

Discipleship and Trust

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[0 : 0 0] As we pray together, Father God, may your word this morning encourage us and empower us afresh. In Jesus' name, amen.

Why does this surprise you? I love that line in this scripture. Why does this surprise you? We are called to witness and trust.

And maybe you can recall, like I can, moments in your life where not only your life was changed, but in your life someone else's life was changed too because you witnessed.

Because you took that time to stand alongside someone and sense that encouragement that the Lord gave you for that moment in time. Because we took a step of faith.

And here in this morning's reading is one of those most beautiful, amazing, powerful, emotional encounters in scripture that we read that really, really encourages me.

[1 : 0 5] And I hope it encourages you too. And yet for some, the miraculous nature of this encounter that we've heard about this morning between Peter and John and this man who had his life changed, dramatically and beautifully transformed and changed, dramatically and beautifully transformed and changed in an instant, maybe for some beyond our understanding.

A leap or a step of faith too far maybe. Whether it's healing, whether it's healing, whether it's healing, emotional, physical, whether it's a reawakening in somebody's life of their faith, a new beginning, healing from the past, looking with fresh hope towards something in the future.

We witness, we witness, we witness, we witness, we witness, we witness, we witness, we are called to witness the realisation that Jesus is with us. And is with us, not just with us as a presence, but with us in power.

We are called to these encounters, each and every one of us. It's not just for a few who may think that they are super spiritual or whatever.

We are each and every one of us called as disciples and followers of Christ. We are all called to witness to our faith. Our Christianity, our faith, our following of Jesus, I can assure you is not a spectator sport.

[2 : 2 7] Please hear that this morning. We are not here to just watch on in awe and wonder. We are called to be participants in what God is doing.

This is alive, it's engaging, and it's real. And it has been so down the ages and will be today as well. I've been rereading, it's a little book, and if you know that I am a visual learner, you'll know that I always look for a little book to read.

It's my thing. But one of the little books, but with a big message that I've been reading, is Practicing the Presence of God. And it's an amazing book, and I would encourage you to reread it, because it was teachings collected about a man called Brother Lawrence, who lived in the 17th century as a Carmelite monk.

Now, the compilation of letters that people brought together, as well as records of his conversation, of those who saw and witnessed Brother Lawrence's ministry.

Was he a big stage speaker? No, he wasn't. Was he, did he write theological books? No, he didn't. He washed dishes.

[3 : 43] That was his job. In the monastery, he washed dishes. And people came from far and wide to stand beside him, and I hope they helped with the drying up.

But they came to stand alongside him, to hear his wisdom of all that God was saying in him and through him. And lives were changed and transformed, so much so that people wrote about it.

The presence of God that was on him and in him and in his everyday workplace. And again, that is where God is at work with us. And every day, in our workplace, wherever we are, those who just came to be with him.

And we are each called to be witnesses. In each and every place that we're going to be this week, let's seek and ask more and more of the presence of God in our lives.

And trust in him in the everyday. Be encouraged. Trust in God. He is with us 24-7. So let's come back to our scripture.

[4 : 54] Peter and John remember just a short while before that they were hidden away in an upper room. They were afraid. They were frightened men. They wouldn't go out and witness as they are doing in our scripture today.

But something happened. And they were transformed and changed because of the risen Jesus. Their faith had been probably at rock bottom.

Then they transformed, empowered, encouraged, enthused through the risen Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit working in them and through him. As have we, I hope.

Because we have that opportunity. We have seen. We heard. We know that Jesus is risen and we can go out empowered afresh in the Holy Spirit today to do what they've been doing.

Now, I don't know what you're like at gifts. I don't know what you're like at gifts. I'm probably, I'm not being, yeah, I'm not just speaking to the guys here, but it's good to listen, guys.

[6 : 02] It's good to listen. I have learned over 41 years of marriage that it's good to listen. And I listen during the year.

And often Mandy will come and she will just drop a subtle hint and say, oh, that's really nice. I like that. And so I squirrel back into the shop, whatever time, and you get this gift in.

And then when it comes to an anniversary or Christmas sort of thing, oh, wow, that's great. And the gift isn't so much in the giving, but I love watching the gift being received.

Surely that's God for us. Surely that's God for us. He must enjoy us using and seeing the gifts that he so freely gives to each and every one of us. And in our story, here are two men who know the blessing and the transformational change that they have experienced.

And they want to share this gift with other people. They trust and they know. This gift to them through Jesus, his ministry and power, isn't a gift to keep to themselves.

