

A People Invited **To Follow**



Bible Thoughts

A People Invited **to Follow**

This is the theme for Conference 2013. (12th – 16th June)

As you may know Conference has been extended by one day and each Circuit may send an additional Member. Up to 50 young adults will also participate. The usual business will be integrated with sessions intended to provoke and inspire members to agree why the Methodist Church in Ireland is here in this time and place.

One of the resources offered to help Churches to be aware of the theme and prepare for Conference is this set of three Bible thoughts. They are intended to prompt discussion on the three phrases; A people / invited / to follow.

These reflections can be used as extended devotions for three church councils or in small groups or as topics for Sunday services. There is a selection of questions to stimulate conversation and further thought.



①

To **Follow**



Many familiar Bible characters undertook journeys that changed their lives. Think of Noah; Abram; Jacob; Naomi and Ruth; Moses and the Hebrew slaves; Nehemiah returning from Exile. There are shorter but equally dangerous journeys, such as Esther walking courageously into the king's presence; or David boldly crossing the brook to challenge Goliath.

Jesus was constantly on the move. He told his apostles to "GO, make disciples..." He meant everywhere. For some that meant travelling over sea and land; for all of them it also meant crossing distances in their own minds as they learned to eat with the despised Gentiles, or started to worship on a day that was not the Jewish Sabbath. Every journey began because people believed they were following where God

was leading. Occasionally, having obeyed God, some took matters into their own hands and went on their own journey. Mistakes were not uncommon! (Abraham travelling into Egypt, Genesis 12) As with all of the disciples, Simon Peter literally began following Jesus with his feet! The Twelve, along with others travelled to both familiar and foreign places. On the way, Peter often got his feet stuck – in his mouth. But he never stopped following.

Here are several references for part of Peter's journey. In a group, look them up, and try drawing a timeline of Peter's high and low points. Put dots above and below this line to indicate how good or bad you think Peter's experience was at that time. Then choose at least one of the questions at the end to consider together.

Timeline of **Peter's Life**

1. Introduced to Jesus (*John 1;40-42*)
2. Appointed an apostle (*Mark 3; 13-16*)
3. Walking or sinking (*Matthew 14; 28-31*)
4. Confessing Christ (*Mark 8;27-30*)
5. Being rebuked (*Mark 8;31-33*)
6. A Peter suggestion (*Mark 9;5-6*)
7. Must he forgive? (*Matthew 18; 21*)
8. Promising loyalty (*Matt 26; 31-35*)
9. A refusal (*John 13;6-11*)
10. Asleep (*Matthew 26; 36- 46*)
11. He disowns Jesus (*Matthew 26; 69-75*)
12. Peter injures Malchus (*John 18;10-11*)
13. The empty tomb (*John 20;1-9*)
14. Restored (*John 21;15-19*)
15. Another rebuke (*John 21; 20-22*)
16. Taking charge (*Acts 1; 15-20*)
17. Preaches at Pentecost (*Acts 2; 14-40*)
18. Inconsistency (*Galatians 2;11-14*)

QUESTIONS

Is there an experience of Peter's to which you might say "That's me!"

At what point did Peter become a Christian?
Why do you think that?

How many "conversions" did Peter have?

Is there a particularly significant one?



**Let's get out of the rut of
being saved, satisfied
and stuck!**

②

A People



“It’s all about me – and I want it now’. That attitude is destroying national economies.”

(Jim Wallis at the launch of HOPE 2014)

Today’s lust for individual freedom and the rampant consumerism to which we have become accustomed, can blind us to our dependence on one another. The Maori people are said to have based tribal decisions on how they would affect the 7th generation out. That is one way of pacing economic growth and conserving fossil fuels! The Christian message is not simply about God meeting our personal needs, but about God judging each of us in the light of our response to other people’s needs, whether those are material or social or spiritual. (Matthew 25;31-46)

The Local Body of Christ

The late Rev Dr Donald English said, “When I became a Christian I only got half of the story! No one told me that when you get Christ - you get his people too!” He was referring to Romans 12;5 “You belong to Christ and to one another”. Individually, we commit ourselves to Christ and as soon as we do, we belong in his body where we cannot avoid other members without blatantly defying him.

Jesus expected his church to show the world that, by the power of the Spirit, human beings can consistently love one another in sacrificial ways. (John 17;21) Many of the New Testament letters were written because church members were not behaving towards one another as Jesus had told them they should. Has the church really changed since those New Testament times?

