

1. The spiritual interest is growing

The Gospel of John 4: 27-38.

We live in the midst of a spiritual disruption. Surveys made on the Danes and their beliefs show that the faith in God and a spiritual world has increased since the 1980's. It has become more common for famous people to talk in public about their faith. Personally, I experience another response from people than I would have 20 years ago if I tell them that I am a priest. When I was younger, it often made people a little embarrassed. Today it often leads to conversations about faith and spirituality.

The growing interest for the personal spirituality is met with resistance in a public debate that consider religion to be a problem. A well-known example is our former prime minister, Anders Fogh-Rasmussen, who during the Muhammad cartoon controversy pronounced that religion had no place in the public space.

In times of disruption both possibilities and dangers emerge. In today's text Jesus encourages his disciples to raise their eyes and look at the people in Samaria, who were, like ripe fields, ready to be harvested for the kingdom of God. That harvest did not look like anything they knew from their Jewish background. If we are to address the spiritual interest of our time, we must like the disciples be willing to look at people that we meet with new eyes. Many of them have no experience with the fellowship of the Church.

We thank you, God, for the growing spiritual interest in our country.

We confess that we often are busier meeting our own needs, than we are tending to the spiritual harvest.

We pray that we must see people around us with Your eyes.

We pray for those, who seek – that they will encounter the Gospels, and not the messages from other religions.

2. We have a calling to make disciples.

The Gospel of Matthew 28: 16-20.

Today's text is one of the most central paragraphs in the Bible. The resurrected Jesus stands together with his disciples just before his ascension and imprints on them their calling and the promise of his presence. He does not blame them for their doubts, but He believes in them.

The text has often been called 'The Great Commission', because Jesus talks about bringing the good news to all nations. Actually, it is more precise if the text had been called a commission of discipleship. 'Make disciples of...' is the only imperative in the text. The words about baptism and teaching only describes how we shall fulfil this command.

In other words, Jesus commands His disciples to make other people His apprentices, like He did with the disciples. How did Jesus work? He shared His life with the disciples. He spent time with them. He prayed with them. He gave them tasks and He fought challenges with them.

Because making disciples out of people is the focal point of the text, it underlines the fact that our task has not been solved merely by baptising and teaching people about the Christian truths. Our task is to invite other people to follow Jesus.

We thank you God, because you have called us to follow You.

We confess that we need to learn what It means to make disciples of people.

We pray that You will help us open up our lives to other believers.

We pray for the Christian children and youth campaigns. Send people as models of faith for the children and young.

3. We have been called to build bridges

First Corinthians 9: 19-23.

We all know the feeling of being out of our comfort zone. To be the new boy in class, where everyone else already know each other, and are tied together by shared history and experiences.

Many spiritually seeking people feel out of their comfort zone when they enter a church.

Paul talks about how he met people on their own turf in today's text. That meant that he was meeting them out of his own comfort zone. We sometimes pray to God that he will bring people to the Church – our turf. There is nothing wrong with that, but our call is more demanding than that. Our calling is, like Paul, to meet people on *their* turf. To build a bridge between you and people who come from other cultures, and who have other interests and habits than us.

For some people, this means trying to understand the youth culture instead of criticizing it. For other people, it means to build relationships with people from other nationalities. For some people, it is to spend time understanding how it is to live as a single. In short, we need to be willing to learn new things and move out of our comfort zone in order to build bridges instead of digging ditches.

We thank you God because the Gospel is for all kinds of people in all cultures in the whole world.

We confess that we often won't come out of our comfort zone and meet people where *they* are.

We pray that we can build bridges to the people that are called by You.

We pray for the social and cultural groups in Denmark and the rest of the world that have not yet heard the good news.

4. Spiritual experience builds bridges

Acts 10: 1-16

When you are to build bridges, you seek common ground. Something that lifts the conversation up and above the things that you look upon differently.

I experience that people's spiritual experiences is a significant bridge builder. As Christians, we believe that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, and that it seeks to lead people to faith in Jesus. It is, therefore, not odd that many people have had experiences that point towards a spiritual reality.

These spiritual experiences are pointing towards God. Today's text tells us about a Roman officer that had a sight of an angel who gave him a message from God. This experience brought, together with Peter's sight, Peter and the officer in contact with each other, and the officer came to faith.

Many Danes are more modest by their spiritual experiences than they are about their sex life. We must, therefore, like Peter meet people on their turf if they are to feel safe enough to tell us about their spiritual experiences. Experiences that can build bridges if we listen and take their experiences seriously.

We thank you Holy Spirit, because you call and draw people to Jesus.

We confess that we sometimes let our traditions stand in the way of the Spirit's guidance.

We pray that we, like Peter, will receive help to let the talk of the Spirit overcome our lack of commitment.

We pray for those who do not know where to go with their spiritual questions and experiences.

5. The hospitable fellowship builds bridges

Acts 2: 42-47

We have as a family build a house twice. In a settler's neighbourhood it is easy to get to know each other. There are no hedges, no rigid rhythms, and new people meeting each other on equal terms.