[7 : 11] This is a gift to share. Look again at the text. They are on their way to pray. One day, Peter and John were going to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

Really important line in the scripture. They haven't jettisoned what they're doing in the everyday. They go back. They've gone back to what they are doing because of the past.

They are going about their everyday business. That's the place in which they ministered. And they are open in every moment to the power of God and the opportunities.

If anything, it is increased in them. Increased in them as it will do in us. A deep, deep desire to serve and praise God because of what they've experienced.

And there they are faced with what? Day after day, he has sat there. Challenge or opportunity? And that's the thing that faces all of us.

[8 : 12] Is this a challenge or an opportunity? So often we see issues that we would rather pass by. Let's be honest. Are we being honest this morning?

A few people are nodding. Often we see things that we would rather pass by, wouldn't we? This guy has been taking up his place here for years in his life, begging.

So what did he do? He asked for money. And isn't that just an easy fix? So often that's just an easy fix for us.

Honestly, it is. You see in this reasoning, as it's fresh for us today in our discipleship and apprenticeship as it was then. Let's throw a bit of money at it and move on.

And so often, you know, let's pay someone else to do the ministry. You know, I've seen that in churches for years. Let's pay somebody else to do the ministry and therefore it lets us off the hook.

[9 : 14] Let's throw money at it and we can walk away with a nice, warm, fuzzy feeling because we've done something. This man asked for money, but in their heart, that they know that they have far more to offer him.

They've got far more than the money. In fact, they didn't have any money in their pocket. You see, my frustration as a Christian and in some areas of church, life is that we seek survival rather than the freedom that Jesus brings.

Let's not just carry on with the ordinary, passing it by, but let's engage with it in the power of the Holy Spirit. And that's true to our Christian witness. This scripture screams at me, we have a gift to share, share it.

Share it with people. Trust more in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. If there's a verse, the fridge magnet business would go out of business without that verse.

I've seen it on so many different fridges. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. If we need to hold on to that, I don't know what's going to happen, Lord, but I know with you things can.

[10 : 24] We have a gift of offering Jesus to people new life and new freedom. Freedom from guilt, freedom from... If that's an ice cream van, mine is a Mivy. Is that right?

I'll just share with you a minute. I'm glad we've got recordings here that we put in because I said to Mandy, on that great day when the Lord calls me home, I want... I want... Instead of going out to Bell's, I'd like an ice cream van played because that was my joy as a child.

You know, so please remember that, will you, if my children don't. Freedom... Jumps on a horse riding by. Coming back. Freedom from guilt. Jesus brings freedom from guilt, freedom from issues of the past, freedom from a lack of self-worth, freedom from lies that have been spoken over us in our life.

We offer people hope and a new dignity. That's what was happening that day. Just don't give me money. Give me something else. And they had it in their pocket and they gave it to him in full, what Jesus had to offer.

We offer people hope and life everlasting. That's what the cross is about. We are in that Easter season. We are an Easter people. Peter and John, if they had money, they may have been tempted, as you and I have done, and just give and move on.

[11 : 43] Again, let's examine our hearts. I just sense sometimes we are given options and challenges and opportunities.

And for them, that day, these two men, there was an option, an opportunity, and a challenge. But they knew the power that they were walking and living in.

They weren't given the option because they had no money. Isn't that interesting? No money in their pocket. So they fell back and relied on God. Isn't that important?

I may have cash. I may have a... Lord, I just want to come back to you because you are the beginning and you are the first and you are my all in all. But they know a deep sense of compassion that the Holy Spirit gives them and they can do more for this man.

The gospel according to Clive Jennings. I'm really sorry, pal. I haven't been to the cash point. I haven't been to the cash point. But what I can do is, would you like me to pray with you?

[12 : 49] Big step for many of us. But stepping out in faith is so important. Now this is where it gets exciting and faith-filled for us as witnesses and disciples because we know what we have to share and you will know the scenarios in your own life of how this works.

You know the person at the bus stop in the morning who on that wet morning with which we have had many is looking for lawn on a Monday morning, stood at the bus stop and you smile and you say, morning, how are you doing?

Not so good. Do you mind if I sit with you on the bus? And you talk. And as you talk, you're praying and there may be an opportunity that the Lord gives you to pray for them.

It's about a step out in faith. You will know the scenarios in your workplace, the places to which you go, the places that we're going to be tomorrow morning. Lord, show me the opportunities. Silver and gold have I none.