In urging obedience to Christ’s command to love one another, many Christian leaders have suggested underlining the phrase “one another” every time it occurs in the New Testament. That is because these references show us how to ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ (John 15;12) They are not suggestions about behaviour, they are specific rules that demand, perhaps reluctant, decisions of the human will. 1 Corinthians 12; 14 – 31 (The Message) has some pretty clear things to say about the hierarchy and lower-archy!

The National Family Of Methodists

The Jewish people, though living in different parts of the country (in Biblical times) and the world (today) have been conscious that they belong to one family. The Hebrew tribes shared the DNA of a common ancestor. Their history is strewn with internal tensions and strife with other nations. In the Exodus event that defines their nationhood it was together they - escaped; followed; celebrated; complained; wandered; feared; idolised and conquered as they inherited what God had promised. At the Conference in 2012, we tried to hear echoes of the

Exodus in the journey Irish Methodism is making. We too share a common heritage for "In the providence of God the Methodist Church has been raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and experience". We do this in different ways and with various degrees of enthusiasm. Some parts of this Church family are large, others are small. Some are old, some are young; some are strong, some are weak. As a people we strive to maintain the unity of love.

QUESTIONS

If this church is really a Body of Christ, what "one another" do we need to work on at present in order to be a more open and caring family?

When the leaders of the two and a half tribes not claiming a Promised Land inheritance told their wives and families that they would be leading the charge and did not know when they would return, what arguments do you imagine followed?! (Joshua 1; 12-15)

What loving step do you need to take as a church to benefit the wider community?

With which part of the Hebrew's journey from slavery to settlement, do you think resonates with where the Methodist Church in Ireland is at present?



What symbol or emblem would you draw to depict the three overriding values of your church?

3

Invited **To**



By comparing the Kingdom of God to a banquet, Jesus uses an event which is familiar to his hearers. Celebrations could last for several days, and the initial invitation was usually issued several weeks in advance. An exact date and time might not be given. The invitation was: "You are invited to attend a banquet in honour of.....to be held in the week beginning 24th." Guests indicated their acceptance and awaited the call when everything was ready.

The Messiah's Wedding Banquet was a powerful image for the coming of God's reign, when Israel would be married to the Anointed One and share in his glory. The prophets had issued the first invitation, Israel had indicated acceptance. At the start of his ministry, Jesus brought the second call to join the prepared banquet, "The Kingdom is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel". (Mark 1; 15)

Throughout his ministry, the 'invited' refused to come. Their pre-conceived ideas of what to expect from a Messiah were not being met by Jesus. These included their prejudice: about his qualifications (or lack of them); his style; the emphases of his ministry and jealousy of his popularity. All these prevented them from setting aside the good things of the present to taste what was better. The parable's guests did not excuse themselves in order to indulge in bad things, but matters to which they had already attended and with which they were well familiar. They considered normality to be of more value than the company of the waiting King so their excuses are an insult to their host. Jesus did not say they

had to forsake family or business, but to enjoy his banquet that could transform both. The vacant seats are taken by those who have no experience of banquets - the un-deserving poor; outcasts and people who have failed in the world. They bring what those who cannot afford to give hospitality often bring – the unassuming gratitude of open hearts. In John Shea's 'Stories of Faith' he describes the messenger asking the king if he can join the banquet too. The master replies, "Yes. But first, tell me how you encouraged them to come". "I told them there was food for all, who would eat with all".

The Lord is already present with those to whom we think we have to deliver the Good News! The invitation is to join them, even if they are not those with whom we would naturally associate or in the places we usually link with the important things.

In scripture we read of God regularly inviting his people to come to where he is already working. Joseph says God intended his slavery for good (Genesis 50;20). The Hebrews walked with the presence of God before them and when needed, behind them (Exodus 14;19). Peter received a life changing revelation when he accepted an invitation to visit a godly Gentile (Acts 10;33). John has the vista of human history revealed to him when he "comes up here". (Revelation 4;1)

We have usually thought of this banquet as being "in heaven". But Jesus message is clearly that the banquet has begun now, with his life and ministry. The Kingdom is among you. Heaven is the dessert!

QUESTIONS

How do these last references speak of what Methodists refer to as prevenient (or preceding) grace?

The first words exchanged between Jesus and potential disciples are in John 1; 37-39. Using different words, how might these questions be re-phrased?

Would you consider that God is inviting Irish Methodists to a banquet today?

How different is that place from where people are now?



The difficulty with many choices is that we can refuse the better thing, simply because it is unknown.

