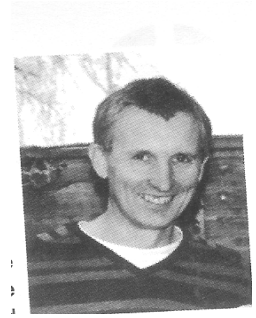


## Thoughts on Evangelism



My start point for this article is that I believe the health of the nation depends on Christian evangelism. Many people, Christians or otherwise would agree that there are problems in our part of the world at this time; cultural, social and economic. What we might not agree on though is the cause of and solution to those problems. I suggest that they have a spiritual root (that for too long we have lived out our lives and politics without reference to God). If the problems are spiritual the solution has to be spiritual as well. Secular organisations and politicians can do much good but I do not see them arresting the overall national decline, at least not independently of God.

In order then to regain a society that does involve God our people need to be people of faith. Without faith people cannot be expected to seek God at all and will continue to strive to meet their own needs through human strength and reason. So if I am in any way right about this, the Church has to get evangelism right, for evangelism is simply the process by which people come to faith and grow in faith.

St. Thomas's vision statement 'to transform lives through faith in Jesus' reflects this thinking. It recognises that lives are in need of transformation but also, that faith in Jesus is required to bring that transformation about. If we are true to our vision statement we have to be serious about evangelism.

Many Christians though are nervous about evangelism and the Church in this country doesn't seem to be very effective at it. The 1990's was designated by the Church of England as its decade of evangelism but during this time the number of committed Christians in the country fell and has continued to fall. There are two questions I want to address in this regard.

### **Do we have Confidence in our faith?**

The resounding voices of today's culture tell us that evangelism is wrong. At this time Christianity is regarded as just one of many worldviews or philosophies and certainly not the solution to the ills of the nation. Evangelism in this climate is thought to be intolerant of the ideas and values of others. Our problem is that if we listen to the voices of the age we will lack confidence in our ability as Christians to shape the world around us for good. We will not

engage with evangelism partly because we're frightened of upsetting people and partly because we're not convinced that being a Christian makes a great deal of difference anyway.

If we don't believe that we can make a difference the chances are that we won't. The first point for effective evangelism is that our own lives reflect God's power and love.

### **How far are we down the discipleship track?**

There is a difference between being a believer and a disciple as I discussed in the April 08 edition of Tom Tom. If many people simply became believers or even church-goers would it make much difference in the world? Probably not, but if many became disciples, then that might be a different story. As disciples of Jesus our lives should look something like His. Jesus both taught and demonstrated what a human life should look like when truly lived out in reference to and in the power of God.

Jesus's life was characterised not by legalism or religiosity but by an outwardness or selflessness that we might call love. Ghandi once said 'I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.' When we really understand and put into practice the life of Jesus in our own lives, it will both compel others and attract them to find it for themselves. Evangelism won't be difficult because people will naturally ask the questions of why we are like we are.

Evangelism is not about keeping Churches going or coercing other people to come to Church or be like us. These are self-centred motives. Do we really believe though that the Christian gospel is good news for the individual and the world and do our lives give evidence for that conviction?

*Steve*