



## Feet

### Transformation through following

**Mark 1: 13-17:** *Walking the Way* with our feet.

To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus; to be the church is to be a community of disciples of Jesus. It's an invitation to join Jesus on the journey he is making. Jesus has a purpose – a mission. He calls it, “the Kingdom of God”. He has places to go and people to see. This isn't about starting a new religion: it's about changing the world. Jesus has just announced that God is transforming the world into all that God intended it to be from creation: the Kingdom of God, not the Roman Empire; a place of life and flourishing, not death and despair (Mark 1:15). As people are about to find out, Jesus makes a real difference. He doesn't just announce Good News, but does Good News and is Good News!

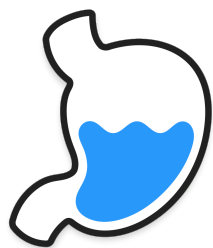
**His call to follow  
is to be part of that story.**

Note that Jesus says, “Follow me”, rather than, “Sit down, get out your notebooks and pens, and take careful notes”. What Jesus wants them to learn can't be taught in a classroom or church building. It has to be experienced. He doesn't just want them to learn things; he needs them to unlearn a whole way of thinking, living and acting, and discover a new way – the new world of the Kingdom of God. This is about transformation, rather than education. He's not inviting them to a seminar, but asking them to join him on a road trip.

“Disciple” comes from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning, “learn”. It's a much more powerful word than “pupil”, where the stress is on “acquiring knowledge”. A disciple is shaped by the master: the aim is to share the master's life; become like the master; live like the master; share in the master's mission and fate. Sharing in the master's fate will be come the crunch point when the disciples realise that Jesus is taking them on a journey along the Way to the Cross.



- ▶ *Where have your feet taken you today?*
- ▶ *What are the things you follow in life?*
- ▶ *Who are your heroes, and what is it that you admire about them?*
- ▶ *Is Jesus a hero and why?*
- ▶ *What is the furthest distance you have travelled or the most trouble/expense you have gone to to follow your hero?*
- ▶ *What, if anything, has it cost you to follow Jesus?*
- ▶ *Wherever you are on your faith journey, are your ‘feet’ ready to begin this cycle?*



## Stomach

### Transformation through sharing

**Mark 2.13-17:** Jesus calls and shares a meal with Levi, a tax collector and many other “tax collectors and sinners”.

This scandalised his hearers: tax collectors were Jewish sell-outs who made a living collecting Roman taxes from their fellow Jews in order to fund the military occupation.

**On this road trip, Jesus teaches us generosity, compassion and care as new norms for living.**

Engaging with others transforms us, as well as the lives of the people we encounter on the road. That is seen most clearly when he is at the meal table.

A shared journey and shared meals: we are “companions on the road”. “Companion” literally means, “bread-sharer”. The sharing of food is a constant reminder to us of Jesus sharing the bread and wine during the Last Supper. It nourishes us as we travelling alongside him from the upper room to the great feasts in God’s New World; from the horror and despair of Calvary to the resurrection triumph of Easter day; and on to the final victory over death itself.

At every celebration of the Jesus-meal, God’s past saving actions in Jesus become present realities again, and God’s future for creation in Jesus summons us to fresh following. This is how Communion nourishes us: it gives us strength to go on every week; to pray; to live differently; to discover God in every surprising and shocking place and person; to rejuvenate us and empower our life and work. The church’s mission is an essential part of the context and drama of the Jesus-meal. Communion reminds us that the Last Word belongs to God and is a word of Resurrection and Life.

At the same time, it challenges us. Proclaiming and living by the standards of the Kingdom means that the Roman authorities killed him. It is a reminder of the cost of discipleship: *Walking the Way* of the Cross may well lead to suffering and death. Communion is our own Caesarea Philippi, where we hear Jesus’ stark reminder: “If anyone wants to be my disciple, they have to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it!” (Mark 8: 34-5).



- ▶ *Who would you invite (living or dead) round for a special meal? You can invite up to 6 people.*
- ▶ *What kind of hospitality does your church offer?*
- ▶ *Who is welcome to your communion table; who is not allowed to share communion?*
- ▶ *What nourishes you in church?*
- ▶ *What would you chose to eat for your own ‘last supper’?*
- ▶ *Who do you think are regarded as the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ in our society?*
- ▶ *Who could you simply not stomach sharing a meal with?*



## Hands

### Transformation through handling

**Mark 6. 7-13:** Jesus invites us to share in the action when he sends the disciples out to participate in his mission. His own focus is the marginalised and dispossessed (Mark 2:17).

He identifies with these people. He celebrates his messianic banquet with the excluded people (Luke 4: 7-25). His gospel is especially Good News for the people who have nothing to hope for from the social and religious system of their day. Shockingly, he declares that these people are particularly blessed by God – not excluded and rejected (see, for example, the blessings and woes in Luke 6: 20-23).