We have also tried to live in an old neighbourhood. There it is a lot more difficult to get a relationship with the neighbours that goes beyond a greeting over the hedge.

The First Church was like a settler's neighbourhood. Everything was new to everyone. Some people probably knew each other beforehand, but they met under new circumstances; their shared faith in Jesus. People gathered in the different homes and at in the temple area, which was Jesus' big public gathering spot.

A church can come to look like an old neighbourhood. Everyone has well established relationships. Maybe people have grown up together, and do not really have space in their lives for establishing new relationships.

We, who have come in the church fellowship for several years, need newcomers. Otherwise we freeze and become a church-version of this old neighbourhood.

The Christian faith is lived out in fellowships. A hospitable fellowship builds bridges. It provides a frame and affiliation. It manifests the Gospel, and it helps people to see what it means to be a Christian in practice.

We thank you God, because you have given us the fellowship of the Church.

We confess that our churches are busy tending to their own needs sometimes.

We pray that we must be hospitable and open to newcomers.

We pray for the many churches that work among newcomers to Denmark. May they become strong and healthy and build relationships across cultures.

6. To walk together builds bridges

Luke 24: 13-32

Spiritual experiences open people towards faith. The hospitable church fellowship then helps these people connect to the church. When they then start to walk alongside other Christians, they want to stay and begin to grow in their faith.

To walk together means in this context: To come together regularly two or three people to share lives, to support each other in decisions and challenges, and to pray together. One of the people in the group can be more experienced in the spiritual world, but she is no expert. Walking together like this is purposeful. It is more than just the random chatter you get when you meet with people informally.

In today's text, Jesus shows us a model of how to walk with people. The two disciples' grief was unfounded for, because Jesus had risen. He does not, however, start to lecture them. He asks them open questions and let them tell Him their story. He takes his time to take their understanding and their feelings seriously. Subsequently, He brings the word of the Bible into play and helps the disciples to see how God's words have something to say to them in their situation. Finally, He accepts their invitation and eats dinner with them. Not until then, the two disciples see reality with new eyes.

Walking together brings forth the truths into people's concrete lives. Without this common journey, faith often stays abstract and difficult to connect to life's griefs and doubts.

We thank you Jesus, because You are one of us and you meet us in eye height.

We confess that it is easier for us to lecture others than to walk together with them.

We pray that no one in our church must be left alone, but that everyone must grow in faith in fellowship with each other.

We pray for those, who right now feel grief and doubt. May they find a person to walk with who can open the door to faith and hope.

7. Christian service builds bridges

Luke 5: 1-11.

The Christian charity has put deep marks on our society through hospitals, schools, poor relief and many other things.

Many of these functions has today been taken over by the state. But the need for Christian service is just as great as it has always been. Christian service can be practiced inside the walls of the church or outside in the rest of society. It can manifest itself in the children's work in the church or in the tutoring of refugees in a refugee centre.

Many people experience that faith becomes concrete when they are invited to help in a Christian fellowship. I have spoken to quite a few newcomers in Christian fellowships who were sad that they weren't, to a greater extent, invited to contribute to the fellowship.

In this text, Jesus asks Peter for help. It strengthened the message of His words to speak to the people from Peter's boat on the water. Today, it could be compared to borrowing sound equipment from a sound engineer. After Peter had done Jesus a favour, Jesus wanted to bless him and show him his greatness. It is often like that: When people serve Jesus with what they have, it opens up a new understanding of who Jesus is.

We thank you God for all the blessings that our country has received through Christian service in earlier generations.

We confess that we sometimes let idleness or fear outshout Your call to service.

We pray that we, as Your people, may act Your blessing in our city and our country.

We pray for those who live in poverty and who are socially outcasts. May they find help and hope.

8. A calling to all believers

Acts 11: 19-21.

Paul several times compares the Church with a body. On this body each person is a member – a foot, an eye, or a hand. The metaphor clearly shows us that the Church can only complete its task if everyone in it serves with their gifts and their strengths.

In our part of the world, the Church is often dominated by professionalism: You need to be educated or specially equipped to build a bridge, build fellowships, and to be able to walk with other Christians and to serve together with them.

Contrary to this, one of the big breakthroughs in the Reformation was the teachings of the common priesthood. This means that all believers are called and equipped to serve God in the Church and in the world.

In today's text, one of the most important churches is founded in Antioch by nameless people – "some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene". They were not apostles. They had no leader positions. None the less, they started building bridges in an innovative manner for a completely new culture and its spiritual seeking people. And God made it happen in a way that presumably far exceeded their expectations.

God calls us Christians to use our gifts to build bridges in order to form spiritual friendships with people who open their hearts to God's love.

We thank you God, because we are all called to serve You.

We confess that we often excuse ourselves by saying that other people are better at doing the job than us.

We pray that the leaders in the Church may receive strength and faith to be able to be in the lead. And that they may encourage each person to serve with his/her gifts.

We pray for Your Church – that it may not be divided but be one through the faith of Christ. Help us to see ourselves as part of Your Church all days and in all situations.