

Promoting the Gospel with Compassion

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[0 : 0 0] it's great to be here at Holy Trinity again and to have this opportunity to preach as well as be involved in another confirmation and reception this will be number two for this year and there's another one still to go so if every parish in the region starts doing this sort of thing we'll have to have another bishop to keep up with them all one of my favourite Australian authors is Tim Winton and I'm not sure what it's like in your household but my wife thinks that I should get my books from the library and I actually like going to bookshops and perusing bookshops and buying books so it's a source of some tension in our household and I have to confess an act of male adult rebellion because at the end of last year I went down to the bookshop and bought Tim Winton's latest book *Dirt Music* so I could read it over summer and of course I was discovered having bought this book because my wife had already borrowed it from the library herself to read it but nevertheless I felt okay and I think if it's a man if you're a man occasionally you have to rebel against some strictures of your wife because they do have a tendency to want to try and control everything

I think really but that's another issue I digress anyway in this great series that you're doing on promoting the gospel and I think this book is an extremely helpful book and the insight that John Dixon brings to this area of evangelism and promoting the gospel is actually very very helpful and a great corrective I think in our current context he talks about how Tim Winton this Australian famous and very much highly awarded Australian writer appeared on *Enough Rope* last year and as part of the interview Andrew Denton in his inimitable style said I want to talk about faith when you were I think about five a stranger came into your family and affected your family quite profoundly is that right and this is part of how Tim Winton responded Tim Winton proceeded to tell Denton how his father a policeman had been in a terrible accident in the mid-60s knocked off his motorcycle by a drunk driver after weeks in a coma he was allowed home Winton said he remembers thinking he was like an earlier version of my father a sort of augmented version of my father he was sort of recognisable but not really my dad you know everything was busted up and they put him in the chair and you know here's your dad and I was horrified

Winton's father was a big man and Mrs Winton had great difficulty bathing him each day there was nothing that Tim at five years of age could have done to help news of the family's situation got out into the local community and shortly afterwards Winton recalls his mother got a knock at the door oh g'day my name's Len said a stranger to Mrs Winton I heard your hubby's a bit crook anything I can do Les Thomas was from the local church Winton explained to Denton this man had heard about Winton's difficulties and wanted to help he just showed up continued Winton and he used to carry my dad from bed and put him in the bath and he used to bathe him which in the 1960s in Perth in the suburbs was not the sort of thing you saw every day of the week according to Winton this simple act of kindness from a single Christian had a powerful effect it really touched me and that regardless of my theology or anything else watching a grown man bother for nothing to show up and wash my sick dad you know it really affected me this strangely sacrificial act as he described it was the doorway into the Christian faith for the whole Winton family it's a great story isn't it and a great account from Tim Winton's own experience of how he was touched by someone's act of compassion an uninvited in a sense act of compassion but nevertheless a very powerful one because that sacrificial act by just one believer taking presumably on his own initiative his own volition had a powerful impact we can assume that to some extent at some stage in some way that particular man must have explained the Christian faith to the Wintons and as a response to that they made a response to Christ but it was the sacrificial act that had the incredible impact in turning them in a particular direction so this morning we're going to be exploring the place of loving actions and helping people to be influenced by God as part of their move to faith now it's always important

I think to bear in mind that in the process of someone coming to faith or being converted whichever term you prefer to use is both a human and a supernatural action it's human in the sense that at some point people respond in some way to God and they make some sort of particular decision now I know that there's always a percentage of people in a church like this who have never made a particular decision because they've always been a Christian person but for many people they've also had that experience of coming to faith in a particular way or to being convicted in some way by the Holy Spirit so for me a youth leader shared the basis of the Christian faith with me and explained what you needed to do to invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart I was too proud at the age of 16 to acknowledge that I needed to do anything about that not with him anyway but I did go home that night and I did kneel beside my bed and I prayed a simple prayer and invited Jesus Christ to come into my heart as my Lord and Saviour nothing much particularly seemed to happen at that particular moment although that's when God made his particular action so I was actually making a decision myself but behind that simple act you can also see and know that God himself was that powerfully at work in a way that actually probably I didn't even have any insight into at that very particular moment

I might have decided to follow Jesus but in reality God chose me it was he he was the one that actually drew me to himself and he's the one that turned me in a supernatural way that I couldn't do and that only he can do to become a person who in fact did have Christ living in my heart and someone who has whose sins had been forgiven and someone whose life had been transformed in a radical and new way so it's actually a dual thing that's going on it's both a human process but as well as that it's a supernatural thing that God's doing it's also important I think to bear in mind that evangelism and especially the process of someone coming to faith is not just one particular moment but it's part of a whole process so again there were a whole range of things that were important for me the seeds of faith were planted and nurtured in Sunday school and youth groups and clubs the church that I grew up in there was the loving concern of God's people especially some families and some particular leaders who always took an interest in me and in my family who had vague sort of church connections and then my brother came to faith at a particular stage which had a significant impact in me returning to the Christian church and having some connection which led to that youth leader talking to me and it was the people who faithfully put up with my never ending questions and sometimes my skepticism and faithfully sought to explain the Christian faith under some provocation well in 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 1 to 2

