield prior to redevelopment). Progress of the England football team under the direction of Gareth Southgate has somewhat overshadowed everything else this week. By the time you read this, we will know if football has finally come home!

I have added the 'Sisters' to reflect the part played by, and existence of, the women who followed and interacted with Jesus. It often seems that Jesus went against the patriarchal culture of his and subsequent times to include women in his ministry.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, as Jesus is about to leave his 'band of brothers/sisters', with his earthly mission complete, is a passage that both challenges me and offers great comfort. I am happy to take the comfort offered, but making disciples? Surely that is for others?

Jesus came to them and said:

'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.'

(Matthew 28. 18-20)

All bible quotes this week are from the Bible Society Contemporary English Version 1997



TUESDAY 13th

Yesterday, we looked at the last thing Jesus said to his followers in the Gospels. Today, one of the first.

'Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish.' (Matthew 4. 18)

As somebody who has usually been reticent to profess my faith publicly or give things up to serve Jesus, I love the fact the first disciples simply met Jesus once and off they went! Most likely not knowing what he meant by fishing for people but just knowing they had to follow Him. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark simply say that Jesus asked the four fishermen to follow Him, and they went. But in Luke's gospel we have the story of the re-casting of the nets, despite a fruitless (or 'fishless') night on the lake and the miracle of an unbelievable haul of fish. Being somewhat a 'doubting Thomas' by nature, I think I may have needed to see the fish first before I left everything I knew and went along.



When Simon Peter saw this happen, he knelt down in front of Jesus and said, "Lord, don't come near me! I am a sinner." Peter and everyone with him were completely surprised at all the fish they had caught. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were surprised too.

Jesus told Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you will bring in people instead of fish." The men pulled their boats up on the shore. Then they left everything and went with Jesus.

(Luke 5. 8-11)

WEDNESDAY 14th

Having played team sports from an early age and spending much of my working life either in or leading a team, I am fascinated by how managers and leaders go about selecting people for their teams. Andrew Goodman recently shared some insights into the great All Blacks team of recent years.

When I was at school, teams during PE lessons were often chosen by a couple of the better sports pupils selected by the teacher. It was usually predictable who would be left standing against the wall at the end. I really hope this doesn't happen anymore!



Jesus knew his mission from the outset of his ministry. He knew the goal. He chose people from diverse backgrounds to be part of his team. I can imagine there may have been whispers from the fishermen already chosen

(as well as the Pharisees) when a tax collector was chosen...

Levi was high-profile and many influential people would have been at the dinner he put on for Jesus. It gave Jesus a

great platform to get his message across and challenge those present. It must have been an experience for the disciples to have been around at such gatherings!

In his home, Levi gave a big dinner for Jesus. Many tax collectors and other guests were also there. The Pharisees and some of their teachers of the Law of Moses grumbled to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with those tax collectors and other sinners?"

Jesus answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to invite good people to turn to God. I came to invite sinners."

(Luke 5. 31-32)

THURSDAY 15th

There was a tabloid headline last week: 'Gazza – In Gareth we trust'.

As a Spurs fan I have a soft spot for Paul Gascoigne, who was one of the most gifted footballers I have seen. By the time you read this we will know whether his trust in Gareth Southgate was justified and whether football has at last 'Come Home'!

Although they didn't always seem to understand Jesus or his mission, the disciples did trust him. They had faith in him. But how much faith? I love the story of when Jesus was asleep in the back of a boat and a violent storm blew up. The disciples were terrified and afraid they would drown so they woke Jesus up and asked him to save them. Which he did... after questioning their faith.



It is so comforting for me that no matter what storms life throws up or how much or how little faith I have, Jesus, who can control the wind and waves, has it covered.

But Jesus replied, "Why are you so afraid? You don't have much faith". Then he got up and ordered the wind and the waves to calm down. And everything was calm.

The men in the boat were amazed and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him."

(Matthew 8. 26-27)

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FRIDAY 16th

The interaction between Jesus and his apostles is fascinating. We get a glimpse of the divine and power of God which is often overwhelming for them. We also see the human side, both from Jesus and the disciples. Peter is often at the centre of these insights, which makes him a very relatable character for me.

I love the image of Peter jumping over the side of the boat to walk over to Jesus across the water only to start to flounder as he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to notice the huge waves and what he is actually doing! He got

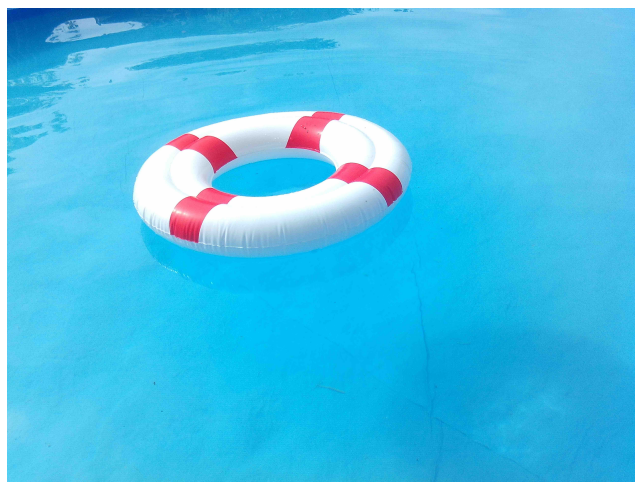
scared. I think I would have still been in the safety of the boat with the others muttering 'Stupid boy' (*Dad's Army*, for younger readers!).