Jesus pulled down the walls of exclusion that were rigidly maintained by the Purity System – the way the Law was interpreted by the priests, scribes and Pharisees. According to the purity code, eating with Gentiles and sharing their unclean food contaminated Jesus and his disciples. Touching unclean people and spending time in unclean places particularly contaminated Jesus. He also ran roughshod over the strict “honour culture”, which established a person’s “rightful place” in the social hierarchy.

He was prepared to be touched by a bleeding woman (Mark 5: 25-35), to touch lepers and a corpse (Mark 5: 35-43), and treat the Syrophoenician woman as someone of equal value as a Jew (Mark 7: 24-30).

Honour codes and purity systems are alive and flourishing in our churches today. Churches reproduce our society’s social values uncritically, making it almost impossible for people “not like us” to feel genuinely welcomed. So many of our responses to people and situations are based on the fear of contamination (think, for example, of the sexuality debate). Yet Jesus literally gets his hands dirty, and challenges the status quo in doing so.

**He calls on his disciples and the communities that claim his name to do the same.**

## Questions for reflection

- ▶ *Who would you be happy to shake hands with?*
  - ▶ *The Queen*
  - ▶ *somebody who just sneezed*
  - ▶ *a used car salesperson*
  - ▶ *a homeless person*
  - ▶ *a criminal*
- ▶ *It’s human nature to congregate with people who are similar to us, but the kingdom of God is supposed to be different.*
  - ▶ *How successful is your church at welcoming the ‘other’*
  - ▶ *What barriers to joining your church do some people face?*
- ▶ *Do you feel you fit in easily at your church, and why?*
- ▶ *Think of someone in your life who could do with a helping-hand in order to encounter God?*



# Heart

## Transformation through loving

**Mark: 6: 30-44:** Five loaves, two fishes and a compassion-filled heart.

Jesus was clear that the heart of the Law was the dual commandment to love God and neighbour. He shared this conviction with his theological opponents, the Pharisees. For Jesus, though, love is compassion-driven. **Compassion** is based on grace: it responds to people according to their need, not to what they deserve.

The key moment in the story of the feeding of the five thousand is when Jesus looks at the great crowd and “has **compassion** on them” (Mark 6: 34). They are lost and bewildered - “like sheep without a shepherd”. They need Good News and they need feeding – and Jesus responds with both.

**Compassion** literally means, “suffering with”. The Greek word is far stronger: it means, “to be twisted up in the guts with empathetic suffering”. **Compassion** won’t rest until the suffering of the other person is alleviated.

This is love. It is not a “fluffy feeling”, but a driving force that is determined to change the circumstances, regardless of the cost to the **compassion**-driven person. It is transformative: it transforms the person you love but also you yourself. There is precious little room for **compassion** in purity systems and honour codes. Jesus offended the religious leaders of his day by proclaiming that **compassion** mirrors God’s own heart, and acted it out in all his dealings with people.

**Compassion**-driven love transforms how we respond to the world. It is integrally connected with how we treat the planet, immigrants, the marginalised, politics, money etc. On the road trip, Jesus teaches that God’s love is extravagant and wasteful because it is driven by **compassion**.

**As his followers,  
we need to learn to love  
in the same way.**



- ▶ *Remember a time when you felt treated with compassion?*
- ▶ *Who in our society do you feel are treated in a heartless way?*
- ▶ *We use many words to describe Jesus’ regard for others; how do these different words compare for you?*
  - ▶ *Jesus is caring*
  - ▶ *Jesus is merciful*
  - ▶ *Jesus is kind*
  - ▶ *Jesus is compassionate*
- ▶ *Are there people who don’t deserve our compassion?*
- ▶ *Have you ever suffered from ‘compassion fatigue’?*
- ▶ *Take some time to pray that you may be more compassionate, and your heart be more like Jesus’.*



## Eyes and Ears

Transformation through  
seeing and hearing

**Mark 8:18:** “Are your eyes blind and your ears deaf?”

Compassion transforms the ways in which we see and hear the world. It is a conversion experience: when our hearts are converted to love, our eyes and ears are “converted”, too. We begin to see “the other” through Jesus’ eyes as a fellow human being, a creation of God who has infinite value. They become valuable to us. We begin to listen out for their pain and need, rather than hearing them as an inconvenient call upon our time and resources.

On this road trip we meet the God that sees and hears. God is vigilant - listening out for the groans and cries of pain and seeing suffering. This is the Exodus God, whose salvation (liberation from slavery) happens because of this divine attentiveness to the situation of a group of unimportant slaves in the brick pits of Pharaoh:

“The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning ... God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them”

(Exodus 2: 23-25).

