

## **1 Peter 3.1-16: GOD WANTS YOU TO BE ATTRACTIVE**

*[Chelmsford 28 October 2012]*

### ***Last words***

Just before he died Conrad Hilton, the founder of the international chain of luxury hotels, was asked if he had any last words of wisdom for the world. He replied: *“Leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub”*

The last words of Marie Antoinette, the wife of King Louis XVI of France, were similarly unimpressive. As she approached the guillotine, she accidentally stepped on the foot of her executioner. Consequently her last words recorded for posterity were: *“Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur”*

Lady Nancy Astor, the first woman MP, spoke her last words when, on her death bed, she momentarily awoke to find herself surrounded by her family, and asked: *“Am I dying or is this my birthday?”*

And Jesus - what were his last words?

- According to Matthew: **“Go and make disciples of all nations”** (Matt 28.19).
- According to Luke: **“You will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”** (Acts 1.8).

The wording may be slightly different - but the thrust is exactly the same.

Jesus left his followers with a task to fulfil - the task of telling others of him.

### ***Tell others of Jesus***

Down through the centuries the church has got on with that task with great success and enthusiasm – with the result that billions of people have come to discover the difference that Jesus can make to life.

I’m looking forward to going to China in eight days time.

Did you know that at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 there were 800,000 Christians in China? Although Mao did his best to kill off the church, by the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 there were 2 million Christians. Since then the church has exploded – and today, there are somewhere between 120-180 million Christians in China.

Here in the UK we have not been so successful.

In the last century we have experienced enormous church decline.

And yet, not all is gloom and doom. Many local churches are growing. Indeed Anglican churches in the London Diocese have grown in the last few years by over 70%.

But the reality is that we need to do better – if we are going to be effective in our task of telling others of Jesus. The question is how?

This is the context in which I want us to look at 1 Peter 3.

Those who are regulars at Central will know that this term we have been looking at the letter of Peter. And it seems to me that we can sum up the message of his third chapter in two words: Be attractive! Yes, if we want to win people for Jesus, then we need to be attractive. We need to be the kind of people that others would love to be. Wow!

## 1. WIVES – BE ATTRACTIVE!

Peter begins the chapter by addressing a group of Christian women in the church whose husbands did not share their faith. ‘*Don’t nag your husbands to come to church*’, says Peter, instead, ‘*attract them to church by the kind of lives you live*’. In this way, he writes in 3.1, “**your conduct (*anastrophe*) will win them over**”.

I shall never forget the day our eldest grand-child was born: we had gone horse-racing at Newmarket, or rather we had gone to see the horse-racing. And before any of thinks we’re into gambling, no, we didn’t put any money on any horse. And thank God we didn’t, because every horse I mentally backed, lost!

The next day we went to see Jemima.

We think Jemima is a lovely name – it is actually a Bible name.

In the Book of Job, Jemima was one of Job’s three daughters – and Jemima along with her sisters are described as the three most beautiful women in all the earth (Job 42.14).

I proudly told this to the African nurse looking after Jemima. But she knew her Bible: and she reminded me that the Bible places more worth on ‘inner beauty’.

That is precisely what Peter says here. Look at 3.4: instead of paying a small fortune on beauty parlours or on designer dresses, “**your beauty should consist of your true inner self, the ageless beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of the greatest value in God’s sight**”.

Ladies, you can’t win your husbands into the kingdom by nagging them.

You can only win by attracting them – by demonstrating to them in the lives you lead the difference that Jesus makes

## 2. CHURCHES – BE ATTRACTIVE!

From husbands and wives, Peter turns to talk to the churches to which he is writing - we know from his opening greeting (1.1) that he was writing to churches in modern Turkey. To them he says: ‘*Instead of trying to impose your beliefs on others, attract them to faith by the kind of lives you lead*’.

Look at 3.16: what counts he says is “**good conduct**” (*anastrophe* – same word as in 3.1).

Sadly all too often churches repel, rather than attract.

One reason why 15 years ago we agreed to redevelop our premises was that we recognized that our building was off-putting.

People are not attracted to Christ when the building is dark and gloomy, the pews are uncomfortable, with all the fixtures and fittings speaking of the past.

We therefore spent £2 million to ensure that we had a facility fit for mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Buildings are important.

And yet buildings just by themselves will not attract people to faith.

What counts is the quality of the fellowship which the church exudes.

If churches are going to attract others, then says Peter in 3.8 they need to have the following

five characteristics: **“You must all have the same attitude and the same feelings; love one another as brothers and sisters, and be kind and humble with one another”**.