[7 : 03] St Peter is addressing a not uncommon situation wives who have husbands who aren't believers now he's addressing that situation because it must have been the case in the early church as it is in the church today that it's more likely to be a wife who has a non-Christian husband than the other way around but that of course doesn't preclude the possibility because it certainly is the case that there are many husbands who have non-Christian wives but there certainly are more wives who have non-Christian husbands Peter would have been present when Jesus had said let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven and in fact in chapter 2 of 1 Peter he goes on himself to say live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God so Peter had a very strong conviction that our good deeds should lead in some cases to God being honoured because of what we do so he goes on to apply this principle to this particular situation of wives whose husbands aren't believers and what he says which is on the screen is that wives in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of their lives now I don't want to spend a whole lot of time talking about the issue of submission because we could be here till the Mandarin service dealing with that particular issue and I'm sure that Paul's dealt with that thoroughly on some occasions but nevertheless you should also note if you have anxiety about this that in the same section

Peter the Apostle urges the husbands to treat their wives considerably with consideration and to treat them with respect so there's a mutuality in the injunctions given to husbands and wives here to submit is to put the other person to be for yourself and to submit is to take the initiative in service it's to put their needs before your own needs so submission isn't some sort of slavish terrible thing it's actually acting in a Christ-like manner towards your partner by putting them before yourself and seeking to serve them rather than yourself but Peter urges that this is especially necessary when the husband isn't a believer and he then uses a seemingly curious phrase he says if any of them do

not believe the word they may be won over without words so what's Peter on about here what does he mean in the Greek this literally means without a word well he seems to be saying that wives can influence their husbands in coming to faith in believing the word by their behavior and when they see the purity and beauty of their lives that will have an impact over time in a way that many words perhaps won't have now some of you might be sitting there thinking surely this can't be right because people are actually won over to God by hearing the word of God and responding to that word in obedience and trust in Romans chapter 10 17 in one of Paul's great statements he says faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ and surely that's the key biblical principle in terms of how people come to faith and respond to God well I guess what I want to suggest this morning is that God is a God of relationship and God's made us to be people who enjoy and enter into relationship with him and one of the distinctives and one of the unique aspects of Christian faith which is distinctive from any other world religion is that we're on about a God who wants to know us and wants to enter into personal friendship and relationship with us a God who speaks to us and wants to communicate with us and a God who wants us to respond to him with words as we pray to him it's a unique personal experience that we're invited into as Christians not some slavish following of rules or some response to an impersonal and detached being so God wants us to relate and he does that relating through words because God communicates through words and that's why the Bible is God's word written because it's God's words written to us so that we can hear him and respond to him personally so what's Peter saying here is he contradicting the apostle the other apostle so we've got one apostle contradicting the other apostle well it seems to me first off we've got to acknowledge here that non-Christian husbands in this context understand something of the Christian faith we're told they don't believe the word of God which literally means that those who disobey the word now conversion by definition is a response to the word of God and these particular husbands have chosen not to respond to the word of God which they must have some knowledge of and that's this stage they're currently disobedient to it but secondly the thing that may win their husbands over to Christ is the behavior of their wives in order to help them to remain open to hearing the word of God the attitude of their partner is critical now we all know that there are some relationships that we all have that are difficult for us to share the Christian faith in if you're a Sunday school teacher like some of the people are out there now it's not that hard like we just had with that excellent children's talk to share the Christian faith is it that's a fairly straightforward context to be able to do it because it's structured for you but for lots of us in some of our relationships it's quite difficult to share the faith and to speak a word of God it could be true that for either a wife or a husband that if your partner isn't a believer that it can be incredibly difficult to talk about the Christian faith and even your own experience or your involvement in church

I grew up in a family where my mother used to go to church from time to time but whenever she went to church it was always a source of some contention and hostility and we always to some extent suffered as a family because of it because my father was rebelling against the Christian faith because of his own background and was quite hostile to that particular action that's the sort of environment some people live in isn't it where it's actually quite difficult to be Christian with your particular partner and therefore it's hard to speak a word in some cases it might be hard to say any word about the Christian faith it may well be that for some of us it's difficult to talk to our parents about the Christian faith or to our brothers or sisters because it's difficult in that sort of environment sometimes to speak about Christ the same issue can apply to parents with adult children or to students with teachers or to people who are employers with their employees or with people who are actually employees with their bosses those might be difficult relationships for all of us in different ways well what we see here is that we're urged in 1 Peter chapter 3 15 to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give it a reason for the hope that you have but to do this with gentleness and respect so again every Christian person ought to be urged and inspired and hopefully willing if it's possible to give a response to someone who may inquire of you about the hope that you have within you and that's the situation hopefully that we all desire to be able to experience and enter into and we're urged to do that with gentleness and respect but in our tricky relationships we must be prepared to wait and to respond with gentleness and respect when we have opportunity because it may well be that it's not going to be appropriate if we seek or are perceived to be seeking to dump something on those people in those tricky situations so we see here that the Lord of the harvest can win people over to himself without a word from us by the impact of a godly life surely this is a reflection of what Jesus was saying when he urged us to be let

our light shine into people's hearts and lives so it's an interesting business isn't it we're looking at here in these particular passages now a number of other

