

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## WHAT IDENTIFIES YOU?

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28TH MAY 2021

As a church we are currently looking at a letter written by the Apostle Peter to a fairly new bunch of believers in Jesus, gathered together in communities in Asia minor – the area we know today as Turkey.

The letter was written by Peter, the same Peter who denied Jesus three times (you know ... Before the cock crowed!), also the same guy who walked out on the water to greet Jesus, only to sink when he realised what he was stood on! This happened when he took his eyes off the one who had the power over the wind and waves.

Following his denial of Jesus, it is amazing that this is the same Peter, who a short time later on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem, proclaimed to the crowds that Jesus was Lord and Messiah and who eventually would be martyred and gave his life standing up for the truth. What a change had come over him.

On the church calendar, the Sunday just gone (23rd May) is known as Pentecost. This is significant because it is the day when Peter all those years ago, stood on the steps in Jerusalem and boldly announced the truth of Jesus to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Weeks (which we now know as Pentecost – meaning 'fiftieth' the nearest Sunday to 50 days after Easter Sunday)

This festival which the Jews celebrated was also known as the festival of the first-fruits – the first and best of the harvest dedicated to God and seen as Holy. The first fruit was also offered as a sign of the promise to come. All of this is important when we consider the events of that first Pentecost. Jesus had risen from the dead, and now 50 days later, the Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised would come in power on those who believed in him as a sign of things to come, had descended upon those early believers and transformed them into walking talking powerhouses – declaring that Jesus was Messiah – the promised one. The Holy

Spirit became the means by which these believers were identified – and this remains in place today. Christians are described as having the Holy Spirit within them and the bible declares that this is the guarantee of an inheritance to come – in heaven – for eternity.

Ephesian 1 verse 14 in the Bible states this clearly:

The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

When I was selected to represent Great Britain in swimming events, I was issued with kit which identified me with the team. A blue tracksuit with a white and red lion embroidered into the fabric. It was a sign of belonging.

When I decided to resign from swimming, I lost the right to wear the colours. I no longer represented my country, so I couldn't wear the identifying marks. When I was a street pastor in Bury, I was identified by the uniform. Dark blue t- shirt, jumper, overcoats and hats all emblazoned with the word Street Pastor in white across them. This was to make sure that I was recognisable to those on the streets who needed help and also to my colleagues, so that we could look after each other's backs.

When I wasn't on duty, I couldn't wear the uniform, as I was legally not representing the team outside hours. This may seem a little odd, but it was to make sure that I wasn't being forced into positions I shouldn't be in, but probably more importantly, I would not be part of the team which the street pastors worked as part of. If we couldn't make a team of three, we simply didn't go out – as protection for each other.

I want to note the wisdom in this, and also the biblical standard being upheld. Very rarely in Scripture do we see people acting independently without others in close proximity: Adam was given Eve, Moses was given Aaron, Abraham was given Sarah and so on. When Jesus sent out disciples to tell others about Him, He sent them in twos

Mark 6 verse 7

And he called his twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits

Jesus didn't do this lightly. For one thing the Law which the Jews lived under, stated that in order for an adequate witness there must be more than one person and should be at least two or three. I also believe that that we can learn from each other and help each other to overcome our weaknesses and broadly speaking, we can encourage each other to be better.

This time last year, I spent a week 30 or so feet off the ground in a cherry picker with Jamie. It wasn't exactly our choice; it was just that some high-level work needed doing so we set ourselves to the task at hand. We wanted to do some building work. What we didn't perhaps appreciate, is that God was going to do some building work with us! We still look back on that week with great fondness. God can achieve a lot when you can't get away from each other!

That week above all over weeks, perhaps gave us both a sense of what God was going to do with us and with the church we represented. It was exciting to 'grow together', 'challenge together', 'laugh together' and to 'weep together' as we began to understand each other. God was equipping us for what was to come. I like to think that we were like two disciples Jesus sent out to tell others, that allowed each other's character's, to strengthen the other. Certainly, God gave us a trust and unity that has been a great help in the times that followed, especially as we planned and resourced the church's path through Covid.

We certainly felt the benefit of being together in God's plan and I think we are more effective because of it. Proverbs 27 verse 17 says:

**As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.**

Here is the benefit of friendship and fellowship. Individually our behavioural patterns need challenging and this is best done within friendship. God knew what He was doing when He ordained that fellowship together as Church is important.

Hebrew 10: 24-26 states:

And let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains,...

And here is the beauty and the warning.

We encourage each other when we are together. God has formed us together as Church. Church is a living organism, identified by the Holy Spirit, working together in unity to Glorify God and to be a beacon of hope to those who have yet to put their trust in Jesus as Saviour. It is a place to spur each other on! C'mon – you can do it!

The warning that goes with it, is that if we continue to sin deliberately, i.e., set our face to go against God with purpose and with flagrant disregard for Him, then we are hardening our hearts and will sadly lose the covering which identifies us as belonging....

I have lost the position of being able to wear my Great Britain Tracksuit, I laid it down and walked away. This was abandonment.

I lost the privilege of wearing my Street Pastor uniform, because I was given another uniform to wear, that of Pastor of the Coach House. I had another role to perform, one which I was equipped for in part, during my time as a street pastor. This was progression – I had been spurred on to love and good deeds.

I believe that only unforgivable sin, is the one we deliberately withhold and do not repent of. God in His grace is capable of loving the un-loveable, and nothing will stop Him granting forgiveness if we are ready to say sorry and throw ourselves at His mercy.

Maybe you are listening or reading this at a time of crisis in your life – a crossroad.

I can wholeheartedly say, that Gods church is a place of refuge, safety and restoration. God is ready to receive, and I trust that we, His church, are ready to receive and bear the witness of Gods Holy Spirit identifying us.



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