But what I have, I can give you. And it's far more than that. I've got a story of a friend and I'm so glad Mandy's here because Mandy is my pearl of wisdom at times like this.

[14 : 07] Because we were, a friend of mine had had a horrific incident, had witnessed a horrific incident in his job. Ian was his name. And he had witnessed this and because of the effect it had on him, he had been told that he wouldn't work again.

He was waking up at night screaming with night terrors because he had seen his friend killed in front of him, his colleague. We happened to meet with them just by chance on a holiday on a campsite down in Devon.

And our children ran back and said, oh, you know, they're there. So we went down, they said, do you want to stay for barbecue? We stayed for barbecue in the evening. Mandy shared with his wife, she said, Ian's not going to work again.

And it's just horrendous. And as Mandy got up to take our children back to bed at the campsite, Mandy whispered to me and said, I really sense you need to pray with Ian.

I knew Ian for years. I wasn't a minister at that point. But I'd known Ian for years and I thought, oh Lord, is he just going to tell me where to go?

[15 : 26] This bloke is in a vulnerable position. He is desperate, but I don't know. Anyway, here you are. Talk about faith and we're talking about stepping into faith.

I got up to leave. Confession time, people. I got up to leave, said Ian, I'll see you. When I felt a physical hand in my chest, a physical hand in my chest, I turned to Ian and I said, Ian, do you mind if I pray with you?

And he said, I've been sat here all evening hoping that you would. It wasn't a great prayer. It was Holy Spirit, would you come and would you heal Ian?

Would you heal him, Lord? Amen. That was it. No great flowery language. No waving of hands. Just a simple prayer.

We arrived back. It was the days, you can tell how long ago, it was before mobile phones or nearer banks. We got back to a message on our answer machine at home with his wife, literally screaming down the phone, saying, phone me, phone me, we're at home.

- [16 : 36] Now initially, I thought, there you are, Mandy. We got it wrong. I should never have done that. Look at that. That's really tipped him over the edge, hasn't it? What have we done?
- What the Lord did was healed him that night. She said, he slept through the night, no night terrors, and woke up totally renewed and revived. He was back at work three weeks later.
- Opportunity or challenge. This is where the gospel comes real for us today. You see, I think we are in a place of open expectation, of faithful discipleship, of being ready for the opportunities to witness when things happen.
- I was on my way to the temple when. I was on my way to the church when. I was on my way to breakfast when. I was on my way to work when. I was on my way on holiday when.
- I was at work when. I was welcoming at church when. Opportunities. The Lord doesn't limit our opportunities at all in the presence of God.
- [17 : 39] Peter and John enter the temple with the man who has just discovered this new freedom. And they don't have to shout and say anything themselves about it because the man does it for them.
- Look at what God has done. We don't have to shout. We don't have to have our pictures in front of the paper handing over certificates. God does it through the people that we have changed.
- Maybe you yourself are one of those people who are here today as I am because somebody took boldness and courageous to speak truth into my life and bring me to a point where I've moved into a living relationship with Jesus.
- Jesus. When all the people saw him walking and praising God they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging in the temple called the beautiful the gate called beautiful and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.
- They were hungry to know. If we do the business people other people get hungry to know what this is about. How did that happen? My friend Ian went on left the job that he was doing in the police force and went on to share his testimony with lots of young people as a youth worker and I'm sure he's transformed lots and lots of lives through his story and his testimony.
- [19 : 04] Opportunity. And Peter and John tell them and they make even more hungry for knowledge. I sense people we're in a period of opportunity. I really want you to be encouraged this morning that we are in a time of opportunity to share our faith.
- People are open. Believe you me people are really open and searching and they want to know but will we give them what they want? Will we give them what they're searching for?
- And do we know the gifts that we've been given? Opportunities. I sense we need to increase that trust. and maybe this morning I sensed while I was writing this and walking up the hill for maybe some who said yeah I know all these gifts but I just need to step in.
- I just need to make that jump. Lord give me a bit more boldness and courageousness to step in and do the things and use the gifts. Ask for the gifts gifts because they're freely given for you to use this week and in the week to come.
- Maybe we all need to trust and jump into the Father's arms more and more. Shall we pray? Lord just thank you for your message and scripture this morning and I pray Lord in the situations and the opportunities that we meet that we would jump and trust and be with you in whatever our new adventure is in Jesus name.
- [20 : 44] Amen.