

## Holiness: Becoming more like Jesus

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A question as we begin. As you were growing up, who did you look up to? Who was your biggest role model? And why? Think carefully. And then share your answer with the person next to you.

Gather some answers.

In our family, it was clear that our son Harry very much looked up to his dad Martyn. They both were good at, and loved, football, and Harry followed in his dad's footsteps by becoming a goalkeeper. Martyn taught him everything he knew. They spent hours in the garden, on the playing field, on the beach on holiday practising key skills. And Harry became a great goalkeeper just like his dad. Off the football field, he picked up his dad's mannerisms. I have a favourite photo, taken from behind, of them walking together, side by side, in shallow water along a beach, step in step with each other, both with their heads down as they chat. Enjoying time together. And the more time you spend with someone, the more you become like them: sharing the same sense of humour, phrases, habits and experiences.

As adults, we can also have important role models, people who make an impact on our lives, who make a difference in how we feel about ourselves. For me, it was a chap called John, who was vicar of our village church for about ten years when our children were very small. He baptised me as an adult and was there at my confirmation. He was a great encouragement to me and continues to be so today. And what I learned most from him as a vicar was the importance in getting alongside people, of taking time to sit and chat, because that was what *he* did, and I experienced first-hand how effective it was.

Having positive role models is obviously good for us. But we live in an age where self-image, particularly among the young, is worryingly low, and is adversely affected by the use of social media. Facebook now has 1.9 billion monthly users with 75% of users spending 20 minutes or more online. WhatsApp has 1.3 billion; Instagram has 600 million. And research shows that children who are heavy users of social media are less happy about their appearance than those who never use Facebook or Twitter. Because, it's too easy to believe the messages that social media generates, messages about body image and world ideals. And the pressure on our children and

young people is immense, as they seek to fit in with their peers.

For all of us, there's a danger that we don't see ourselves the way others do, and certainly not as God sees us. I wonder how you would describe yourself. How would your family and friends describe you? How does that compare with how *you* describe yourself, but more importantly, how that does compare with how *God* sees you? Those words again from Psalm 139:

*'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'* In The Message translation, the words are: *'I thank you, High God – you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvellously made. I worship in adoration – what a creation!'*

Now, I don't know about you, but when I get up in the morning and look in the mirror, I don't say *'What a creation!'* I don't see a masterpiece. Well, maybe a Picasso! But I *want* to be a masterpiece. So my prayer is *'Heavenly Father, do whatever it takes to mould me into the image of your Son. Make me your masterpiece.'* Because, when we look in the mirror, ultimately, we and others need to see Jesus. Because that what holiness means – becoming more like Jesus. And we need to allow

God to chisel away at us, to chisel away at our pride, our anger, our selfishness, our dependence on what others think of us – to become more like him. And do you know what the biggest barrier is, to becoming more like him? ... it's ourselves.

We think we're not good enough, that we'll never make the mark. We listen to too many voices that are not from God. And, rather than masterpieces, we think that we're rubbish. We use words such as useless, stupid, and worthless about ourselves. But God doesn't use his time to make rubbish, for his love for us is as *'high as the heavens are above the earth, as far as the east is from the west* (Ps 102).' His love for us has no end. And he loves us too much to leave us where we are.

Consider these great biblical characters:

Noah ... Noah was a drunk

Abraham was too old

Jeremiah and Timothy were too young

Isaac was a daydreamer

Jacob was a liar

Joseph was abused

Moses had a stutter

Gideon was afraid

Samson had long hair and was a womaniser

Rahab was a prostitute

David had an affair and was a murderer

Elijah was suicidal

Job went bankrupt

Peter denied Christ

The disciples fell asleep while praying

Martha worried about everything

Zacchaeus was too small

Lazarus was dead.

So, no excuses, God can use you to your full potential.

