



This week we are beginning a new series on 21st century discipleship and we are beginning with a few weeks on the subject of integrity: a word which is very topical, with political upheaval and accusations of corruption at home and abroad. It has been highlighted by the resignation of Tim Farron as leader of a progressive Liberal party. Sadly, he was “torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader”. It seems he felt driven towards hypocrisy: he needed to regain his integrity. We'll try to find out how to improve our integrity and grow in this area of discipleship

1. What is integrity and where does it come from?

- A person of integrity's behaviour will match their beliefs, their character will match their confession, their walk will match their talk and be consistent and reliably whole. Integrity is the will of God for us and is for His glory.
- It includes honesty and moral uprightness – but not moralism:
 - Moralism aims to 'be good' in comparison with other people.
 - Integrity aims to be TRUE: not better than others, but unburdened by inner conflict, rooted in a truth that runs all the way through us (*stick of rock comes to mind*) and leads to a life of freedom. **Proverbs 10:9a**.
- We may understand what integrity looks like externally: but where is its internal root? **Read John 7: 14 – 38**.

2. The Model of Integrity.

- Jesus is the supreme model of integrity: even His enemies knew that His life evidenced His character, **Mk12:14**
- It comes from His deep identity as the loved Son of the Father God: this gives Him His wholeness and security.
- Mutual love between Father and Son gives Him His self-worth, and the confidence to live to please His Father.
- By the time Jesus arrived for the festival in John 7, rumours, accusations and whisperings about Him were rife. Jesus began to teach and the turmoil increased but Jesus stood in the centre of it all, as if in the eye of the storm, completely at peace and knowing with perfect clarity who He is and to whom He belongs. He knows He is loved, He knows whose authority he is working under; so there is a sufficiency, an integrity to His core.
- He has a confidence which doesn't need to try to please other people. He is not bothered by 'the fear of men'.
- Unlike Jesus, our integrity can be compromised if the opinions of others matter too much and too often to us. Or if we become a different version of ourselves, depending on which group of people we are with.
- Like Jesus, we find out WHO we are when we discover WHOSE we are – children of God, infinitely valuable to Him and unconditionally loved. At St Paul's, we are all on a journey, learning to live in the love of God.

3. Two areas of integrity to think about and work at.

- **The Truth of our Words.**
 - Our outward speech is a barometer of our inner integrity: what we say and what we do must match.
 - Our word must be our bond. It is fundamental to building relationships of trust and vital for our lives.
 - But there is a rapidly increasing acceptance of casual lying in our culture:
 - a) 'As long as it doesn't hurt anyone, lying is fine' – it makes things easier, it can ease a situation along so we get what we want everybody does it, from all ages and backgrounds.
 - b) But if we are living to glorify God, then we must and will be a person of **truth** whatever it costs. Truth and integrity are the same word in the Bible, we need to start to reduce casual lying.
- **Commitment.**
 - There is less and less willingness to commit to things, partly because of the rise in mobile phone use.
 - A party? Invitation? Don't be a 'maybe' or wait to see who else is going. Can you help at church in 3 weeks' time? 'Yes' is great and 'No' is fine but 'I don't know what I'm doing in 3 weeks' is so unhelpful.
 - Let's be different from the crowd, let's have the integrity to commit and be people who are known as reliable, because our word is true and is a reflection of an inner trustworthiness.

Thoughts to ponder:

1. *Think of someone you admire for their integrity. How would you score on an integrity scale of 1 – 10?*
2. *Why do I worry about what people think of me? Who do I most want to impress?*
3. *I've been a Christian for years: do I really believe I'm of infinite value to God and that he offers me unconditional love?*
4. *Swap stories of outstanding integrity.*
5. *How does casual lying or the culture of lack of commitment affect us?*
6. *Read verses 37-8 of our passage again: Jesus promises to quench our thirst for truth and goodness, wholeness and healing in our lives. He gives us His Spirit to overflow with the living water that is Good News for our thirsty world.*