

15.01.2012

St Barnabas' Clapham Common

GROWING

Today's sermon is about growth, in particular the growth of St Barnabas' Church. There are lots of dangers which surround any talk about church growth.

There is a danger of **pride**: that we give ourselves too much credit for something when the glory should really go to God.

Or there's the danger of **denial**: that we only celebrate the positive as a way of avoiding the negative and hope that a certain feel-good factor will act as a distraction from other issues.

Or there's the danger of **guilt**: that however much we have done, the subtext is that, if we are REALLY committed to this, if we REALLY love Jesus and his church we REALLY MUST do more.

Or there's the danger of simply **missing the point**: church growth can become an end itself so that numbers come to matter more than ministry.

I'm aware of those dangers and I hope to avoid them this morning!

All that being so, I think it is essential to talk about growth especially where we have evidence of it happening. Although not an end in itself, church growth IS a good thing and there is absolutely nothing wrong in wanting to affirm that which is rightly considered to be good. And because growth and change go hand in hand, it is also important to talk about it for everyone's sake: it can help to make sense of the bigger picture of life at St Barnabas', and it can offer the motivation and open the opportunity to get involved in a new or different way.

If today's sermon is about the growth of St Barnabas' Church, then all of what I've just said suggests that there is a certain tension that needs to be acknowledged as we begin our run up to the subject. And when we look into it, the tension perhaps comes down to holding two things in balance: the part we play in church growth and the part that God plays.

1st reading: Mark 4.26-29

A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

Even though the parable is about the Kingdom of God rather than the church I think the point is transferable: growth is a partnership between God and his church where God gives the growth as we put our faith in him and he puts his faith in us.

Signs of Growth: 2011

- 1. Sunday School:** more children coming more regularly; restructured groups in Sep 2011; resulted in 8 new leaders & an entirely new team to run the creche.
- 2. Attendances:**
Typical Average:
11.00 service with Sunday Groups:
85 adults & 25 children

First Sunday of the month:
9.30 Family Service
11.00 Holy Communion
- 3. Technology** installation of 2 screens (May 2011); significant investment in resources for worship nudges our worship into new areas
- 4. Music & musicians:** new hymns and songs growth in repertoire; also new musicians on piano and vocals signals the growing involvement of others

- 5. Church socials:** *Keith and Sue's farewell lunch* and the *Christmas Party* both attended by 70+; proper intergenerational and cross cultural mix bringing us together as a community other than for services encouraging growth of community
- 6. Stewarding Teams:** Again new people signing up not quite on scale of Sunday School...and always room for more!
- 7. Barney's:** Toddler Group started last Wednesday in preparation since September largely organised by people who have joined us within the last 18 months years & attended by those who are even newer.
- 8. Giving:** Context of economic hardship, austerity and cuts, delighted to say our giving has gone up for 2011 (in theory, of course it should do if the numbers are going up but in reality, the giving usually takes a while to catch up!).
- 9. Missionary Giving:** means we will also give more away 10% of giving goes in various proportions to:
- Diocesan Church Schools
 - CPAS (our patrons)
 - Christian Aid
 - Stepping Stones Trust (local mission partner)
 - ZIMPRO (global mission partner)
- 10. Website:** **2010:** 10,067 hits (av = 28 day)
2011: 16, 130 hits (av = 44 day)
 Busiest day: Dec 18 2011 - 219 hits
 Suggests the website is regular/first point of contact for a growing number; and also suggests our profile is growing locally
- 11. Newcomers:** 42 filled in a newcomers card last year - which is perhaps about 1/3 of all visitors (excluding baptism parties); there is continuous potential for further growth.

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 3.5-11

I planted...Apollos watered...but God made it grow.

Growing a church the responsibility of all of us but we will need to do so in the context of some significant losses:

In September 2011, Keith (NSM Curate) & Sue Bishop moved on, and in the Summer 2012, David (Warden) & Della (Reader) Adams will move on. Also George (Warden) Giannoukakis will step back as warden in April 2012. This means that by the summer of this year the team that was in place on my arrival in 2009, will have disbanded... which kind of sharpens our focus on church growth: our growth in the year ahead is not necessarily a growing larger (although not necessarily *not* a growing larger either)...but certainly a growth into greater responsibility for ministry...growth into new roles (with a corresponding growth in personal faith as well)...growth into the responsibility for making church happen between us.

There's always scope for your involvement across many areas of church life; here are some particular **Areas for Growth** in the new one.

Areas for Growth: 2012

- 1. Wardens:** job of a warden is open to being shaped by what any individual brings to it
 there are really only a few formal expectations
 Traditionally appoint 2 wardens are appointed
 but I would be interested in creating 4 with 2 assistants:
 share equally in the role
 spread the demands of the role
 work closely with me
- 2. Reader:** Reader is a specific vocation to preach and lead worship

which involves formal training and results in a licence.
Possible to have gifts of leading and preaching without the licence

3. Fabrics: with members of our Men's Group (DIY team) and Fabric's Committee moving on this year vital to have an enthusiastic team to keep our fantastic (and potentially very expensive if neglected!) Grade II listed building up to scratch.

4. Baptism visiting: currently all undertaken by me - on average 3 a month really enjoy it but limits the contact new baptism families have with the church to me to share this ministry with me means more contact with church members and it's those sort of contacts that help newcomers integrate more fully.

5. Pastoral visiting: some of this happens informally I know but I would love to develop a more systematic approach with others which means more people being visited more regularly - various models for doing that very simple but very rewarding thing to do.

This year could prove to be quite a significant year:

a time of transition with new people doing new roles...
a time of personal spiritual growth for all who take it on.

As we wait and see what happens, please be encouraged:

1. by evidence of the last year (2011) where the signs of growth are there to be seen
2. and by the model of growth from the bible where whoever does the planting and whoever does the watering we can trust that it's God who will bring the growth.