

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life?

This has been a reoccurring theme for me, right throughout my Christian experience. I started asking this question when I first went to Zion Bible Training Centre. A little school run by the Queen Street Assemblies of God in the middle 1980's. Spending hours and hours every day studying the bible will do that to you. You eat, breathe, and think it all the time; and while it's very inspiring, it's also very challenging. You constantly question yourself. What to do, what not to do, what of all the things you could do, is the most important thing to do? After a while it can become a little overwhelming, and while I often found it complicated, it's a question I keep on asking.

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What are the things, of all the things that can, point us in the right direction as we struggle away living as God's people in this world. With all that goes on around us, how do we live as Christian people in good conscience and still function in the real world.

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I guess if we're honest we can only speak of things from our own experience and rattle the tin of the stuff that we have done, to see if any of it falls out as a winner.

The first thing Janet and I did in answer to this question, was move all over the country following the Lord Jesus. Down the island and the motorway from Marsden Point to Auckland. Then 6 moves in 5 years around the city as we battled for accommodation with no money and no backing. At one stage finding ourselves genuinely homeless with 3 very small children. Then we went right out of this island to the other one, to Ashburton in the south, following what we thought was the right thing to do. Then back up the islands to Marsden again, and another shift down the motorway to Auckland and Ponsonby Baptist, where we had another 3 moves in the 11 years we were there, before we finally shifted to our own home in Huntly.

I have often wondered whether all that moving, shifting, and disrupting the kids repeatedly, was an authentic Christian life? It was certainly a committed Christian life, but I'm not sure if it qualified as particularly authentic? As I think about it now, I wonder if it didn't provide as many frustrations and resentments, as it did anchors for the soul?

So, we tried giving up everything and following the Lord kind of Christianity, which we thought the gospel called us too, and it worked for a while. It was fine when we were in our early and even late 20's, but by the time we got to our late 30's and 40's, with 4 kids, no money, and no home, we were tired and looking for a dose of stability.

We needed a chance to settle and be, to try the life that everyone else had, to have a place and be able to call somewhere home.

So, we left the ministry and moved to Huntly. We could afford to buy a house there, and it was where Janet's Mum and Dad were.

We brought a big old villa with a proper section, put all our stuff out, hung our pictures, put in bookcases, and got the floors polished. We eventually got round to doing the blinds and curtains, and it was, our very own form of bliss. We really enjoyed having our own place. It was a massive change for us. A place to put our stuff and be ourselves, a place to put down roots and be a part of a local community. It was a home instead of a place to live.

I have since wondered about being in Huntly, whether that was an authentic Christian life, too? It was a good life, but I'm not sure if it qualified as particularly authentic, either? As I think about it now, I wonder if it, didn't provide as many frustrations and resentments, as it did anchors for the soul?

It worked ... for a while. But then stirrings occurred, and I went to work at the prison as a Chaplain, and then more stirrings and I became an Anglican, went to Howick, and now we are here with you guys at St Barnabas.

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We tried leaving all and following. We tried settling down and staying, they both worked for a while, very well, until they didn't ... and I'm still asking that question.

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The Prophet in Isaiah wants a true fast. Paul suggests it springs out of the wisdom of God, not of the world. Matthew wants true disciples to follow the Lord Jesus.

So, what does it mean?

After 40 years of trying to follow, I don't think it's about moving or staying. I think it's much simpler than that. I think it's about our heart response to the gospel's call on us, as evidenced in our texts for this morning.

"Let's not fool ourselves or others, or try to fool God, about what we are about. Let's not say we are one thing and be something else. Let's have honest dealings with others, be straight in all our business affairs. Let's be faithful in our relationships, especially with those close to us. Our wives and husbands, our families, and friends. Let's be generous with those we love, the church and organisations we are a part of. Let's make sure there is something for those who don't have as much as we do."

This is not just about what we do as individuals. It's about community and communal relationships. These are communal texts.

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life?

It means living an honest, heartfelt, genuine life together, as the church of Jesus Christ. Planted here in Mt Eden as St Barnabas Anglican Parish. It means loving one another. Loving our city and our world, together.

Today's texts are community texts.

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life?

It means authentic Christianity is only found in loving. And that loving is only found in community. Communities of people all loving and working on this life ... together.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.