



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH-UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 25th October 2020



NEWS UPDATE

Church PCC

Following today's AGM, Karen Birkby and Lisa Moffat have joined the Church PCC.



Karen Birkby



Lisa Moffat

Debbie Williams has been re-elected for another term of office, and continues in her role as assistant churchwarden.



Debbie Williams

Debra Foster has joined Darren Shirley as our second churchwarden. She is not fond of the camera, but I manage to catch her last year when the new church hall chairs arrived (the lady in red).



Dawn Edwards has stepped down as warden, but continues on the PCC as church Vision Champion (alongside Louise Walton). Dawn's first love continues to be the children's work, and by stepping down as church warden she will be able to re-focus on this.

Stepping down from PCC this time are David Hodson, Angel Sale, and Gary Thompson. We are grateful for all that David, Angel, and Gary have contributed to our church – THANK YOU.

Cleaner Living Tip – UCLAN Zero Waste Shopping



We would do well to identify local initiatives aimed at improving the care of our planet. The UCLAN Student's Union shop has introduced a zero-waste section. The new area sells plastic free foods, liquids, and eco-friendly household items. The shop is open to members of the public, and is well worth a visit if you are passing by.

Has anybody tried switching their energy supplier or their bank over the last few weeks? I would also like to know if anyone else is interested in helping promote this topic. Feedback from these cleaner living tips has been somewhat limited.

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ENJOY – ENGAGE – ENCOURAGE – EMPOWER

And so we come to our final topic in this little four week series – EMPOWER. This is probably the least obvious of the four topics in terms of what it means, and why it is a priority for Christians; but you will see that it is very much in line with what Jesus demonstrated and taught.

Today's bible passage shows Jesus sending out seventy of his followers ahead of him, with a mandate to proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were being empowered to do the things that he did.

Bible Reading – Luke 10:1-11, 17-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Making Ourselves Redundant

As you may know my previous job was as an instrumental music teacher with Lancashire Music Service. I remember well the first time I attended a staff training day at the age of twenty-one, full of enthusiasm. We were sat in rows ready for the keynote speaker to begin, and when he got up, these were his opening words:

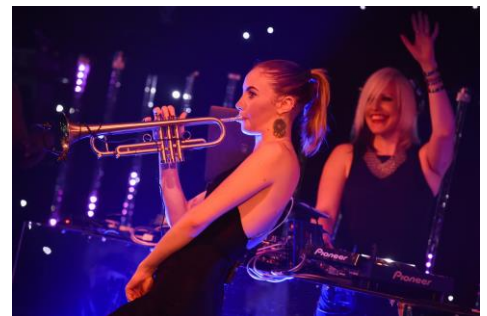
"The aim of the teacher is to make yourself redundant"

I remember thinking that this was strange advice. If I make myself redundant, won't I be out of a job? But as time has gone by, I have learned to recognise the truth of these words, not just in relation to teaching, but in all areas of life. As a parent I will have succeeded in my role if my children grow up to

be independent and self-reliant. If I allow that part of me that *needs to feel needed* to get in the way, I will only hinder their progress and development. Similarly, within church, the real ambition of those in leadership roles is that we become surplus to requirement, because we have enabled others to grow in their gifts and develop the confidence to fulfil the church's ministry.

There may be a part of us that doesn't like the idea of 'making ourselves redundant,' because we don't want to find that we are no longer needed, but my experience is that when we empower others to do the things that we have learned, God soon finds something else for us. God calls us on to greater and greater things.

When I look back on my work as an instrumental teacher, it is rewarding to know that some of my ex-pupils are now doing really well with their music. Lily who is pictured here went on to train at a music college in London, and has done a lot of commercial trumpet playing.



I also think of Daniel, whom I started teaching trombone to at the age of seven. He could barely reach the end of the slide! He progressed with his music and went on to conduct the Leeds University chamber choir.

