

Hello Everyone

**1 Peter 2:2-3 – Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

There is more of a grain of truth in my overstatement that everything important I learned as a Christian I learned before I was seven years old. In those days, our Sunday School was so big that it was divided into departments and I remember so clearly many of the things I learned when I was in the 'primary department' (children 7 years of age and younger, what in day school was 'infants'). Singing elementary Christian songs was an important part of Sunday School and, along with boys and girls all over the country, we sang, 'I will make you fishers of men if you follow me'. However, in our Sunday School we continued, 'Read your Bible, pray every day if you want to grow.' I have a feeling that I probably thought this meant 'grow in height' when really it means 'grow as a Christian'. Growing as a Christian is not something we seem to talk about so much these days but I suppose most people will understand what it means. When I was a child, I had good relationships with my parents, family and friends but they were different relationships from the ones I have as an adult.

In the life of the church, the pattern of pre-evangelism, evangelism, conversion, and nurture are very important. Pre-evangelism is all to do with the contacts that we build before we begin to tell others about our faith in Jesus. Often, we have thought 'evangelists' are people like Billy Graham or even John Wesley. That is right but anyone who shares faith in Jesus, especially when we hope that will result in a response from the people with whom we are sharing it, is engaging in 'evangelism'. In the New Testament, we find at least two patterns of Christian conversion. The more dramatic conversion experience is labelled the 'Damascus Road' (Acts 9:1-19).

Saul had been a vigorous opponent of faith in Jesus Christ but, on the road to Damascus, he had a vivid encounter with the risen Lord which resulted in his life taking a whole new direction. In contrast, on the evening of the first Easter Day, two disciples walking to Emmaus, gradually realised that they also had met the risen Lord, something sealed in their simple home at supper time as Jesus said grace at the table (Luke 24:13-35). However, whether a believer's type of conversion is Damascus Road or Emmaus Road, conversion is not the end of the Christian life but the beginning.

The beginning of the Christian life is not only described as 'conversion' but being 'born again'. Occasionally, someone asks me whether I am one of those born-again Christians. I nearly always reply, 'is there another sort of Christian?' The life of faith that the Lord Jesus clearly describes as beginning with the new birth (John 3:1-21) naturally continues with spiritual growth (Christian nurture). The Apostle Peter picks this up in his first letter. 'For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God' (1 Peter 1:23).

Each year, as we receive Christmas greetings from friends, they tell us how their children and, more recently, grandchildren are growing. They expect their family to increase and they expect all its members to grow. This natural pattern needs to be reflected within the life of the church. I hope, therefore, that it is not too impertinent a question to ask, 'how do you feel that you grew as a Christian in 2016 and how are you planning to grow in 2017?' We all know the importance of a healthy diet. In modern Britain that includes an awareness of not eating the wrong things (Christians might feel that has a spiritual application) but for the majority of the people in the world a healthy diet is really focused on eating enough of the right things.

There is a place to discuss how we as a church are getting on with pre-evangelism, evangelism and conversion but let's leave those aside for a moment to consider how we are growing as individual Christians and as Christians together (what we have traditionally called 'fellowship' a word that has been hijacked to mean something less than it ought). When Peter speaks about 'newborn babies' he is not thinking about the smallness and innocence of the baby but its strong instinctive longing for a mother's milk. For believers, the new birth results in a new appetite. In the New Testament, 'milk' is elementary Christian teaching (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-13; Michaels, J. R. (1998), 1 Peter (Vol. 49, pp. 86-90), Dallas: Word, Inc.). Elementary and advanced teaching are necessary for the believer to 'grow up in salvation'.

The most necessary way in which spiritual milk is received is the proclaimed message of the gospel. Christians grow through Biblical preaching and teaching. We need to move to a new understanding of what we are doing on Sundays and Tuesdays. When we miss a service, we

are not simply missing an important opportunity to worship but we are 'going hungry'. Milk (1 Peter 2:2) is not only food for recent converts but the means of growth for all believers. Even this is not so that believers can know more than others for the aim is to 'grow up in salvation'. Underlying Peter's thought is his conviction that believers need to be ready for the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Peter 1:3-5). Nowhere in the New Testament is the Christian life depicted as a life of ease. It is a struggle, a battle, a journey (often uphill) and we need to be nurtured, strengthened, fed, taught and encouraged along the way.

At Goodrington Methodist Church, the *Tuesdays Together* programme is an important part of our provision of the 'pure spiritual milk'. The aim is to achieve this through a diet of Bible study, prayer, exploration and worship. Members who are sharing fully in the *Tuesdays Together* programme are able to testify that they are growing in faith. If you are missing out on that, perhaps the New Year is a good time to set a new routine and to become part of it. *Tuesdays Together* give us opportunity to support and encourage one another and to supplement the pattern of daily Bible study and prayer that we should all be developing at home (for details of help with daily Bible reading see the December issue of the circuit magazine *Connected* or ask for further information). In the *Tuesday Teaching* we are taking an overview of the prophet Isaiah, the prophet most quoted in the New Testament. *Tuesday Praying* can help us to develop a spiritual vision for the church. *2B1* continues with its gentle evenings of worship through, song, reading and prayer. *Tuesday Exploring* is suitable for anyone who wants to explore or learn more about the Christian faith, giving us opportunity to engage with the Bible message in our own style and at our own level.

Another important part of the devotional life of our church is our *Thursday Communion*. In its new format our monthly midweek communion service (normally on the first Thursday of each month) begins at 11.30am and is followed by a light lunch. It is not necessary to book in advance and there is no charge for the lunches which are financed simply by the donations of those attending.

How are you planning to grow in 2017? I hope that one of the ways in which you might reply is 'by being committed to *Tuesdays Together*.'

God bless you all in the coming year.

**John Haley**  
**Minister**