Jesus mirrors this same concern for the invisible people in the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the poor ...

Blessed are the hungry ...

Blessed are those who weep ...

Blessed those who are reviled ...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...”

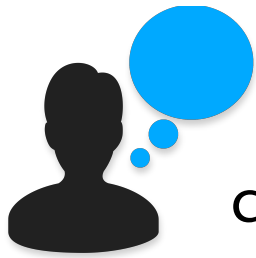
(Luke 6: 20-22/Matthew 5: 3-12).

**As followers of Jesus  
we are converted  
to see and hear the world  
through Gods eyes and ears.**



- ▶ *Think of an issue that didn't bother you in the past but now matters to you a great deal.*
- ▶ *Compassion means that we cannot rest until we have acted to change the situation: On that definition, when did you last react with compassion to something you saw or heard?*
- ▶ *How do we increase our awareness of what life is like for other people?*
- ▶ *How are social issues presented or discussed in the life of your church?*
- ▶ *How do we see and hear like Jesus with our own eyes and ears?*





## Head

### Transformation through conscientising

**Mark 8: 29/9:7:** “You are the Messiah!”  
“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Seeing and hearing the world through God’s eyes and ears by giving priority to the pain and suffering of “the least” begins to uncover the underlying systems of power, wealth and greed that make the world go round in ways that always seem to favour the “haves” at the expense of the “have nots”.

As Desmond Tutu says:

“It is not enough to keep rescuing drowning people; at some point we have to go upriver to discover who is throwing them in!”

Transformation happens when we begin to see and understand the ways in which systems and suffering are connected. Jesus is the Messiah – God’s Liberator. When the heart touches the head in this way, we begin to understand that

**God’s salvation is not only about forgiveness of sin, but also about liberation from those who sin against us.**

Then we begin to see possibilities and opportunities to enable Jesus’ Kingdom on earth, not only in the hearts of people.

Jesus comes not only to alleviate the suffering of the very least (the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the demon-possessed and the law-breakers); he comes to call time on the political, economic and religious systems that ensure that they are always the people who pay for the power, privilege and lifestyle of the “haves”.



- ▶ *Who is ‘drowning’ in our communities?*
- ▶ *Who/what is ‘throwing them in’?*
- ▶ *Consider your own life and faith journey:*
  - ▶ *recall a time when you have felt in need of forgiveness*
  - ▶ *think of a difficult life event not of your making, from which you felt in need of liberation.*
- ▶ *Be conscious that in our lives we are all a mix of ‘sinned against’ and ‘sinner’. Pray now for people or situations*
  - ▶ *where you need to forgive*
  - ▶ *in need of liberation*
  - ▶ *who are the oppressor*
- ▶ *In your life and faith, how in tune are your heart and head?*



# Committing

Transformation through  
giving your whole life



# Questions

for reflection

**Mark 8: 34-37:** “If you give up your life for me and the gospel, you will save it”.

The more deeply we come to understand Jesus and his mission, the more we realise that we can't have our cake and eat it: we can't have the new world of the Kingdom and hang on to the bits of the old world that we like.

The Kingdom of God is the world turned upside down for the benefit of the very least first. This means that following Jesus and being church is about a life lived on behalf of others, not for ourselves. That is cross-shaped living. And Jesus, looking this full in the face, warns his disciples that there is no way around it. Dying to the old life is the only way of finding the New Life of the New World of the Kingdom of God.

Note where this incident comes in the Jesus story (and in the Discipleship Cycle). This call to whole-life commitment is the second time that Jesus calls his disciples. It is half way through the story, after they have answered his call to follow him and share in his mission. They have been on the road with Jesus a long time. It is only now that Jesus considers them ready to recognise the full extent to what they've signed up for.

So much of our evangelism puts this call to whole-hearted commitment at the start of following Jesus; Jesus himself only places it a long way into the journey, because it is only at this point that the disciples are ready and able to hear it.

This is why we talk about the Discipleship Cycle: the gospels present the long journey of transformation that the original disciples undergo on their road trip with Jesus. And they do so because this is the process by which the church becomes the sort of community that Jesus intends.

**It is a long process  
of living with Jesus –  
not a short seminar  
at which we're expected  
to take copious notes!**

It is through this process of formation – of deepening commitment to a life lived on behalf of others at our own expense – that the church gradually becomes a visible sign of the Good News of Jesus.

