

Group Notes 16 January 2011
Growing Series #2 – Growing Out

Welcome - Ice Breaker

If you had a magic wand and just one wish, which major problem in the world would you sort out?

Word - Sermon Summary: Matthew 9:35-38

This is the second in a series on Growing:

- *Growing Up* – we grow closer to God, and as we do so, we grow to be more like Him.
- *Growing Out* – we grow in numbers through reaching out to others in service and witness
- *Growing In* – we grow closer together in fellowship, love and unity
- *Growing Pains* – sometimes we only grow through suffering...

This week we are focussing on Growing out. Matthew 9 35-38 shows the motive for this in the heart of Jesus. His compassion goes out, not just to us, not just to Christians, but to everyone. The challenge is this: how can we grow up, claiming to be more like Jesus, if we don't share His heart of compassion for those around us? The people are harassed and helpless, sheep without a shepherd. And where's Jesus?

- Deep in contemplation? Yes, He does that sometimes, He wants to *grow up* closer to His Father
- Sitting on the hilltop enjoying fellowship with his disciples? Yes, He does that too, He wants to *grow in* closer with his disciples too

But mostly the Gospel portrays Him there among the people. He's with the widow who is so poor she only has a farthing for the collection box. He's with parents who have just lost a beloved daughter. He's reaching out to touch those whose lives have been blighted by leprosy. He's feeding the hungry. He's reassuring the ones who are so ridden with guilt they are literally paralysed. He's freeing people from the grip of Satan. Think of your favourite stories of Jesus in the Gospel....

So if we are really serious about growing up (into the image of Christ), then we need to be serious about going wherever His love and mercy take us. How can we even think we are growing to be more like Jesus if we are not moved by the people around us just as He is moved?

As individuals we are not able to go out and save the world. We should be wary of developing a Messiah complex where we are personally responsible for saving everyone – only Jesus can do this, and we will burn ourselves out very rapidly if we try and step into His formidable sandals! But what we can do is to play our part within the body of Christ, using our gifts and calling in service and witness. In fact if we do mission within the giftings that God has put within us, we'll find it fulfilling and get a buzz from it. Some of the most joyful Christians in our church are those who are giving most in service of others.

Not to reach out is to imagine that being a Christian is only about going to church. "We have great worship! We have great fellowship! And it's great that no-one comes and disturbs us!" But the problem is that if we only have spiritual input and no spiritual output we have got spiritual constipation. It'll get more and more uncomfortable and kill us in the end! The problem is we can get used to our spiritual ghetto, think that the way it is now is the way it's supposed to be and will always be, and we lose the imagination to enquire whether God might have something bigger and more beautiful in mind for us. In Isaiah 54:2-3 (Sunday's other reading) God challenges the people to get ready for bigger things that He is going to do, bigger than they have yet imagined.

On the last night before He was crucified, Jesus rolled up His sleeves and washed the disciples' feet. What a way to spend your last night on earth! But He told us it was an example for us to wash each other's feet. Are we ready to follow Him?

Word 2 - Discussion Questions:-

- Do you know any missionaries? What do you feel about them, their life, their spirituality?
- Do you think it is possible to *grow up* into Christ without *growing out* in outreach to others?
- Do you think the church in the UK suffers from spiritual constipation? How do you think it affects us? What cures might work?
- "The people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Is this true of our society today? Are there any particular groups where this is most evident?
- Which do you feel is the most important way to share the Lord's love with others?
 - In actions of compassionate service?
 - In words of witness?
 - Or should we stop trying to separate the two?
-

Worship Ideas

Make a list of things you know of at St Matthew's that people are doing to serve others and reach out to them. Then give thanks for the people who are doing such amazing things! Pray for them as they pursue their calling.

Works / Witness

If there is anyone in your group who is engaging in mission or service in one way or another, including perhaps through their job, ask them how you can support them as a group.

Here are three new or newish mission ventures at St Matthew's or in Walsall that some of your members might want to engage with:

- Messy Church – God is really at work among families and children through Messy Church.
- Street Pastors – due to launch soon, an outreach to people on the streets of Walsall who may never have been near a church in their lives
- Lunch Club – St Matthew's is hoping to launch a weekly lunch club for people who have lost meals on wheels services and/ or may be housebound. Is anyone in your group interested in helping?