

## CALLED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: COMMISSIONING NEW TOWN PASTORS FOR EMMAUS RD. GUILDFORD (Adam & Hannah Heather, Pete Burton)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

### Luke 17:21 (NIVUK)

<sup>20</sup> Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is in your midst.'

### Luke 17:21 (The New Testament for Everyone – Tom Wright)

<sup>20</sup> The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. 'God's kingdom', replied Jesus, 'isn't the sort of thing you can watch for and see coming. <sup>21</sup> People won't say "Look, here it is", or "Look, over there!" No: God's kingdom is within your grasp.'

In Tom Wright's commentary on this text, he writes,

"The phrase he uses in verse 21 is sometimes translated 'within you', and people have often thought it meant that the kingdom is purely spiritual, a private, interior relationship with God. But Jesus never uses 'God's kingdom' in that sense. It always refers to things that happen in the public world, not to private experience. Others have suggested that the phrase means 'in your midst'; God's kingdom, in other words, is present but secret, hidden, waiting for them to discover it. That is closer, but still not quite there. The phrase is more active. It doesn't just tell you where the kingdom is; it tells you that you've got to do something about it. It is 'within your grasp'; it is confronting you with a decision, the decision to believe, trust and follow Jesus. It isn't the sort of thing that's just going to happen so you can sit back and watch. God's sovereign plan to put the world to rights *is waiting for you to sign on*. That is the force of what Jesus is saying. [...] The passage holds out an invitation [...]: God's sovereign rule of the world, his healing love, are not only yours for the grasping, but are waiting for your help." (Luke for Everyone. pp.210-211)

Adam recalled Tom Wright speaking at a conference and putting it even more directly – 'The ball is in your court'! In other words, this is an invitation to sign on to Jesus' call to come and make a sizeable difference in the world.

Quoting Henri Nouwen, Hannah spoke about what, in practical terms, that difference might look like:

"More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets. It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them." (Henri Nouwen. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*)

- *If we take seriously the idea that the ball really is in our court, and it isn't just up to Jesus and the mysterious working of his secret kingdom, what difference might it mean to the way we live now?*
- *What do you think Henri Nouwen means by a 'simple ministry of presence'? Does that sound too simple, or do we sometimes get so caught up in the urgency of things we 'need' to do that we don't have time to love people?*
- *Henri Nouwen writes about his time being taken up in 'meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops'. These may sound like good things, but what gets in the way of the most important things in your life?*
- *What 'sizeable difference' would you like to see in your community? In your town (or village)? In your street? In your workplace?*
- *Remembering that 'the birthplace of the church was the place of the impossible' (that is to say, a dead Messiah in a sealed tomb), what is your 'impossible dream' that just might be possible?*