There are squabbles amongst the group as to who is the greatest. They can't keep awake when Jesus really needs them. They are terrified when Jesus leaves them. But you also get the sense of camaraderie among them. You can only imagine what it was like to witness the miracles Jesus performed first-hand.

As I mentioned on Monday, I take real heart from the fact that their faith wavered and even disappeared on occasions, but Jesus always came through.

"Come on!" Jesus said. Peter then got out of the boat and started walking towards him. But when Peter saw how strong the wind was, he was afraid and started sinking. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Straight away, Jesus reached out his hand. He helped Peter up and said, "You don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?"

(Matthew 14. 29-31)



SATURDAY 17th

I am not sure what was in the water around Hertford in the 1980s and early 1990s, but many of my friends are proud Dads to wonderful daughters. Despite growing up in a modern western society and enjoying freedoms many women in the world today are denied, there have been - and still continue to be - many issues faced by our daughters not encountered by their male peers.



All 12 of the apostles named in the Gospels were men (little test for the quizzers among you – can you name them? Bonus point: Name the 13th), but although few of the women who were among the wider entourage of followers get mentioned by name, they were all an integral part of the group. In fact, on many occasions they show more faith, loyalty and common sense than the men. Or is that just the feminist in me?

I find questions popping into my head whenever I read the Gospels...

Why didn't one of the men tell Martha to go and sit with Jesus and Mary and finish preparing the food? (Luke 10. 38-42)

If the woman who was healed by Jesus just by touching his cloak had been in the boat instead of Peter, would she have got further across the water towards Jesus? (Matthew 8. 43-48)

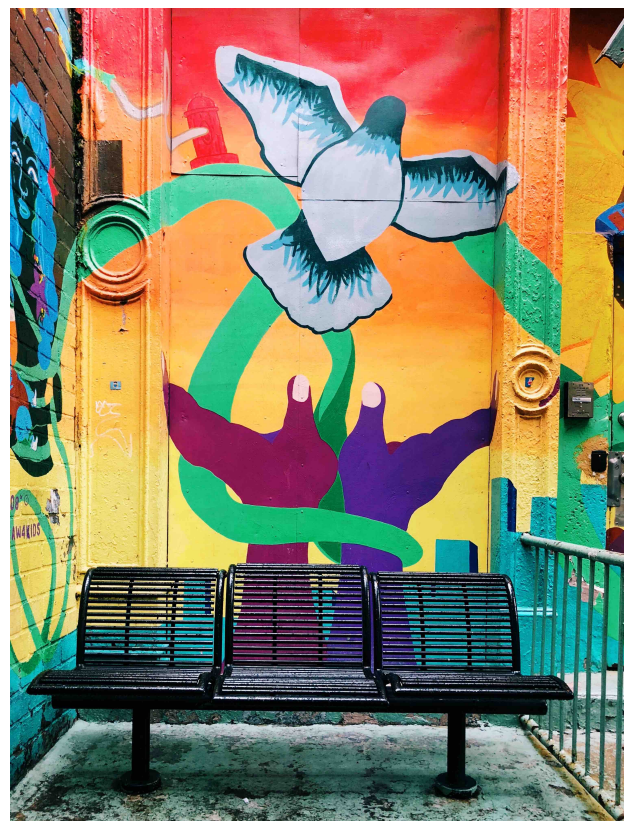
Why did the risen Jesus reveal himself to the two Marys first? (Matthew 28. 1-10)

Soon after this, Jesus was going through towns and villages, telling the good news about God's kingdom. His twelve apostles were with him, so were some women who had been healed of evil spirits and all sorts of diseases. One of the women was Mary Magdalene, who once had seven demons in her. Joanna, Susanna, and many others had also used what they owned to help Jesus and his disciples. Joanna's husband, Chuza was one of Herod's officials.

(Luke 8. 1-3)

SUNDAY 18th

I still remember a three-week course I attended in 1984 during my time with Barclays Bank. The bonds you form and the fun you have during such times live long in the memory. To share part of the life and ministry of Jesus with friends and family must have been some roller coaster! I also remember the sense of sadness, and to some extent loss, when the course came to an end and we went our separate ways. Needless to say, these feelings did not last too long!



I can only imagine how devastated and scared the disciples of Jesus were after his arrest and execution. It is easy to empathise with Peter who denied being a follower in the immediate aftermath of those shocking events.

Great encouragement has to be taken from what the apostles and disciples went on to achieve once they had been transformed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that is available to each one of us.

"Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you."

(John 14. 16)