

Rector's sermon 3: September 2026

Grow

Good morning!

Its great to be with you again to share the third sermon in our series looking at our Mission Community mission statement, which you'll of course remember says:

We are called by God to build a Christian community in each village, which will worship, pray, grow and reach out with the Gospel.

So far, we've looked at how God might be calling us to worship and pray (if you missed those sermons you can catch up on our website).

Today I want to think about what it might mean to build a Christian community which grows.

Now, there are three ways in which we might grow as Christian communities, churches, and they are these:

1. Spiritually
2. Numerically
3. In impact

Let's look at each of these in turn...

Spiritual growth:

St Peter wrote (1 Peter 2.2):

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

The writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 5.12-13) chides his readers:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

The leaders of the early church clearly expected the Christians they pastored to be growing.

To start out with the healthy nourishing “milk” of the gospel, but then to move onto the “solids” of more complex Christian teaching. And if they didn’t move on, they expressed their frustration!

So, how might we grow spiritually, as individuals, and collectively as church?

Well, we do need to take some personal responsibility: studying the Scriptures (... its amazing how as we read the Scriptures and become familiar with them that a verse will pop into our heads at just the moment we need it), reading a good Christian book or listening to a podcast; seeking out another Christian to talk to who is a bit further along on their journey of faith. Putting ourselves out there and having a go at some sort of ministry... its often as we try something we grow into it and discover we can do something that we never imagined we could!

And we do need to be helping each other.

“Let the word of God dwell richly in you (plural)” says Paul in Colossians 3.16.

And *“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works”* says to writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10.24).

Did you know that there are about 100 ‘one anothers’ in the New Testament.

Many are about our responsibility to maintain unity within the body of Christ.

Many others about loving our brother and sister Christians.

But a good number urge us to encourage one another, teach one another, pray for one another.

Contrary to the retort of Cain when asked by God about his brother Abel, yes, I am *“my brother’s keeper”*.

Might you come alongside someone after church and ask how they got on with the sermon? and help them with anything they didn't understand. Or you could offer to pray with them about something that has particularly spoken to them?

Prayer triplets and homegroups and study groups are a great way to be intentional about this. Or joining a course... the diocese has lots on offer and many run in Barnstaple.

But, and this is important, if we are going to grow, then what we come to understand with our mind needs to drop to our heart and put in practice in our lives.

It's one thing to know that giving is a good thing, but quite another to start giving generously, sacrificially even... and joyfully... to God's work.

It's one thing to understand that fasting is a good thing, but quite another to start going without a meal once a week to spend time in prayer.

This is where the spiritual disciplines might help us... building some of the ancient practices of the church into our lives.

Why not get hold of a book that might help.

Dallas Willard's, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* is a classic.

Lots of people are finding recent books by John Mark Comer really helpful.

So, spiritual growth.

What about numerical growth?

Jesus clearly expected his kingdom to grow... think the parable of the mustard seed which, Jesus said, is the smallest of seeds but grows into the largest of garden plants.

And the parable of the yeast which causes a whole batch of dough to rise (both Matthew 13).

Jesus clearly expected the Church to grow... "*Go and make disciples*", said Jesus "*and baptise them and teach them*" (Matthew 28).

Now of course, we can't "convert" anyone.

It is only the Holy Spirit who can bring someone to repentance and faith and new birth and new life as a child of God. Read again Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 about being born again.

But as St Paul wrote in Romans 10.13-14:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Our job is to share the good news of Jesus, so that hearing, people can believe and be saved.

Of course, for many people, becoming a Christian takes some time; it's a process.

People need to get to know Christians and try out church to see if it works before they commit to following Jesus.

People may need to explore and find answers to questions.

But at some point, people need to make up their minds to follow Jesus; come to him in repentance and faith and give their lives to him.

Let me ask you, "If someone said to you that they wanted to become a Christian, right here and now, would you know how to help them pray a prayer of repentance and faith and invite Jesus into their lives?

If not, learn quickly... we don't want people to be ready and us not to be able to help them.

If you aren't sure, I'd suggest getting hold of an Alpha Why Jesus booklet and looking at the prayer at the back and practicing how you would pray it with someone.

Thirdly, growth of impact.

The Church is supposed to make a difference in the world.

Matthew 5.14-16: *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Let me make a bold assertion: communities with lively vibrant churches (and they don't have to be big churches), with Christians living as Jesus said, are better off than those without.

Do you believe that?

I hope you do?

At the very least, communities with a church have someone praying for them (we talked about that last month didn't we!).

But they will also have Christians growing in the fruits of the spirit (Christlike character) and modelling a good way to live.

They will have Christians who are actively looking out for others; loving their neighbour as they love themselves influencing society for good.

People who are struggling will not have to do it alone

Communities with a church will have Christians who care of the environment; stewarding God's creation and helping it be fruitful.

The simple fact is that, statistically, if you are a Christian you are much more likely to volunteer in your community than if you are an atheist.

That's why the government loves churches... not because of their faith... they often want churches to keep quiet about that... but because

Christians run toddler groups, youth groups, coffee mornings, food banks, debt advice centres, homeless shelters, Street pastors, school mentoring schemes.

Christians also give to charity more than those who aren't.

Christians care.

Because God cares.

So, let's come in to land...

We are called by God to build Christian communities which worship, pray and grow:

Grow spiritually, numerically and in impact.

If we are going to do this, and I trust we want to, then there is one thing that is more important than any other...

To remain rooted in Christ.

The final bible verse I want to end with is John 15.5:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Each Autumn we celebrate harvest.

We recognise the hard work of those who grow and produce our food.

But we also recognise that ultimately it's the Lord who "sends the snow in winter and the warmth to swell the grain".

As with the growth of crops, so with spiritual, numerical and impact growth... Jesus has promised that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail.

We have the fun of joining in with him... so long as remain rooted and nourished by him.

Prayer

Father God,

Rooted in Christ, may we be a church that grows: spiritually, numerically and in impact.

To your praise and glory

Amen