New Testament passages speak of behaviour of believers and the impact of that behaviour whether it's good or bad and in Titus 2 in particular we have a passage where Paul describes Christian behaviour as a defence against attack and critique of the Christian message in that community where Titus was located and then describes it as a promotion of the gospel message itself so in verses 1-5 of Titus which we're not looking at in detail here he addresses the older men and the older women and then the younger women so that no one will malign the word of God because of their behaviour he goes on to urge the young men to live godly lives why?

[15 : 45] so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us and then finally he urges the slaves to obey their masters why?

so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive so there's actually a great message here isn't it that the lives that we live need to evidence what we believe and the lives that we live actually are a display of what we're on about even if what we're on about is something that's hidden and can't be seen because it's not self-evident when you look at someone that they're a Christian person is it?

but their behaviour is incredibly self-evident our good deeds are the fruit of the gospel in our lives and if we're truly converted and obedient to Christ and obedient to the word of God we will be reflecting that we will be reflected in living transformed lives and we need to pray that God will actually help our lives to be so transformed that do in fact reflect Christ and will be a means by which others will be impacted the fruit of the gospel is a vital means whereby the gospel is promoted and I think that's a great emphasis that we get in this book that you're studying currently here at Holy Trinity now we know that bad behaviour calls into question the authenticity of our faith and we know that the media love stories about failed vicars don't they?

if you ever go to England and on holidays there's basically an article every day about a vicar who messes up or does something quirky or strange because they just love vicars in the English newspapers and they're always doing something stupid or seemingly isn't that the case?

if you're visiting in England the media loves stories about money grabbing evangelists or pompous bishops or non-believing teachers of the truth they just love that stuff don't they? because they love to actually pick up on our failures and our flaws and our weaknesses bad behaviour is a bad witness to Christ and good behaviour makes the gospel we're told here attractive we don't behave well as a show and we don't behave well as some sort of cynical exercise in order to somehow trap people into believing the Christian faith we don't take up acts of service or acts of compassion so that people will make a response we do it as part of being a compassionate person in response to God's love in our lives and as people who are involved actively in service but good behaviour we're told here makes the teaching about our saviour beautiful and attractive so today I want to urge you to see that your lives ought to reflect what you believe and that your lives authenticate the gospel and have a significant impact in the situations where you have influence in the lives of other people and let's face this face it all of us have a mission field that God's already given us hasn't he?

[18 : 37] if you analyse this congregation and analyse all of the people in our lives all of us have a significant mission field that God's already given us a whole lot of people whether in family friends, neighbours community group people that we're involved with people that we work with or used to work with people that we play sport with and God wants us to influence those people through our actions as well as through our words in promoting the gospel let your light shine before others so that they might see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven and that's something we need to do personally but as well as that something that we need to do as God's people together now I'm sure in a church as dynamic and as exciting as your church that there are some great stories of the way in which simple acts of compassion have had an incredible impact in the lives of this community and it'd be surprising if there aren't some people here this morning who aren't here as a consequence of compassionate actions which were taken out of pure love and concern that have led to people then exploring the Christian faith it'd be incredibly surprising if that wasn't the case today so I want to urge you to keep doing that stuff when I was at

St John's Diamond Creek there was a man called Colin who was dying of cancer it was particularly poignant for me because he was at the same age and he had two young kids sorry three young kids and I had two young kids and so in a sense it was someone in my situation my age and stage going through a terrible experience of cancer and towards the end of his life one of the church wardens

who was also the small group leader in that particular small group that he was a member of went to this guy Colin and said listen is there anything that you regret that you haven't been able to do that you just think we might be able to do because you may not be around much longer to see that happen and Colin said well I really regret the fact that we've been living in this house for 10 or 11 years and when we moved into it the backyard was a bit of a jungle and it still is and I've not been able to do anything about it so this was noted and on the Thursday on early in that week and on the Thursday Colin died and on that Saturday after that before his funeral the next week about 60 or 70 people from the church gathered and we literally had our own backyard blitz it was the most amazing experience it was in February it was hideously hot but we had young people we had old people we had kids we had young students gathering voluntarily freely because they wanted to transform this man's backyard the amazing thing that happened and this wasn't intentional was that the neighbours in the street were absolutely agog they couldn't believe that this was happening and they couldn't believe that people would give up a Saturday to act in that way and even though we didn't intend it and didn't even think about it certainly word got around to that entire community and people were amazed that Christian people would act in such a selfless way to actually love and to care for someone in that way it had an incredible impact in the lives of many others there was no word spoken but those loving deeds certainly commended Christ and let our light shine in that community so that in fact

God the Father was glorified well let me urge you to do that in your tricky relationships but as well as that as a community together as you serve this community Amen Amen