

Philippians 3 v 8-11

*What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

## Belong, Believe, Become

This is my Church, this is your church, this is God's church. And I think it's good every so often to talk about what sort of church we want this church to be.

I want this church to be a place where we can sing and praise God. Where generally I feel the joy! Feel the love. But I also desperately want this to be a church that you can come to when you're feeling down. Like Life has just delivered you a sucker punch, and your world is shaky. It's good to be joyful but it's also OK to be shattered.

I want this to be a church where you can come and feel close to God, but also a place to come if you are not sure that you believe at all but just maybe something is drawing you.



I want this church to be a place where you can come if you're pregnant and it's all a bit messy; or if you don't have kids, or your single. I want this to be a church where a 2-year-old can race around the sanctuary a couple of times, and a church where we know each other well enough to be able to scoop him up on his third time around, when he needs distracting. I want this to be a safe church, and a church that takes risks. A church where you are welcome if you have mental health challenges, and a church where we set firm limits on violence. I want this church to be a church where your gay children will know that they are welcome and will be loved. But also a church that takes the bible seriously as the word of God, spoken through culture, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. A place where we don't gloss over the challenging words of scripture, to all of us. A church where we can sing in the spirit and pray expecting miracles, but also support each other when it comes time to die.

Do you want this to be a church like that, is that what God's church would look like to you? Why no text me your line ideas, and I'll put them up on the Blog.

I was at a Christians Against Poverty pastor's day last month and they were talking about a strategy for the church, which really resonated with me. It's nothing new but I thought they put it really well. In our culture today people need to start with belonging. We need to create a space for people from outside the Christian world to be welcomed and encounter Jesus through us. Through our love and our community. I love the phrase building a plausibility shelter for the gospel, not just intellectually – but with Love. It's a big challenge to be a welcoming community. I'm not talking about a friendly community. That's talking to people we know, welcoming is walking across the room and meeting people who are different. And not welcoming people into our church. Welcoming people into our lives.



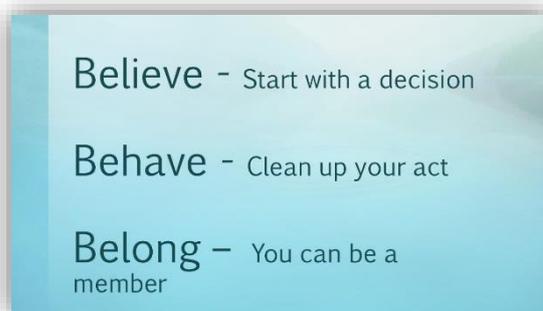
Then to believe is to be always pointing people to Jesus, not to religious rules and laws. But to the person of Jesus. Belief in the scriptures does not mean primarily believing a set of facts – it means trusting in one you have encountered. And often that starts with believing in Jesus as a good teacher, as an incredible man; and

then later beginning to discover that he is more than that. There are different pathways to faith in Jesus. But church is a place to hear about the God of the Bible and God made human in Jesus

Then to talk about becoming... Becoming like Jesus. The more we encounter Jesus and then believe in him – then the door way is open to becoming like him. And we are all on that same pathway, whether we have been on the journey for 5 mins or 50 years, I love that Paul talks about his passion to know Jesus and to become like him.

But let's remember why we often struggle with these church culture questions. It's because for a long time the pathway looked like this.

In evangelical culture the doorway for a time was, you start by believing, you would hear about Jesus and make a decision to follow Jesus. That was the entryway into the church. Then often what was required was a long time of cleaning up your act – starting to behave correctly. Learning the Christian way and only then could you belong or be a member. It wasn't always explicit – but it was certainly taken as read.



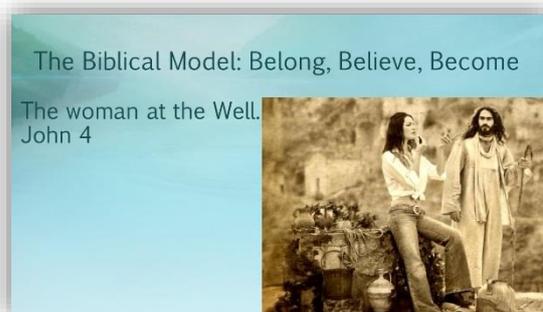
This is not all bad as a model, but it probably belongs to a former era when people knew more about the bible, and there was a much greater agreement within our culture about what behaving looked like. When I was a kid you needed to learn enough, go through communicate classes or catechesis before you could receive communion. In some ways it felt like believe before belong. Have a think about what your experience of church when you came to believe was?

Sometimes churches have required you to behave, before you could believe, and only then could you belong. Do we sometimes have it the wrong way around in our minds?

What I want to do now is argue that Belong, Believe, Become is actually the Jesus model.

I wonder if any of you know the story in John 4 about a Samaritan woman who at Midday came to a well where Jesus was sitting, and as she was there Jesus asked her for a drink. There's a debate today about whether her many husbands suggest that she was a wonton woman or more likely an unlucky hard done by woman. Either way, Jesus turned convention on its head by asking her for a drink. That definitely wasn't done! Jesus started by creating a little bit of community with her. He clearly reached out to her before she did anything to him. I don't think it's a stretch

at all to say that he invited her to belong in his circle by asking her for water. Then he starts to talk to her about Spiritual matters – about Living water. He invites her to believe in him. Only later does he bring up the issue of her marital status – where clearly things aren't happy - she's onto partner number six and this one hasn't even had the decency to marry her. Then they got involved in a heavy theological conversation – ending up in him declaring that he is the messiah. Now let's have a look at that becoming. Because she becomes an evangelist. She goes and tells people in her town her story. Asking could this be the Christ? V29. Remember Christ means perfect king, great leader, rescuer. And note that John goes on to say in verse 39. Many Samaritans from that town believed because of the woman's testimony. We don't know what happened to her and marital status – but actually it fades into the background because she was becoming a follower of Jesus.



