

Introduction

As a child we used to travel a lot. My father was in the air force and we lived abroad a great deal. This meant that we became used to long journeys. But I've never forgotten the anticipation and excitement of the travelling. I know my mother became very weary as three excited children bounced up and down in cars, trains and aeroplanes and constantly asked, "Are we there yet?", "Is this it?", "Have we arrived?"

Children are very good at anticipating, at looking forward with excitement. My nieces when they were younger would stay up all night on Christmas Eve waiting for the magical morning to come. Anticipation is a wonderful thing. Looking forward, expecting, and waiting. Yet it is also an anxious thing, "Will I know when I get there?", "Will it be as good as I expect it to be?" "Will it be all worth it?"

John the Baptist knew about waiting and anticipation. The one thing he knew about himself and his role in life was that he was to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah, the saviour that God was sending to rescue his people. He was a sign post, a pointer, to prepare people and to make them ready.

The people had been waiting a long time. The promise of the saviour had been mentioned at the very beginning of scripture in Genesis when God told Adam and Eve that he would rescue them from the results of their disobedience. That promise had been repeated and strengthened through the years and the prophets continuously talked of the Messiah who would rescue God's people and transform the world they lived in

from one of sin and strife to a place of justice and peace and hope.

John's birth was announced by an angel to his father Zechariah who was told that John would bring the people back to God to make them ready for the promised saviour. So John's ministry was one of preparation, and of anxious watching. He knew he was announcing a saviour but he didn't know who he was or when he'd come. So when he was arrested, in prison for his preaching he heard word of Jesus' ministry and preaching and wondered – was this the one? Is this the promised Messiah? Are we there yet?

He sent his disciples to Jesus to ask the question, "Are you the one who was promised, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus' reply was to point them to what he was doing. "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor." Jesus' ministry was self-evident. It proclaimed who he was. Everything he did and said shouted that he was the expected one, the one John had been preparing the people to meet.

Jesus then talks about John to the listening crowd. He calls him a prophet and confirms that he was the one who would prepare the way. The one who would point.

John pointed the people to Jesus.

The angel who announced his birth said that John would turn hearts:

- from ignorance to knowledge

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7:-18

- from carelessness to thoughtfulness
- from sin to God

His message was designed to bring them back to God and to prepare them for the ministry of Jesus and the coming of his kingdom in power. In all that he said and did he was pointing the people to him and preparing them to meet with Jesus.

John's role was to speak to the people and he clearly attracted a lot of attention during his ministry and had a large following. People were struck by his message. It affected their hearts and minds and made them return to the Lord in sorrow for their sins and commitment to following him. They came to him at the Jordan and many were baptised as a sign of repentance.

His ministry was successful and effective. But he never lost sight of what his role was and the fact that he was merely "preparing the way of the Lord". It would have been easy for him to start his own sect or cult. He had a committed group of followers and he could have had a successful ministry. But he knew that his calling was to point to Jesus. To turn people's hearts and minds to him.

This is our ministry too. As followers of Jesus our role and calling is to point people to him, to make his name known, to proclaim that God's rule and reign was established through Jesus ministry on earth and to offer people all the benefits of his kingdom. Our job is to be signposts that have Jesus written clearly on them so that the way we live, the things we say, the things we do all point to Jesus. Our job is to show Jesus to

people in the way that we love them, care for them practically, and speak to them of him.

That is our ministry both within our fellowship and within the community we live in.

Within our fellowship

We can point to Jesus:

- in the quality of our love and relationships
- in the quality of our service ... and
- in the quality of our worship.

Jesus told us that we are to love one another as he has loved us. When we have fully understood the depth and quality of his love for us and when we have begun to accept his love for us then we are able to show that love to others. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul talks of Jesus' love in this way; *" I pray that you may have your roots and foundations in love, so that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep is Christ's love. Yes may you come to understand his love, though it can never be fully known - and so be completely filled with the very nature of God."*

As God's love fills us we will be filled with the very nature of God. We cannot make ourselves love but we can open ourselves to his love, we can seek to know more of him and what his love for us has cost him, we can ask him to show us how he sees us so that we can begin to grasp hold of the depth of his love for us and as we begin to do that we will begin to develop his

love, it's quality and quantity. That love will deepen and strengthen our relationships and will show Jesus to all who come into contact with us.

We can also point to Jesus in the quality of our service. Jesus' ministry was at its heart one of service and servant hood. He showed this time and again in his life. He came, not as a king but as a fragile human being and his ministry was one of concern for others and of service to them. Jesus taught his disciples both in actions and in his words that they too were called to serve others. As he prepared for his death he knelt at their feet and washed them to show that his kingdom, although one of power was not one where power was wielded over others. His kingdom was a kingdom of love where the weak and the needy matter and where his subjects served each other.

This is the role that Jesus has called us to. We will not fully be following him unless we are serving him and each other. Paul tells us in his letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians that God has given each of us gifts that are meant to be used in his service. Those gifts are to strengthen the church and to enable us in our calling.

Each and every one of us has been called to service and it is as we humbly and graciously serve God that we will be pointing to Jesus. Maybe we need to review how we are serving God in this fellowship and if there is any area of service that God would like us to be involved in. It might be good to think about what you do. Is there something else God might want you to be involved in. Could you act as a sidesperson, making sure services run smoothly? or arranging flowers? Do

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7:-18

you help with the reading or praying in services? – maybe you could. Do you pray for others? – perhaps you should be helping with prayer ministry, should you be on the PCC, maybe next year you could be.

Jesus is also made known to others in our worship. People often say to me that worship is a very personal thing. That it is between them and God and that means they need to worship in ways that suit them. Of course this is partly true. When we worship God we are doing what we were created to do. It is an opportunity to express our love and gratitude to him and a chance to give him honour and glory for who he is.

But in corporate worship, when we come together in church to praise God it is a three way thing. God's community here is worshipping him together with the saints and angels in heaven. It is something we do together and as we honour him as a church family he reveals himself more clearly to us and he also shows himself to those who are in our midst. As we worship God he makes himself known and points to Jesus. The quality of our worship is vitally important. That's why it is good to have the church space prepared and quiet before the service begins, so that from the very beginning we are praising God in a way that honours him.

Do we come to church prepared to meet with God in our worship and prepared to give of ourselves joyfully as we praise him, or do we think being involved is just up to the three or four people at the front who lead worship? If we do believe that and if we come to

church with that attitude people will not see Jesus in our worship. But if we come prepared to meet with God and to give of ourselves Jesus will be seen and made known.

As a church family we are called to point to Jesus in the way that we live together, serve each other and worship together but we are also called to make Jesus known in the community that we live in. That doesn't mean that we should stand outside the church and preach to the people that pass by. It means that we need to make ourselves known in the community. We need to be visible - not just in this building, but as the human membership of the church we need to be visible in the community.

We need to be active in ways that help people to see our love and our service. We need to build relationships and we need to make our presence felt.

John the Baptist knew his calling and he lived it. He gave his life in pointing to Jesus and turning the hearts of the people he met to God. What are we doing that points to Jesus? What should we be doing that shows his love to the people in our villages so that they flock to hear his word proclaimed and to meet with him personally?