- ▶ *Think of some things you have given up; how easy or hard did you find it to do so?*
- ▶ *At the start of this cycle you were asked who were your heroes and what you admired about them. It is likely that many of your answers were to do with their commitment or dedication to a particular cause or talent:*
  - ▶ *What causes are you greatly committed to?*
  - ▶ *Think of something you do regularly which is more for someone else's benefit than your own.*
  - ▶ *What would you be prepared to give up, or to commit to, if it helped you to more effectively share the gospel with others?*



# Witnessing

## Transformation through politics

### Mark 9: 30-32: Confronting the powers.

This is the first of Jesus' passion predictions: this road trip is not going to end well! Jesus' mission ends in Jerusalem on a Roman cross – a public execution reserved for the political opponents of the Roman Empire. He is crucified as the victim of an unholy alliance between the Roman occupation and the religious powers, centred on the Jerusalem Temple.

The message that God is transforming the world into the Kingdom of God is Good News to the “little people”, but it is Bad News to those whose power comes from their place in the political, economic and religious systems. For them, Jesus and his gospel is a threat that needs to be eliminated at all costs.

Politics is about the way in which we order our society and distribute power. Jesus engaged directly with the politics of his day by creating an alternative community (the disciples) that literally “lived in a different world” – a world governed by God.

This is a world away from the idea that Jesus' mission was to “prepare us for heaven”. To pray for the coming of God's Kingdom – doing God's will on earth – means engaging in changing the world.

Jesus called his followers to an alternative personal existence and also an alternative community. The church is called to be the alternative to a world structured to favour the powerful at the expense of the powerless. This is what it means to be counter-cultural.

What does Jesus-shaped politics look like? There are two key characteristics: making the flourishing of the very least the priority and acid test for policy-making, and “critical solidarity” with parties and groups that champion their cause. In Apartheid South Africa, Desmond Tutu was a passionate advocate of the ANC, because they fought for a South Africa that benefitted Apartheid's victims. But he disagreed with them fundamentally over the Armed Struggle - the use of violence, He challenged them publicly over this, but “from the inside”, as someone already standing firmly with them. This is “critical solidarity”: it recognises that no one party or system can deliver the Kingdom, but that some will make more of a Jesus-shaped difference than others.

**Churches transformed by following Jesus  
bear powerful witness  
to the New World of the Kingdom -  
not by opting out of politics,  
but by doing it differently.**



- ▶ *If you were eligible to participate at the next general election, how would you use your vote?*
- ▶ *What were your considerations in reaching your decision?*
- ▶ *Now reflect honestly: is your decision based more on what is best for you and your family, or on what you believe to be best for the people in society most in need of help and compassion?*
- ▶ *Have you ever taken part in a political campaign or protest, either in person, or by writing to a person in authority? How does your faith help or hinder you in this regard?*
- ▶ *Do your political beliefs witness to your commitment to follow Jesus?*





# Globalising

## Transformation through theology

**Mark 10-28-31:** Life in the new world.

When Jesus promises “Life in the world to come”, he isn’t talking about heaven, but about a world transformed into all God intended it to be at creation.

### **This is heaven: heaven come down to earth!**

We often preach as though God’s concern was to rescue some of humanity for life after death (and argue about the numbers). Typically, different strands of the church through history have seen themselves as “the true church” – the people whom God will obviously save. This is rather like the Israel of Jesus’ day, that assumed God’s chief and only concern was with the career of the Chosen People. What we need to learn on this road trip with Jesus is that God’s concern is nothing less than global – cosmological, even.

Having our horizons constantly expanded: this is part of the transformation on the journey of following Jesus. The early church had to discover to its shock that the Good News of God’s salvation in Jesus extended to the Gentiles: it needed to spread from “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

We live in a global village. We operate in a global economy, make global alliances and face global problems – not least, climate change and the very real threat of global extinction. We cannot opt out of global issues because of the scale of the issues involved: the church also has a global God and a global gospel.

What this means concretely is that anything we say about God’s saving actions in the world is only credible to the extent that it is able to address any problem in any part of the world on any scale. If not, then God becomes simply some sort of tribal deity – in this case, the tribal god of the Christians – not the Lord of all creation.

Christians ought to be news addicts. Churches ought to be places where the needs and issues of the day feature prominently in the preaching, praying and evangelism. This is not an issue about “trying to be relevant”: it happens naturally as our understanding of God (our theology) is expanded and transformed to recognise God as the creator, redeemer and Lord of all that is. This God and the message of the Kingdom is Good News for a world in serious trouble on a global scale.



- ▶ *Think of examples of when the following things feel “heavenly”:*
  - ▶ *places*
  - ▶ *food*
  - ▶ *experiences*
  - ▶ *someone’s company*
- ▶ *What would God’s Kingdom on earth (not heaven) be like?*
- ▶ *What sort of political action might we have to engage in to create the Kingdom on earth?*
- ▶ *What campaigning issues and organisations are or could you and your church be part of?*
- ▶ *What counts as “Good News” for a world in trouble on a global scale?*