

I love tramping, I love getting away and having all I need on my back. I love sleeping under a fly in the open, although I do quite like a hut! I was so sad to miss the tramp up the Kauri trees a couple of weeks ago that I went and did the walk on my own just before Easter. It had a lot of river crossings. I think altogether. And as I looked at the first river I was tempted by the stones, many tramping's when they get to a river look to see if there are rocks that are well spaced so that you can cross the river without getting your feet wet. It's rock hopping and we are all tempted to do it. (let me show you.)

Two years ago I took a week's study leave and did a course in outdoor education. One of the things that stuck with me from that course was how the instructors made it clear that we should never rock hop. The safe way to cross a river is to get your feet wet and aim for the bottom of the river and find the most stable place. The big advantage is that you are far less likely to slip or trip and roll an ankle or fall over, and even if you do slip when in the river you are far less likely to hurt yourself.

Our instructors talked about guiding, when you are guiding you always walk in the water, when you are out on a multi-day trip you always walk in the water; because if you are the guide and break your ankle, how's that going to work out? So that's the theory but what really struck me about Sean and Gemma is they didn't just teach it, they lived it. I never once saw them get to a river and rock hop, they habitually got their feet wet. And ever since I have been trying to teach myself to do that. So as I walked up to the twin kauri's as no one was watching I habitually got my feet wet. Hold onto that idea.

This month is Vision month, a month to remind ourselves of the Vision we believe that God has put before us as a congregation. Our Vision is 'Christ to the City and the City to Christ'. Can we say that together please? Our Vision speaks of seeing us going out of the church and taking Christ, Jesus, our faith into the city; that might be taking Jesus with us when we walk down Spring street, it might be taking Christ with us to St Peters House or to Childcare, it might be taking Christ with us to the University of Waikato in Tauranga or to Girls College or to Pyes Pa. Our Vision has a focus in the CBD of Tauranga, but also means wherever we live and work in Tauranga. Part two 'the city to Christ', it means inviting people that we meet in the city to Church, inviting people from Childcare, from St Peters house from school, to church but ultimately what we want to do is invite people to meet Jesus Christ, to get baptised and to come to a deep lifelong relationship with Christ. 'Christ to the city, the city to Christ'; us going out and drawing people in.

I've given you one example from Christmas, Christmas carols at the waterfront is an explicit example of taking Christ into the city, our Christmas dinner is an explicit example of inviting people from the city to Church and potentially an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Later this year we are collaborating with TSCF to bring a dramatized version of the gospel of Mark to the city, we hope to perform it here, and then hopefully at the university and hopefully at the waterfront.

For 2019 I want to use 2 words to sum up the Vision, witness and mentor – to be a Christ carrier where ever we go, and to offer and initiate mentoring relationships with each other and people starting to come to know Christ. So I'm going to talk for 2 weeks about being a witness and for 2 weeks about mentoring., and each week I will have a short interview with one of our elders at the end of the message.

So what do you think my connection with rock hopping is?

I want to encourage you that every conversation you have is a river, and I want to encourage you to get feet wet every time, to take the opportunity to have a spiritual conversation if the opportunity is there. Now I'm not talking about starting every conversation with the question are you saved, but I am saying let's habitually be ready for the conversation to take a spiritual turn.

These two girls are safe river crossing and supporting each other. Now the other photo is fabulous because I only got it this week. This is Danny and Lily literally having to cross a river to take part in an outreach with their Mission Community. Danny has had a stroke and this river crossing will not have been easy, they are both getting their shorts wet. Let me encourage you, every time you have a conversation with someone who may not know Christ, look for the opening. Let me come back to that. Habitually get your feet wet!

Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus is the son of God who came to earth to tell us and show us what God is like. The bible calls him the image of the invisible God. In John 4 we read the story of Jesus' encounter with a woman at a well. I want you to start by noticing verse 6, Jesus tired as he was from the journey. Jesus was walking from Judea in the South to Galilee in the North, a journey of perhaps 100 km's. So the first thing I want you to notice was that Jesus was tired, "kopiao", weary, tired maybe even exhausted. Jesus was not at his best, he hadn't had a great night's sleep and was buzzing with anticipation about the message he was about to deliver, he hadn't just finished putting the finishing touches to his greatest outreach presentation, he was just tired. But he didn't miss the opportunity. He habitually took the opportunities to have spiritual conversations with people when the chance arose. That's all I want to say. Jesus got tired, that's called part of his being a real human being, and he was tired. Jesus was stuffed and he sat down by the well.

