

I'd like to invite you to come and to church with me this week, the kids are putting on a Christmas play and it's going to be great, can I give you a ride?

So often we don't ask because we don't know how OR we worry about what if they say NO.

Today I want to talk about the power of an invitation, I want to encourage you to invite people to church, to our church, to this church!

Our goal is to see people come to know Christ and to live a better life because of knowing him. But one specific step on the way is being invited to church.

"I go to St Peters Church, it's great, you should come, I'll meet you there or can I give you a ride?"

Let's practice, just out loud this time.

I believe lots of people never come to church, because they are never asked. If someone says no – no worries, treat it like if you invite them to a movie and they say no.

That's today's message in a nutshell. We should invite people to church, because we encounter God here, God is especially present at church, to touch people's lives, to heal, to forgive. God is here.

Christ to the city, the city to Christ. (pause)

I want to run a model past you today. I want ask you to examine this model with me from a practical and a biblical point of view, and then I want to test it on you. Are you up for it?

I'm going to call the Model; Aiming for YES and I want to wrestle with it together.

Here's the model. The best way to get a YES is

For the right person.

To ask the right question.

At the right time.

In the right place.

With the right tone.

5 is better than 4, 4 is better than 3, 3 is better than 2, 2 is better than 1 and 1 is better than none.

So to kick it off, the best person to ask grandad to church, if he doesn't usually come is his grand-daughter, the right question would be Grandad would you come and see me in the play at church, the right place is face to face when he's relaxed and enjoying seeing his granddaughter, and the right time is when he's heard a little bit about the play and knows it's a special guest Sunday – and there's plenty of time for him to arrange to get there. The right tone, is no pressure. Sounds like a yes, doesn't it granddads!

So who are you the right person for?

Now it's really important to understand I'm not talking about a manipulation, I'm not talking about a trick, just optimising the opportunity. This is not setting grandad up for a bad experience.

Let me give you another example. When I worked for the Alpha Course part of my job was to ring partners up and invite them to the alpha partners event. I was the right person to do this because I was the Auckland co-ordinator, in some ways I was the one they were paying for, so it was good for me to invite them along, tell them how we were going and thank them for their support. Now Ray used to encourage me to ask the right question. Did you get your invitation – which we had mailed out, and are you coming. We weren't cold calling we were following up, and the tone was helpful, and of course if they hadn't got the invitation then we could fix that. Right time, between 5 and 8 at night, it was a long night for me, but it got people at a time they could check with their spouse, it got when they were at home and I wasn't intruding on their workplace. Those phone calls probably doubled our attendance, because people knew we wanted them there, and we did.

Right person, right question, right time, right place, right tone. You can't always get all five, but the more the better. There is also a really important balance of tone, I wouldn't ask if I didn't want you to come, but there is no pressure.

So who are you the right person for?

Pat was the session clerk at my second church, when I knew her she had been an elder for 20 years, involved in everything and a trained counsellor, her daughter is a Presy minister. Pat came to church because 3 neighbours invite her in one week, they just wanted her to come.

Len was telling me a similar story, when he and Rosalie brought Jonathan and Matthew along to get baptised, he was planning just to drop the kids off, but Fergus I think it was asked him, and will you be bringing the boys. Len tells me he wasn't listening carefully and just said Yes, and then he realised what the question was and that he had just said yes! The power of a question.

So who are you the right person for?

Abraham the father of faith is sitting under the sacred trees at Mamre and 3 strangers walk past, he spots them and he runs out to see them. Strange behaviour, he's in the right place at the right time and he asks the right question, if I have found favour in your eyes – he turns his act of hospitality into a request. He doesn't imply that they are putting him out, but offers a little water and a little bread. Think how different that is to, well I guess I could get you something to eat if you insist. Notice how he puts himself in the right place, he goes out, he invites in, and then his actions are wonderful he offers a little bread but provides a banquet. A calf, some yoghurt and plenty of milk. He is very generous.

If we are going to invite people to meet Jesus here at church and through our lives, we need to do a good job of hospitality. As a church, we need to notice people who are new among us, not to swamp them, but to welcome them. And not just welcome them to church, but

welcome people into our lives. You might be able to ask someone to lunch, at home or a café, but more important, let's listen to each other's stories and get to know each other.

So who are you the right person for?

I heard this lovely story some years ago about two colleagues who had worked together for years one was a believer in Jesus and one wasn't and one day the Jesus follower said to his friend, I'd like to buy you lunch next week and talk to you about my faith, would you come? I love that question, there's hospitality – I get lunch out of it. There's no trap, he knows what they are going to talk about. And there are boundaries, if it doesn't go anywhere, it stays at that lunch. It's not at work, it's good time.

Who are you the right person for? Could you have an email conversation with someone?

When a boy wants to ask a girl the big question he spends time setting it up, he makes sure she's the one, he practices the words and the tone, he chooses the right place romantic and the right time, sunset is always popular, and he asks.

Jesus was a master at setting up situations. I wonder whether the calling of the first disciples was a bit more of a process as the boys committed more. Luke tells us that the boys had been fishing all night and then had let Jesus use their boat to preach from and then he tells them to go out into deep water in the middle of the day. The wrong time to go fishing, and they catch fish. Peter and Andrew, James and John are gobsmacked and then Jesus nails it, don't be afraid come with me and we will catch people.

Jesus invited Matthew a tax collector to become his disciple, might have been wrong time, wrong place, but it was the right questions.

Jesus saw a woman by Jacob's well, was this the right time and place, but he asks the right question can you get me some water. And then they have a deep conversation.

Business, how do you get someone on board? You get the introduction from the right person, someone you both know and trust. You ask the right question, have a look at this and tell me what you think, you ask in a business setting at a business time not when you have someone trapped at a social event.

I remember my friend Evan's advice to young people looking for a job, don't always ask directly, make an appointment at their office, I'm looking for a job in computing, these are my skills who do you suggest that I talk to?

Ok back to faith.

My friends if we are going to bring Christ to the city and the City to Christ; we need to get out there and put faith "Christ" on the city's agenda. We need to go and to invite. Richard Harkness invited our mayor Greg Brownless to our Brigade breakup, and he came, turns out he's got the Queen's badge.

What I want to do today, is encourage you to ask someone to church every week until Christmas.

“I go to St Peters Church, it’s great, you should come, I’ll meet you there or can I give you a ride?” Use our Christmas activities as a prompt.

Now we are going to practice. Please stand up, and turn to the person next to you and practice the words, no pressure, there are already here so they are not going to be embarrassed by being asked.

I go to St Peters Church, it’s great, you should come,

Find another person, I go to St Peters Church, it’s great, you should come, and a third. I go to St Peters Church, it’s great, you should come.

Let me finish by repeating the reason that we all gather here, we believe that God is real and that he made you, he loves you and he has a purpose for you.

You are not an accidental result of random chemistry; you are made in the image of God himself.

But our world is broken, our first ancestors turned away from God and ever since we have in significant ways been separated from God.

That’s why God sent his son Jesus into time and space, to rescue us from ourselves and for him. God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants you to know his love and his purpose for you.

The only way for us to come to know God is through Jesus, he came to tell us about God and he died as a sacrifice to take away our sins which cause a barrier between us and God.

If you want to know the love of God, the friendship of God and the power of God; God asks you to become a follower of Jesus. To accept him as your saviour and Lord and he will come into your life with power and Love.

Let’s pray.