There's a tax collector in Luke 19. Zacchaeus, a hated member of the collaborators, like a member of the town council in Vichy France under Hitler. He's nosy, he goes ahead and climbs a tree so that he can see Jesus and hear what he's saying. Just like someone listening on the edge of a conversation. Hiding. Well what does Jesus do! He sees him and again he makes connection with him. He creates belonging, by saying I'm coming to your house for tea. I love Jesus hospitality. He never once is recorded as cooking a meal in his own house. In fact, it's debatable whether he even had a house. Belong. Now something happened really quickly about believe here. Because Zacchaeus heard Jesus being slandered for his sake. People began to mutter. Jesus was spending some of his reputation on this guy. Like being seen with prostitutes and drunkards. And something added up for Zacchaeus straight away. It doesn't say it. But clearly he believes. Because his next action turns his life around. He becomes – he gives half his possessions to the poor and if he has cheated any one he will repay them 4 times. It's a wonder he would have any money left. This is a story of becoming like Jesus, holy and good and generous; and in the quickness of it you can miss Belong and Believe – but I guarantee you they are there and they are there in that order.

The Biblical Model: Belong, Believe, Become

The woman at the Well.  
John 4

Zacchaeus up a tree.  
Luke 19



Thirdly the disciples. Jesus creates belonging – come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men and women. He gathered them, he created community, actually he had gathered crowds with his teaching and then choose twelve from among them. Sure they believe, but it's a growing thing; by half way through Matthew's gospel Matt 16 Jesus is asking them who do you say I am. And only at this point does Peter grasp it. Belief is a journey as well as a moment. I think the disciples followed Jesus as an earthly messiah for a long time before they began to believe in him as the son of God. And then comes become/ behave. Straight away peter gets it wrong. Later he denies. In fact, the gospels are full of stories of the failures of the disciples to be like Jesus. We should be so careful of being self-righteous. It's a lifetime to start to get things right.

The Biblical Model: Belong, Believe, Become

The woman at the Well.  
John 4

Zacchaeus up a tree.  
Luke 19

The Disciples  
Matt 16



So church Helping People Find, follow and Know Jesus. That's our Mission Statement – Vision what we want to do, Mission how we are going to achieve it. – does it fit this model? Does find sound like believing first? Follow sound like Become. OR. Does helping people find Jesus start in belonging, do we actually help people find Jesus reflected in us and in community. By creating plausibility shelters of love in this building and outside this building. Like little umbrellas of belonging where you can start to believe. Then once we have demonstrated that we care, we can start talking about believing – about following Jesus. Believing not just in our heads, but believing by starting to follow. Again I wonder whether we should talk about knowing Jesus and then following. But actually the bible uses the words completely differently, following is starting to believe, knowing is a much deeper level of transformation. That's when we encourage each other to become like Jesus by our deep commitment to knowing Jesus. I have captured by Philippians this week. I consider everything a loss compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus! I want to know Christ. I want to be found in Jesus. Not having a pretend goodness that comes from religious practices, but that comes from his life growing in mine. And here's the sharp bit I want to know Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering.

Helping people Find,  
Follow and Know Jesus

Belong – Find Jesus in us  
Believe – Start to follow Jesus  
Become – Fully devoted



Let's renew our commitment to helping people Find, Follow and Know Jesus.

What does belonging look like. My favourite example is Christmas dinner here at St Peters. For 27 years we have thrown a banquet and invited the City, the young, the old, the poor, the lonely, big families, singles; and everyone find a place, as a host or a guest, a cook or a volunteer. It's not perfect – but to me it's a picture of our church at its best. So let's make sure the doors of our church and hearts are open wide. If you're homeless you're welcome here. If you're frighteningly wealthy you're welcome here. If you've been to gaol – you're welcome. If you are violent then, then the boundaries are clear. If you are violent you are not welcome here. I regularly trespass people. But if you overcome your violence after 2 years you are welcome back. In the meantime, if you are not dangerous the next time you turn up I might have a coffee with you on the street. Good boundaries are part of belonging and I will not have children threatened or partners stalked.



Belief is a journey you have to talk through, you have to think it through, we can't expect anyone to take things just on authority any more. We need to present the one who we believe in. We need to – and by that I mean you – you are the church – you and me – we have to make Jesus part of our discussion here. And outside there. Perhaps asking what would a Jesus perspective on this be. If John the Baptist said he came to make the road flat, then Jesus has something to say about highway construction. While I have been emphasising believe in the person, there is also a place to discover a Christian world-view. That all human beings are made in the image of God. That belief in Jesus has transformed millions of lives. That we are all fallen, whether you take the Adam and eve story literally or not – it's a story of great truth. The line that separates good and evil runs through every human heart. Jesus came to be the sacrifice that reconciles truth and mercy. We need to welcome people in and then point them to Jesus. I was telling a friend just this week – how so easily we can look to people, friends, partner, parents for that deep acceptance and love – but the only one who truly satisfies is Jesus. You have to turn that from talk into fact. And Believe involves action, it takes follow – search out Jesus, turn towards him, start to follow. Following precedes becoming. Starting to follow Jesus is the first step, becoming truly like him is the goal.



And then there is a life time of becoming. Let me repeat Paul's words. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. *“8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have thrown away all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”*



Or as Peterson translates, *“All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, first hand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant. I’ve dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. And when we are pursuing devotion to Jesus like this – it should result in love and a deep, deep desire to build community for others. The more devoted to Christ we are the more outreaching to others we are.”*

This is my Church, this is your church, this is God’s church. Is that a picture of church you can embrace?

Rev. Simon McLeay

