

Continuous Breakthrough: The Circle

We begin first with the Circle because it is the one sided shape but it is also the process by which Jesus began to do ministry when he was among us.

He called people to follow him. Literally, in the Greek, "to accompany him along the road."

He offered them the opportunity to be taught what he knew, and to be in a situation where they could 'catch' what he was about. "Life to Life engagement."

The word used by Jesus to describe this process is the word "**Mathetes**" – which we have translated into the dusty word "disciple", evoking pictures of saints in stain glass windows. This is not the dynamic word Jesus originally intended. What he was speaking about was a dynamic process by which a person's life would be radically changed, equipped and empowered to change the world themselves.

The Mathetes were to become "**Learners of Jesus**" and as they learnt they were to teach others. Jesus says come and learn from me, and finishes his ministry by saying go and teach others to learn from me. He took the moments of their lives and taught them how to learn from each one of them.

Let's begin by looking at Mark 1: 14-15 -

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14 – 15)

This was a watershed in history, a moment that Jesus had been waiting for.

You would imagine that the moment he would be waiting for would be, as Mark describes it, when Heaven was torn asunder and from beyond the physical realm a voice came from heaven, "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased". You would imagine that The Holy Spirit descending in the form of dove would be the moment that would indicate the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

But this was not the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, but was the beginning of the beginning. It was the beginning of the process that led to the launching of Jesus into his ministry in Galilee.

Luke tells us that after his baptism the Holy Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days. It is interesting to note that he entered "full of the Holy Spirit" and emerged in the "power of the Holy Spirit."

There was an empowering that took place. This was a time of mortal combat with his enemy. In vanquishing Satan he was empowered to begin his ministry. He was waiting for the work of the messenger to come to an end.

It is an indication of the watershed that he uses the word **Kairos**. The Greek word for time was always used by Jesus - "The time has come".

Le Brie was a community/retreat house nestling in the Swiss Alps. Francis Schaeffer used to take his students up to the snow line as it was beginning to melt in the spring. He would stand them on the arête and explain that if a single snowflake melts at this point it can do one of two things. It can flow to the left side of the Mt Leseur into streams and rivers via the Rhine and eventually into the North Sea. The Rhine is one of the most polluted rivers in history; you can even develop film in it!

Or it can melt and flow down the right hand side of the mountain into the Rhone, one of the cleanest rivers in Europe that winds its way through some of the most beautiful scenery before finally ending its journey in the warmth of the Mediterranean Sea.

Schaeffer was making the point that we make similar choices throughout our lives!

This is a good physical description of what Jesus means by Kairos. He is saying that up until now you could only go one way; there has only been one option.

But now there are two options, now there is an opportunity to receive and engage with an entirely new reality. You can now choose to go another way, and end up in the balmy waters of the Mediterranean, and it's all a question of what you do in relation to this moment called a Kairos.

This word Kairos can be understood in a number of ways, there are several words in the New Testament used for time, the two most common are Chronos and Kairos.

Chronos – sequential time as on a ticking clock, and in a sequence of events.

Kairos – described in our language when we say "wasn't that a great or important time", or a significant moment in our lives.

That construction in our language articulates what Jesus is talking about. It's a coming together of opportunities or events to describe for us something that we've not seen before. We're standing on the cusp of something new.

Jesus said, the time is right! The Kingdom of God is at hand or the Kingdom of God is near. So near you can taste it. That's a big Kairos!

A birthday being near is another kind of Kairos, an anniversary coming up is another kind of Kairos, but the Kingdom of God being near is the Kairos of all Kairos!

Jesus can see that the messenger who is the one to prepare the way has completed his task and is now in prison. That's the end of John's ministry and Jesus now takes up the torch and what has been prepared by the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, by John the Baptist, is now being offered – the Kingdom of God.

Theologically it's important to understand this on a deeper level. The Kingdom is an eschatological reality; God has created a future for his people which is devoid of sin, selfishness, sadness and Satan.

This is constructed by the loving creator for all humanity, and He wants us to come into his new creation. And that new creation is called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven throughout the bible.

It would appear from the teachings of Jesus and the other writers in the New Testament that this Kingdom draws closer, as though the future begins to press in on the present.

Here's the Kingdom. It's all the human heart aspires towards, and it's very near.

Jesus called it "The time" for you to encounter and engage with the presence of God. The reign and rule of God in our lives

Then he said "The time is now, great opportunity, you can meet with God".

Though the Kingdom is here he gives us two things to do.

Repent and **believe** the good news.

Here is a time, an event; a series of circumstances that have come together so that you can meet with God in an amazing way. This is what everyone wants to do, but to do this you need to repent and believe.

To have inner change we need to **Observe** – Jesus was always poking, "What about this?" "What about that?"

He made his disciples look at and question anxieties; sometimes in the most bizarre circumstances.

When the Pharisees were breathing threats against them Jesus would say "look at the birds of the air, do they sow or reap but your heavenly father takes care of them?"

Look at the flowers of the fields? Are they not more beautiful?

²⁵"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"
Matthew 6:25 – 30

He began the learning process with **Observation**.

Jesus was not asking rhetorical questions, he asked them to illicit a response. It is just that the writers of the New Testament did not want to write everything down.

