

‘Out of My Mind’- for Feb 2004 ‘Baptist’ by Mike Crudge

“The Queen’s English was good enough for Jesus Christ, and it’s good enough for me.”

This was the supporting argument of a US Congressman who was a guest on a talk show on the subject of ‘language’. Among other things, he was very racist, and wanted the whole world to speak *his* language. His argument became the catch-phrase of a song by my favourite kiwi band the Mutton Birds, called “Queens English” (on the album ‘Salty’, EMI 1994). I would summarise this chap as having an inexcusable naivety morphed with arrogance and ignorance – and that makes for a really good song, it’s humorous...

Putting the subject of language aside, and moving now to the topic of ‘being-Christian,’ – I think there are too many people that have a ‘congressman’ approach to the outworking of their faith. In other words, it appears that many people think by default that the way we do things is the way Jesus did things: “the way we do church/mission/teaching was good enough for Jesus Christ and it’s good enough for us...” “the way I’m Christian was good enough for Jesus Christ, and it’s good enough for me...” *Do you see what I mean?*

How did Jesus do ‘church’, do ‘mission’, be ‘Christian’???

I think Jesus did this through quality/real relationships.

I was glad to read in the December *Baptist* what I think are truly significant statistics: that the majority of people that come into the church (who make some kind of ‘commitment’ to faith) are through friends or relatives – in other words, through ‘relationships’ (friendship). The stats have been saying this for longer than I’ve been alive – I wonder why the churches I’ve grown up in, that have shaped so much of ‘how’ I am Christian, have in my opinion, largely missed the significance of this.

Suggesting teaching-series, programs and leading-from-the-front in terms of learning how to have friends isn’t really where it’s at for me. The need for these perhaps reflects how Pharisee-like we’ve become as an institution. The way we are Christian now has a lot to do with the way people have been disciplined in decades past. Perhaps lacking the indefinite-getting-along-side-ness which *is* ‘relationship’ (and leadership). Being a disciple means being like Jesus – being recreated according to the image of our Creator. This doesn’t happen immediately, but is ongoing throughout a Christian’s life – so discipleship should never end.

Jesus was amazing. He had perfect love for each one of his followers, yet at the same time had gradations of intimacy. He related more closely to some followers than others. This is good news for us as we model Jesus – not to the extent that we become exclusive, but to the extent that as individuals we have closer connections with a few friends and people we are ‘discipling’ (both within and without the church). In the context of ‘church’ the ideal should be that nobody is left without close relationship – so in the matrix of relationships, everyone is accounted for.

This means that the mission task of Christians shouldn’t be focused on instant-conversions where we relax as soon as a few spiritual laws have been recited. But instead, becoming-like-Jesus happens naturally and gradually *through* relationships (which includes the Spirit of God) – this is the big-picture of discipleship.

A key component of relationships is hospitality. A good example of this are the Celts from St Patrick’s time in the fifth century AD, they *served* people in the way they evangelized as opposed to the Roman way which first presented the Christian message, then invited people to believe in Christ and become Christians, then finally, if people decided positively they were welcomed into the church and its ‘fellowship’ (relationships). The Celtic model for reaching people was the other way round – they first established community with people (relationships), then within these relationships they engaged in conversation, ministry, prayer and worship, and in time, as people discovered that they believed, were invited to ‘commit’ (an expression of this would be baptism). Belonging came before believing – a large component of belonging is fulfilled through relationships.

One dimension of having a quality relationship with God is linked with having quality relationships with one another – the ‘church.’ Unfortunately the ‘message’ can be easily lost by our actions.

My dentist tells me that if I don’t floss – no one will do it for me. If we in the ‘church’ don’t model the life of Jesus – no one will do it for us. I believe we should be more like the Celts than the Romans. We should be more like Jesus than the congressman.