

What can we learn about ministry from Jesus'?

There are many things to learn from Jesus, but we can reflect on four

- 1, Jesus' relationship with God ('Abba')
2. Compassion
3. Leadership & authority
4. Working with others

If we put aside theology, it is clear that when Jesus spoke about God, he used the primary relationship within his culture, which was Father and Son, not husband and wife as we might expect. A first-born son inherited everything from his father and the son was expected to be a 'stamp' of his father. Jesus experienced and spoke about a personal God who embraces all people as 'His family' and he was able to communicate this vision in an effective way, both in his preaching and his encounters with people.

Lepers, tax-collectors, prostitutes, the blind, disabled, Samaritans, former terrorists, people who were 'possessed', sabbath-breakers were welcomed into this family. In the famous parable of the prodigal son Jesus explains how God is overwhelmed with love and compassion, and anyone and everyone can embrace this love.

The word compassion comes from the Latin words Com (with) and passio (to suffer). It is not pity or sympathy. It is an action, a welling up from within that comes from being able to identify with another's weakness and cry of pain. In several parables, including the parable of the two debtors and the Good Samaritan, Jesus explained that God offers unlimited forgiveness and compassion.

When thinking of our ministry it is clear that our first call is of the heart, not the head. Our skills and our 'position' are secondary. We must be able to walk in others' shoes.

The wonderful encounter between Jesus and 'the leper' in Mark 1:40-44, highlights that if we imitate Jesus, we will offer love and acceptance to outsiders. The encounter with Zacchaeus shows us how we can invite back those who have become separated from the community. The encounter of Jesus with the 'woman bent over', highlights that women are to be treated with dignity and not 'sidelined'. The cure of the Roman centurion's son reminds us that God embraces all people and this is our mission. Any Christian ministry, especially PFGM leadership must be all inclusive, welcoming and outreaching.

PFG leaders should not favour the popular group members, the ones who 'perform' or turn out to monthly activities and ignore or lose interest in the others. What we learn from Jesus is that we must look out also for the weak, the needy, the outsiders, invite them 'in' and pay particular attention to them.

Often those on the edges of any group are like that because of their life situation. It is important to spend time with them and listen to their pain (their story). Too often when people stop attending get together no one in the PFG bothers to visit them to see how they are. If leaders fail to do this, they are not responding to what was so obviously paramount in Jesus ministry.

Jesus reminded his leadership group that they must not copy pagan leaders who lorded it over others. No doubt this practice could be readily seen among the Roman oppressors. Christian authority is marked by service. Leaders do not have to know everything and they should not insist on their own way. The gospels record how the people were impressed by the way Jesus spoke. The people ask where he got his authority and the religious leaders challenge him by asking who gave him the authority to speak as he did. He answered by pointing to his deeds. His wisdom and care for the 'little people' impressed the people more than their own religious leaders who were more interested in parading their own sense of importance and insisting on strict details of the law above the needs of the people.

In the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, it is clear that Jesus shows respect for the woman, and he is willing to stand up for her in front of her male accusers.

We learn from Jesus that more is contributed by working in teams. Jesus 'used' others. He had his twelve apostles. On one occasion he sent out seventy two disciples to towns and villages to prepare for his own arrival. He relied on the women who followed him in Galilee and used their resources to care for him. Jesus relied on others and sought their help as we hear in the Gethsemane garden where he took his disciples to watch and pray with him.

If the call of the church to build community is taken seriously, it needs a variety of gifts working together to achieve this. Leaders need to spend time together as Jesus and the apostles did. If ministry doesn't allow time for sharing, supporting and resting, all of our efforts will collapse. This is why we recommend regular leader meetings. Ministers, and particularly leaders, need to be encouragers and this gift is enhanced by the leader group themselves being encouraged..

Teamwork adds perspective and encourages the sharing of gifts and resources. It witnesses to community and encourages accountability to the community. In the present and future church there will be new forms of lay leadership and changing roles for the clergy. PFG leadership can make a vital contribution to parish life and the building up of the local community.

Jesus obviously believed that if he spent his time working powerfully with a small number of people, rather than trying to do it all himself, he would be effective. He did not have a need to see everything accomplished and everyone involved. When the rich young man refused his offer, Jesus allowed him to go.

He instructed his disciples that if people in a town wouldn't listen to them they should 'shake the dust from the sandals' and go to another place. Jesus looked for a response from people and he encouraged others to help. If we are to learn anything from this strategy it might be that we don't try to do everything ourselves, but instead, actively seek to involve others.

In coming to appreciate modern ministry, the starting point is the recognition that all Christians are ministers. All are called to study Jesus' life, his values and his person. Every aspect of life must be related to Jesus and what he teaches. The way a person spends time and with whom, what he/she talks about, where he/she goes, what he/she does ought to be witnessing to Jesus. Christians who are modelling their lives on Jesus will be willing to lay down their lives for others as he did.

Building parish community is one of the PFGM aims and this needs everyone working together for the common good. It starts with families being committed to Jesus, and not being afraid to admit this to one another and to others. There is a variety of gifts and all sorts of service to be done, and the Spirit works in each one according to their ability. There is much to be done within and outside of the community. You are the church: you are the body of Jesus. It can't be done without you.

What can help us?

- A strong spiritual life
- A deep & grateful belief in our God of love
- Prayer & Contemplation
- A true love of people
- A compassionate heart
- Strong relationships
- An ability to share & be 'real'
- An ability to recognise our limits
- A sense of humour

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