Back to our Vision, Christ to the city, now there are three things I want to encourage you about. And in some ways they are 3 voices. The first thing I want to encourage you about, is none of us make someone else a Christian. If someone comes to believe in Jesus and follow him, it's never primarily because of us. First and foremost, it is always God. It is God who reaches out to people, to the world, to the city. God first. And God uses lots of people, it's cumulative. God might use us several times to speak to someone, or more likely he will use lots of different people to put himself on our radar. So when we talk about witness we don't have to do it all we just have to do our little bit. I've talked to people when have come to faith, and it's often that God has spoken to them through several people. God does that to me, he gangs up on me, when I hear the same message from 3-4 people I'm thinking Woo. So when the chance to have a spiritual conversation happens, don't feel you have to do it all. You might just have the tiniest little bit to do today. 2. But don't avoid, if you are in conversation and your friend says something with the potential of spiritual depth, do something, even just notice it. Don't; change the subject. 3 Sometimes I'm with someone and I feel anxious that I should say something spiritual, ask a question or say I went to church last week. That feeling is a nudge from the Holy Spirit, do you know what it feels like? Do you know what it feels like to receive a nudge from the Holy spirit? William can I demonstrate? "Go on." Those three are all I am talking about today, when I talk about bearing witness. Knowing I might only have a tiny part to play, not avoiding the conversation if it comes up and thirdly saying something if I get the nudge.

I did a course once on starting conversations, and I sat in a Mall for hours practicing, and I never started a conversation by saying nothing. And once I said something, it was all Go.

Back to Jesus, verse 7, will you give me a drink. Pretty simple eh? Or was it. It was about the 6th hour, mid-day I think, not the normal time for a woman to be at the well. He was a man and she was a woman on her own. I don't think she would have felt harassed by him, but he was breaking a cultural taboo. A woman a Samaritan, and here's the beauty of it, he starts by asking for help, there is a connection of shared humanity here. Her response show that she knew the rules, 'How can you ask me for drink?' He's moved on from zero. She could have said nothing and just given him a drink, she could have ignored him - but instead she begins a deeper conversation. There is so much here, but the second thing I want you to notice is that Jesus started with a request for help. And she responds.

Let me go back to the Vision, Christ to the city. If you hear a spiritual opening, a reference to something deeper or even a spiritual challenge, here's 3 questions that you can use. These can be in your toolbox; we are going to come back to them many times this year. 1. What do you mean by that? 2. Where did you get that idea? 3 Have you considered?

Let's take an example, say you were talking about the mosque shooting and someone said, well you all believe in the same God basically – You might say what do you mean by that? Or better you might say, where did you get that idea from? Or you might be ready to respond and say, have you considered that Christians and Muslims believe quite a few things in common about God, but also somethings that are very different.

Or what about Israel Folau, what would you say if his comments came up in conversation. I suspect I would want to run and hide. Well I'm offering these questions, so which one would you use? Well I'd go to "Have you considered?" Have you considered what Israel was actually trying to say? Or Have you considered that Israel might have been mis-quoting the bible little bit. What the verse says is that people who do a range of things that were considered sinful, shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Now that phrase could start a whole further conversation.

Right let's return to Jesus and the woman from Samaria for a final time. She initiates a deeper conversation – you are a Jew I'm a Samaritan, how can you ask me for a drink. She didn't close down the conversation. She didn't say no. She asked. And then Jesus launched off into a great conversation about spirits of living water. You see that's what Jesus has to offer each of us. Faith in Jesus is like a spirit of living water in our hearts, God's Holy Spirit is that living water and it can change the ordinary into the extra-ordinary. But today I don't want to get into some fabulous ideas about where our spiritual conversations could go. I really only want to make one point.

Don't be a rock hopper, get your feet wet. If we habitually approach conversations as if they are a chance that might go deeper, then God will give us opportunities. Christ to the City. I'm not saying go around being super intense, but just listen for the chance to take surface chatter deeper. I was listening to Steve the Pastor at South City Baptist this week and he encouraged us that the goal of conversation need not just be communication but could be communion, where you me and God share in the conversation.

That's our vision.