Let me unpack that verse – I am fascinated by the lifestyle Peter deems to be attractive:

1. **“You must all have the same attitude”** (*homophron*) – by this Peter doesn’t mean that we should all read the Daily Mail, all enjoy the same music, all vote for the same party, and all watch the same TV programmes. That would be appalling. We would be a bunch of clones. No, he is essentially saying – *“let harmony reign”*. In music, harmony is when different notes put together make a pleasant sound. Put negatively, *‘let there be no discord’* – churches where people argue with one another repel, rather than attract.
2. **“You must all have,,, the same feelings”** (*sumpathes*) – literally, you must all be *‘sympathetic’*. The feelings of which Peter speaks are feelings of sympathy for others in need. It is the churches that care for the weak and the vulnerable which attract – the churches which are all wrapped up with self repel
3. **“Love one another as brothers and sisters”** (*philadelphos*). Did you hear of the church that was gothic in architecture, arctic in temperature, where the deacons walked up and down the aisles like polar bears? A church that is cold repels – a church that is warm and welcoming attracts.
4. **“Be kind”** says Peter. Literally, ‘have healthy bowels’ (*eusplagchnos*). And before you jump to the conclusion that Peter is commending All Bran, remember that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century the seat of the affections was not the heart, but the bowels. When in the Gospels we read the Jesus had compassion on people, literally it says that his bowels moved! Be kind, be compassionate, be tender-hearted. Legalism in church life repels, kindness, tenderness attracts.
5. **“Be humble (*tapeinophron*) with one another”**. Amazingly one commentator (Joel Green) suggests that at this point Peter is picking up a smear word, and giving it a positive meaning. For in the ancient world ‘humility’ was not a virtue. Humble people who didn’t brag about themselves and their exploits were regarded as wimps without spunk. Sadly in our world, all too often the people who seem to make it in life are those who play games of one-upmanship. But at the end of the day, one-upmanship repels – modesty which values the worth of others is what attracts.

### 3. PARENTS – BE ATTRACTIVE

Nowhere does Peter in his letter talk about children and parents.

But on a day when three families have brought children for a service of thanksgiving and blessing and dedication, it is worth making the point that children from Christian families also need to be attracted to Christ, and that attraction will in the first place be found in the lives their parents lead.

Thank God, children from Christian homes often find it natural to believe in the love of God for them – but that belief needs to be confirmed by what they see of God’s love in their homes.

Look at what Peter says in 3.9, and apply it to a home rather than a church. **“Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead, pay back with a blessing”**.

If children are to believe in a God who forgives and blesses, then they need to see those same attributes in their parents.

Homes where there is backbiting and criticism will repel children from believing in a God of love – but homes where relationships are marked by positivity and peace-making, attract.

#### 4. LET OTHERS ASK – ‘WHY?’

Our lives should not only attract – they should also cause others to wonder why our lives are different from others. Our lives should give non-Christians food for thought.

This is what Peter has in mind when in 3.15-16 he writes: **"Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do so with gentleness and respect"**

NB Peter does not say: "Be ready at all times to take the initiative and share your faith".

No, he says: **"Be ready at all times to answer....., to explain"**.

Peter presumes that if we are living truly Christian lives, then people will automatically want to ask why:

- What is it that makes us tick?
- What is it that makes us different?
- What is it about the Christian faith which makes us live our lives in the way we do?

One of the best books on evangelism has the wonderful title of *The Provocative Church*.

There Graham Tomlin, the author, writes: *“Unless there is something about church, or Christians, or Christian faith that intrigues, provokes or entices, then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears. If churches cannot convey a sense of ‘reality’ then all our ‘truth’ will count for nothing. Unless someone wants to hear, there’s no point in shouting louder. Churches need to become provocative, arresting places which make the searcher, the casual visitor, want to come back for more”*. He goes on: *“Is our church just another little club for likeminded people who happen to enjoy singing, religious emotion and sermons? Or is there anything in the life or worship of our church that would make an outsider looking in want what we have?”*

I would love to think that people who come into our church because some outside body has put on an event, ask themselves the question: *‘What is it that motivates this church? What is it that is so special about God that these church people give so generously of their time and of their money?’*

I would love to think that when people who don’t normally come to church visit us on a Sunday, they ask: *‘What is it that causes these church people to be so open and welcoming? What is it that makes them tick?’*

But it is not only the church which is called to be provocative.

We as individual Christians are called to be provocative - provocative not in the things we/say, but in the way which we live our lives.

Our values expressed in the way we live, at home and at work, should provoke others to want to know more about what it is that makes us different.

Our life-style is crucial to our evangelism.

Yes, of course, there comes a stage when we do need to speak.

As Peter says, we must **“be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope that you have in you”**.

Yes, each one of us needs to be able to **“explain”** what Christianity is really all about.

For as, Alister McGrath, an Oxford theologian has rightly said *“Most people have very confused understandings of what Christianity is about! They don’t reject Christianity because they have given it careful consideration and decided that it is wrong. In most cases, they encounter a caricature of Christianity and reject that instead”*

And if you find it difficult to explain, then there is a simple solution: just invite them to come with you to Alpha.

There is a place for telling others about Jesus.

But there is no place for imposing Jesus on others.

Rather, we should attract people to Jesus by the kind of lives we lead. We should provoke people to ask ‘why’.

It has been said: *"A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God"*

Does your life - does mine - make it easier for others to believe in God?

How attractive/provocative is our life-style?

Yes, how attractive/provocative is our life-style at work? Or at home?

God wants us – he wants you – to be attractive!