When Jesus called his first disciples, as recounted in our gospel reading today, we read that these simple fishermen – first, Simon and Andrew, and then James and John – *immediately* left their nets and followed him. They didn't appear to ask any questions, but simply dropped

their nets and followed. Abandoning boat and their father, they followed Jesus. Followed him for three years through all of Galilee, watching him as he taught in the synagogues, preached the good news of the kingdom, and healed every disease and sickness among the people. And, the more time the disciples spent with Jesus, the more they became like him. In Mark 6 verse 7 we read that he called the twelve to him and *'sent them out, two by two and gave authority over evil spirits.'* Verse 12 and 13 – *'they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.'* Doing as Jesus did. Following in *his* footsteps and becoming like him.

And then after his crucifixion and resurrection, he spends 40 days with them before ascending to be with his Father. What does he teach them during this time? The first chapter of Acts says in verse 3 that *'he appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.'* Umm, spoke what about the kingdom of God? Well, what exactly did he teach? We're not told. But then he says *'Go and be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'*

Witnesses of what? The kingdom – what he’s been talking about for 40 days.

And how? By the power of the Holy Spirit which they’ve yet to experience.

So, what is the kingdom? Well, Jesus *does* give a definition. Using 14 words recorded in Matthew’s gospel. *‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’*

What’s the kingdom? It’s when we see God’s will done on earth just like it is in heaven. It’s those moments when earth looks a little bit like heaven. When God’s love, mercy, compassion and justice break through. This beautiful world isn’t as it should be. We don’t care for the earth as we should but cause irreparable damage. But the promise is that in the future God’s kingdom *will* come and he will put right all that is wrong. That his will **WILL** be done on earth.

Where Jesus walked, where he went, heaven for a moment touched earth. He gave people a glimpse of the world as God meant it to be. He gave people a glimpse of what it *will* be when his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus grabbed that promise of a world as it would

be in the future and made it real before their eyes right there and then.

Zacchaeus – little Zacchaeus – a man whose life was marred by greed. A man without friends, and who couldn’t get through the crowds when Jesus came to town, presumably because no-one would let him through. So he climbs a tree. As Jesus draws near, he stops, looks up and says these words, recorded in Luke 19: *‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’* To Zacchaeus – friendless and rejected – he says, *‘I’ll be your friend.’* Within hours, the greedy, selfish, dishonest man is giving away money by the cartload to those in need. A life twisted by sin beginning to be untwisted. A man rejected being welcomed back into the community. *‘This man too is a son of Abraham’*, Jesus says. And for a moment, earth looks like heaven. Sins forgiven, lives changed. God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven.

And there are many more examples in the gospels. The Samaritan woman at the well. The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. The man born blind. Those with leprosy. And they encounter Jesus. Glimpses of the kingdom, people healed, lives transformed.

Jesus grabs what one day will be ... and gives people a glimpse of it in the here and now.

But then he disappears. What we now call ascension. No more glimpses. But he says, *'Go, be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria. No, not just there, but to the ends of the earth.'*

*'Be witnesses of the kingdom.'*

*'In my name.'*

How?

*'In the power of the Spirit.'*

*'Go disciples, be my witnesses.'*

*Go Church, be my witnesses.*

*Go, church in Cottenham and Rampton, be my witnesses.*

*All I have done, go so and do.*

*Be holy, because I am holy.'*

And how? Through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we comfort those who mourn, we give a glimpse of the kingdom. When we help those who have fallen on hard times. When we feed the hungry and give water to

the thirsty, we give a glimpse of the kingdom. These were important to Jesus, and so should be important to us. For the day is coming when there will be *'no more tears, no more death or mourning, no more crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.'*

One day his kingdom will come ... but, until then, it's us. Us, as Jesus' hands and feet, giving people a glimpse of heaven. Us, being holy, as he was holy. Becoming more like Jesus every day, in what we think, in what we say, in our relationships with people, in how we do our work, in how we pray, in how we use our money.

Let's be people who see ourselves as God our Father sees us. Fearfully and wonderfully made. Children of God, who enjoy spending time with his Son, our Saviour, and, in spending time with him through prayer and reading scripture, become more like him day by day. Through whom people get a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. And let's be part of seeing lives transformed. Amen.