So having done some observation, they begin to chew on it. Taking the observation into a **Reflection**.

What about you then?

"What will your heavenly Father do for you?"

Birds can't feed themselves – Heavenly father does it

Flowers can't clothe themselves – Heavenly Father clothes them

This reflection takes it into the inner process, but it is not simply an Introvert reality, also an Extrovert reality. "Well come on then, talk to me, tell me!"

Jesus is calling for a response, for a **Discussion**.

We have been hoodwinked into thinking this is solely an Introvert reality. Why? Well most spirituality has been written by Introverts. If you really want to go deeper with God you need to spend four hours alone, reading your Bible alone in grinding loneliness and quiet.

This may be entirely appropriate for an Introvert but Extroverts need a sound track; they are much better off reading their Bibles in Starbucks.

Jesus made it clear that the process of inner change is both internal and external. As Western Protestants we are very bad at this.

Why? – Well primarily we are afraid that we will say something stupid. There is something in our honour culture that makes us afraid of getting it wrong.

Look what Jesus said, “**Get behind me Satan**” (**Matthew 16:23**), and that was to his main leader in front of everyone! Imagine the face of the disciple taking the minutes. Do you really want me to include that? “Yes get it down” said Jesus!

Can you imagine that in our Churches today, “and then the pastor said to the president of the board....!”

Jesus goes on “**How foolish you are, you have so little faith**” (**Matthew 6:30**). We would be absolutely crushed by such feedback.

This discussion was a very extrovert process – Jesus did not discriminate between extrovert and introvert!

We need to engage with the idea that inner change will involve us being sufficiently transparent to allow other people into the process we are going through.

Shame often prevents us doing this! Yet allowing others into the learning process is a fundamental component of the “**Metanoia**” that is taking place.

Jesus then moves into the next half of the learning circle. From **Repentance** - “**Metanoia**” to **Belief**, or more literally “**have faith**” (“**Pistis**”)

The faith Jesus is talking about here was being certain of what we cannot see. We often teach faith as hope, an aspiration, something we desire or are looking for.

In New Testament culture that is called Hope!
Sometimes we teach that Faith is all about bravado and spelt RISK.

In New Testament culture Faith is spelt SURE. How do you get this certainty rather than nebulous? “I have faith for this” usually means general hope.

This type of faith does not move mountains!

Faith comes by hearing the Word (**Romans 10:17**), the Word which set creation in motion.

Everyone has that experience - “Do you believe God loves you? That you’re going to heaven, that sins are forgiven because of what Jesus has done?”

Immediate response is what the New Testament culture calls Faith.

Where does certainty that elicits an immediate response come from?

He has pounded away at the hardness of our hearts "I love you, I love you, I love you", and eventually we get it.

Certain of what we cannot see! **(Hebrews 11)** What is the process that produces this kind of concrete reality within it?

We begin to move towards intentional activity – we make a **Plan**.

If you are worried, "**seek first the Kingdom and everything else will be added to you.**" **(Matthew 6:33)** This is a plan for life. Don't worry about this stuff, seek the other stuff.

As you look for the Kingdom there are resources aplenty. In the Kingdom there is no want, there is abundance shared from the heart of a gracious Father. There is no want in the pantry of heaven.

You have the Kairos that opens up the opportunity.

All these things will be given to you. Not something open for debate, no latitude. If you seek the Kingdom everything else is provided. Isn't this amazing!

Manifesto – beginning

From the Plan, realise that your life is **Accountable**. The internalised realities and the external realities that he is always bidding us come into. You don't do this by yourself!

Your life will reveal whether you are seeking the Kingdom. Is there fruit? Best be honest and best be accountable for it.

Accountability – often feel this is a heavy word, headmaster looking over the walls of heaven, better do what I say.

It is simply living out here what you have decided to do in here. The entire next chapter is about living accountable lives. Narrow and wise ways, trees and fruits.

In the final clinch he delivers the final piece in the process of discipleship.

Let me tell you a story – Wise and a foolish builder.

Wise man who builds his life on a rock so that when the storm comes, that life is built on something solid and secure.

Difference between the wise and the foolish is not whether they had listened to Jesus. The wise man acted on what he heard, the foolish man didn't.

Faith always produces activity. We have not learnt it until we have **acted** upon it.

This is often preached wrongly.

²⁴"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24)

I am convinced that was how Jesus learnt from the father.

I only do what I see the Father doing, turning things over in our hearts and talking with others, we become accountable for the plan and as we do that we intentionally reflect what is in our hearts by the actions that we choose.

As disciples we are called to learn, to be learners. We can learn how to receive and enter into the Kingdom.

Make learners of everyone, teaching them do everything that I taught you to do. Not about an event but a process of learning. We are called to be people who teach others how to learn from Jesus.

To what extent are you engaged in the process of discipleship as a learner?

To what extent as a learner from Christ are you teaching the people that follow you to learn from Jesus? Life on Life.

We are called to be transparent! If our plan is to feel guilty then sharing it will reveal how stupid that is!

European Protestants – congenitally incapable of confrontation! Techniques we follow until we disappear up our own essential orifice.

We need to get out of a tailspin. We need to be honest! It is hard at first but eventually like all skills we get better.