

## 29 Sept Becoming

Becoming, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of our Values, alongside belonging and believing.

I think there are 2 aspects to becoming: firstly God working in us through His Holy Spirit and secondly, the work we ourselves put in. (Being and doing is one way of thinking about it)

If we think about the disciples, there were times when they sat with Jesus and listened, times when they received the Holy Spirit, and there were times when they were sent out to do Jesus' work.

The pledge on the card reads:

So becoming is very much a partnership between us and God, as we open ourselves to Him, to be changed and led, to share in His mission:

Part 1: God working in us - Being

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor 3

<sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

And in 2 Cor 5 <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! And (2 Cor 3: 18) we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Easy – all we have to do is sit there and let God do all the hard work...

In our first reading we see God's role in the choosing of David to be Israel's next king (after the first one, Saul, had gone seriously astray.) David as the youngest was the unlikely choice, but was anointed by God and filled with his Spirit – powerfully as v 13 says. David did great things, he was Israel's greatest King and was described as having God's own heart. *But* it is also worth remembering that he also did some definitely not great things, he made some very poor choices, he was directed to repent, did so and was forgiven and continued serving God.

Perhaps David could have done with some of Paul's advice to Timothy.

God empowers and calls us, but our decisions matter:

Which brings us to part 2, the second reading and very much the doing part of becoming- although still with space for God to work.

Timothy was probably converted to the Christian faith on Paul's first journey and he was closely associated with Paul on his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> journeys. Paul writes in Philippians 2 , I have no one else like Timothy, who will show genuine concern for your welfare... he has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Paul introduces his letter to Timothy with "To Timothy, my loyal child of the faith" and there are many instructions to encourage and help Timothy in his ministry. As with all of Paul's letters we

have to remember the context and think in terms of principles rather than following advice exactly as given. But I think there is some good stuff here.

We started the reading halfway through v7, in some translations 'train yourself to be godly' is a new sentence. Tim and I were at the Festival of Preaching recently and one thing that stick in my mind is one of the speakers saying that trying is not the same as training. Something you might like to ponder in the context of Becoming.

When we discussed this passage on Sunday evening, we wondered what "godliness" actually meant, some translations have "serving God", so 'train yourself to serve God'; my favourite version is in the Message "Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please!" I will let you consider what that looks like in practice (in your small groups,) – where your spiritual flabby bits might be! It does suggest that a serious amount of effort is needed on our part, it doesn't just come naturally.

These verses contain a mixture of our effort - labour and strive, Command and teach, set an example, devote yourself, Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere. Sounds a bit tough actually!

There is also mention of God's role: hope in the living God who is the Saviour of all, Timothy's gift – given to him.

Why is all this so important?

For ourselves and others: v8 godliness (serving God) has value for all things; the promise is for both the present life and the life to come. V16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Its evangelism by word **and** example, which is vital in a world where integrity can be in short supply and Christians and the church are often (and sometimes justifiably) accused of hypocrisy.

Unlike our pledge, Paul's instructions to Timothy don't include reaching out to the oppressed and marginalised, but that is what Jesus did and our Becoming more Christlike and serving God does too.

So the Being and the doing working together. In both aspects Becoming is a process, God can and sometimes does change people in instant, radical and miraculous ways; but my experience is more of a longer, slower and often tougher process.

Sometimes we can see change in our lives, sometimes others have to point it out, and sometimes its all happening out of sight. Don't be despondent if it seems like nothing is changing. Life can be complicated, it can be tough; there are other things that demand our time. Simply being here (or watching online may be a huge achievement for you) – and if that is you – hang in there, we really do value your presence with us. God has not given up on you. Tim talked last Sunday about God being a slow God and Marie mentioned the verse from Matthew, where Jesus quotes from Isaiah: A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Hold on to that if you need to.

I mentioned seeds: earlier Paul planted, Apollos watered, God make it grow: Some seeds germinate quickly – cress takes a few days, others seem to take for ever and you almost give up. Seeds can need different conditions to make them germinate - some need a period of cold, others need the heat of a fire. Whichever it is, its out of sight and too slow for us to watch in real time, but it is happening, we are becoming that community of believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, becoming more Christlike, serving.

It might help to look back over 5 or 10 years and ask how have I changed – am I doing something I would never have dreamed of? Or is there something I used to do and had to stop, but is it maybe time to start again.

It will be different for all of us, but one thing I think is key to becoming is to move in and out of our comfort zones.

Stepping out of our comfort zones – trying that new thing, being with those different people, going to a strange place, is really important. It helps us to rely on God, gives the Spirit a chance to work. It's how we grow, but it is important to have that safe place to return to, to refuel. That might include our services, Small Groups or being with other Christian friends.

We are going to have a few minutes to reflect, to think about the pledges – these are between you and God , Tim isn't going to ask you to hand them in; some of you may have done them already, others might be waiting till the end of the series or they might just be sitting on your to do pile; or this might be the first time you have come. It doesn't matter, its about being guided by God – being in partnership with him for our lives and for our community here at St Mark's.

Copies of the points will come up on the screen so I'll stop and allow some time for God to speak to us and then I'll close in prayer.

**God of power, may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,  
may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us, may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve and  
worship you now and always. Amen**

Our next song is also a prayer please stand or sit as you prefer.