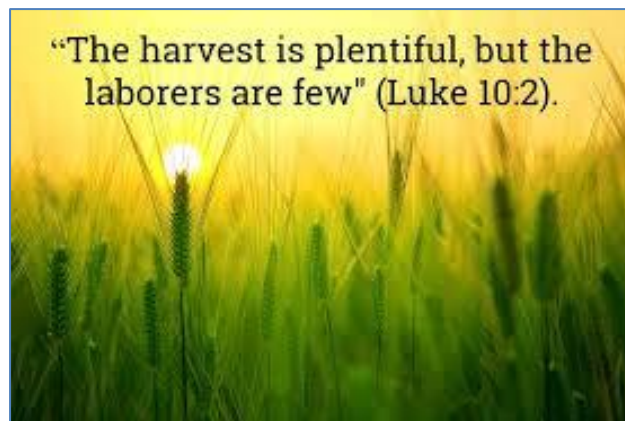
Both Lily and Daniel are probably now better musicians than I have ever been. Does that bother me? Not at all! I had a role to play in nurturing them when they started out, and having empowered them in their earlier years through my teaching, they have now surpassed me. This brings me a feeling of

satisfaction, not a feeling of being second best.

Jesus Empowered others to continue his work

Jesus spent a limited time on earth, having been sent by God for a specific purpose: to redeem mankind. His plan was always that he would invest in others who would be empowered to continue the work that he began; and so he chose twelve young men – some fisherman, a tax collector, and others whose previous occupations we are not told about. They don't appear at first to be particularly promising material, and it took them some time to understand what being a disciple of Jesus was really all about. Jesus had to be rather patient with them. Sometimes we read that Jesus sat them down to talk with them in order to explain things (like the meaning of a parable), but the primary way in which they picked things up was to *join in* with Jesus. They followed him around, they watched what he did, and when the time was right Jesus gave them more and more responsibility.

Jesus taught that the opportunities for the growth of God's Kingdom are much greater than the number of people willing to work for it – "*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.*" This is as true today as it was back then. There are many opportunities to share the love of God and to proclaim the message of Jesus, but there are comparatively few people offering themselves in God's service. Jesus' solution was (and is) to *empower*



his followers to be workers in the harvest of God's Kingdom. We must likewise empower people today to play their part, in order to increase 'God's workforce' in our time and in our place. We are told to pray that God will send out more workers into his harvest, and when that prayer is answered we must be ready to let others contribute, learn, and grow. How else will the harvest be gathered in?

Jesus taught his disciples to live by faith. They are told to '*carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.*' People often think that in order to serve Jesus they must first be equipped with various things that they lack, and for this reason they put off doing it! It doesn't work like this. We offer ourselves in faith, and God provides us with what we need as we go along. We are empowered as we grow in faith, not just in capability.

The message he gave his disciples was a message of peace - *Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!"* We too have a message of peace for people today – peace with God, and peace with others, by turning to God in repentance and faith. Jesus knew that this message of peace would not always be received in the same spirit, and by being upfront about this from the start he equipped them to deal with the rejection they would sometimes encounter.

" I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."

This whole experience of sending out the seventy was like a boot camp training exercise. The disciples return with excitement, because '*even the demons submit to us!*' Jesus had given them his authority over the powers of darkness, and he gives us his followers today the same authority. We too are empowered to challenge the forces of evil in Jesus'

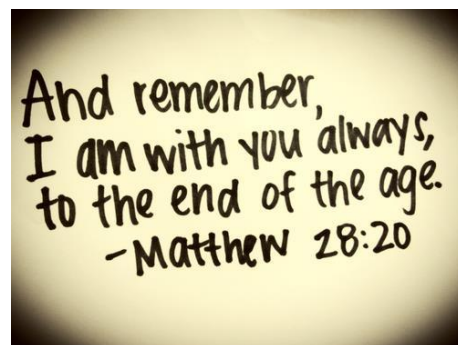
name, through the weapons of prayer and love. This is certainly an exciting and adventurous prospect, yet Jesus reminds us that to be secure in our eternal destiny is worthy of greater celebration – '*do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*'

God gives his power away

Empowering others is fundamental to the nature of God. Every Christmas we remember that an all-powerful God who created the universe became a small, weak, and vulnerable baby. It is the ultimate act of *self-disempowerment*. By leaving his heavenly home and sharing in our humanity, Jesus emptied himself of his own divine power, in order that we may share in it.

When I think about the call to empower others, I know this to be the hardest aspect of it. We can only empower others if we are willing to give away some of our own power, and this goes against our human nature. When we have power and control, our instinct is not to relinquish it. We have probably all been in a situation where we have been given a task to undertake, and the person who asked us to do it then breathes down our neck rather than letting us get on with it! This is because that person struggles to let go of their power and control, and has therefore struggled to truly empower us...

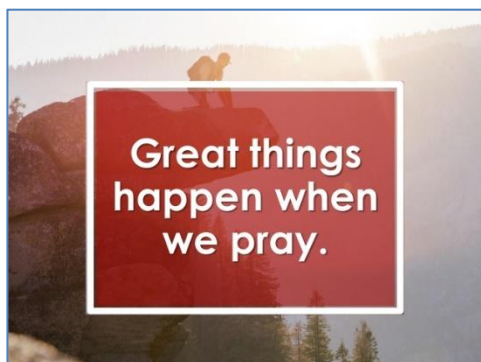
Jesus does not do this. When Jesus gives us a part to play in his great work of healing our broken world, he gives us freedom. He lets us make mistakes and learn from them, it is how we grow into greater maturity. He empowers us by the same Holy Spirit to continue the mission which he began, and he is never far away from us. After he had commissioned his first disciples, he said to them, '*remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*' (Matthew 28:20). Jesus is always by our side, but without breathing down our neck!



Empowerment – A bit of an afterthought?

The first three topics in this series have been pretty straightforward. We should *enjoy* our relationship with God and our fellowship with other Christians. We must *engage* with the world if we are to practice Jesus' teaching to love our neighbours and to make more disciples. We need to *encourage* each other, given the daily battles that we face, and the struggle to keep going in the Christian life.

What about this last topic? If we treat *empowering others* as a bit of an afterthought, we will find that our life of faith will not leave a lasting legacy. All too often I see churches looking at the issue of younger leaders when the people who have been doing things for years have become too old and tired. Secular workplaces often do the same thing. What if instead we look for opportunities to empower people all the time, making it an ordinary part of our Christian life? This will happen if we have a heart to see *others* flourish, instead of measuring our spiritual life according to how much we ourselves are doing. This attitude requires humility, wisdom, and kindness – the humility to think of others before ourselves, the wisdom to know when someone is ready to take a step forward, and the kindness to let someone else do the things that we ourselves may enjoy.



I have a prayer. It is a prayer I have prayed regularly for a number of years, because it often pops into my head. My prayer is that someone as a result of my life and ministry will go on to do greater things for God than me. I know that God will answer this prayer, because I have prayed it so often. I do not know how and when it will be answered, or whether I will even be alive to see it. What I do know is that it will only happen if it is in my nature to empower people, just as it was in Christ's nature.

Prayers – Written by Jim Berry



Heavenly Father, we come to you now to give you Honour and Praise and Worship
and Thanksgiving.

We come in the name of our Saviour and Lord.

We come as those who have been set free, and as those who have already experienced the
joy of your presence and the wonder of your love.

We come to receive your power and your grace to take what you give and to ask for more.

We come to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that we may go out in your service and live for you.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Father, we thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ.

Each day is filled with bad news when we think about the way we treat each other and your creation,
yet we rejoice to be hearers and bearers of the good news, that Christ came, lived, died and was raised again
as the sign that we can be forgiven and our lives made new.

We thank you that this good news has been told all around the world, and that wherever it has been
proclaimed people's lives have been made new.

We thank you that you provide us with opportunities to share this message,

Moments when we can offer love and care in Christ's name, and take his name upon our lips.

Father, we pray that you will enable, authorise, and empower us as we seek to bring the good news of
God's Kingdom to all people.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all whose lives are under a cloud,

for those whose lives are filled with despair and those who are disillusioned,

For those whose lives are gripped by fear, anxiety or grief that will not go away,

For those who once were happy and bright and are now under a cloud of worry, concern, or illness.

We pray for people known to us in need of our prayers at this time.

Pause to think of someone whom you can pray for.

We ask that the love, the mercy, and the grace of Christ may be sufficient for all their needs.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Father, you are the source, guide, and goal of all life.

We ask you to fill us with the love and power of your Holy Spirit, that we may complete the task you have
laid upon us in Jesus' name.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**