

TYM YOUTH SERVICE
'THE JAM'
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It's Time for a Change

Are you changing? Are you up with what's new, what's hot? Have you got the latest CD, the trendiest haircut, the most up-to-date label cap or pair of jeans? You've got to keep up, keep with it, keep on changing.

Everytime I turn on the TV it screams at me that I'm not pretty enough, skinny enough (well, especially these days!), rich enough, young enough, funny enough. That my life is never going to be really great unless I get that fantastic car, that extra-special shampoo, or drink the right drink. "Change the script", says Pepsi. "Just do it", says Nike. "Does your stomach look like this?", they want to know, as they try to persuade you to spend \$400 on a 'Home Fitness Centre'.

And then you get it at home. "Why can't you be more like your big brother?!" Do you get that? Parents, eh.

In my experience, parents are pulled 3 ways when dealing with their kids. On one hand they want you to have more than they did, to do things better than they did, to not make their mistakes. To be richer, happier, better educated. So parents can put a lot of pressure on you to change, to be work harder, do more homework. It's all in your best interests. Apparently.

On the other hand, they also want you to be your own person, to live your own life, to be successful in your own way. At least, that's what they tell themselves that they want. So why do they keep assuming that they know better than you what your 'own way' is going to be? Why do they sometimes go through the roof when you come home with a hair cut or colour that is definitely NOT what they had in mind!?

Well, maybe it's that when it comes down to it, - on the 3rd hand! - parents are happiest when you are basically just like them. And the scariest thing is that most of the time, we do turn out pretty much like our parents. That's what the drama from the Apostolic group was about. This man always thought that he would be better than his Dad, be his own person, do things his own way, not make the same mistakes. But because he never really thought about it and made a deliberate choice to do it differently, he ended up just the same way.

It's time to change. Time to think about who you want to be, how you want to live your life. Everyone around you has their own idea about who you should be, what you should wear, who you should hang out with, what you should do. But watch out! They all have their own agendas. The ads want to make money out of you. School wants to have great achievement statistics at the end of the year. Your parents want you to be like them, or better.

I had a tough time at school. I was teased a lot. I was the class grot in 3rd Form. Being 'Popular' meant EVERYTHING. My Mum tried to make me feel better by reassuring me that I was bright and did well at lots of things. But I KNEW that what mattered most was being Popular. There was this ladder, you see. You couldn't see it, but I knew it was real. At

the top were the Gods and Goddesses - those girls with gorgeous hair, the always-confident smile, the boys hanging off their every move. And the boys in the first 15 - tall, handsome, strong. At the bottom was ... no, not me. I knew that I wasn't a totally loser. I did have some friends. And this ladder had rules, ways of getting up or down. To get up you could look right, or you could move up a notch by putting someone else down - someone lower than you on the scale. And you slipped down if you were seen mixing with the 'wrong' people - those lower down, like me.

Has anyone else had that kind of experience at school? It's a tough world.

So of course I tried my best to change. I tried to persuade Mum to buy me trendier clothes. I tried to mix with the 'right' people. I tried to learn what to say, how to walk right and talk right. I never quite made it, but I tried really hard. It was exhausting!

Then, at the end of 6th Form, one week totally changed my life. I went to a national Methodist youth conference, where nobody knew me. And suddenly I didn't have to fight against that image of the 3rd form grot. I relaxed, and just enjoyed myself. And, incredibly, I found that people seemed to like me. 3 boys fell in love with me! I made friends that are still special even now. For the first time for years I felt that I was OK, just as I was. I didn't have to change to be a fun, happy person.

The ladder suddenly was gone. It was just an illusion.

Chris: Story

That's basically what happened to the man with the hoard of demons that Jesus healed. He was crowded in by other people's expectations. He had voices hammering at him inside his head night and day, accusing him, harassing him, taunting him to change, to be someone he wasn't. They drove him out, away from normal people and normal homes, into the loneliest place he could find. The people in his community couldn't cope with him being so different and tormented. They wanted to chain him, control him, push him out of sight.

And then Jesus came. Jesus came and asked him, 'Who are you?', Jesus cared enough to look him in the eye, and to see past the demons, to love the man behind the chaos, the fear and the rage. And so he is released. But he is not only released from the inner demons. He is also released from the expectations of those people he knows. No more will he fit any of their boxes. And Jesus calls him. Calls him to stay with them, to be an evangelist. Imagine how hard that would be. To stay, to shape a new role when everyone expects you to break down into madness at any moment. But no one else could have been such a powerful witness to God's love in that place. So Jesus accepts him, frees him, and calls him to change. And that call is to the hardest task imaginable.

It's like that quote from Katherine Mansfield. 'Do the hardest thing in the world for you.'

And the woman caught in adultery, rescued from the brink of death by Jesus, who does not judge her, doesn't say, 'Oh, dear, you have stuffed up, haven't you.' He doesn't leap in with opinions straight off, like everyone else does.

He just stands with her, and gently reminds everyone there that underneath our judgements and self-righteousness we are all human, all basically the same. Then, when they have all gone, he says those magnificent words, 'Then neither do I condemn you'. Only he, the sinless Son of God, had the right to judge her, and he doesn't. And in that moment he tells us that, yes, God can and does judge us, but first and foremost God loves us. In that moment he accepts her just as she is. In that moment she is free to be who she truly is. No one else's expectations matter. She is stripped clean in the outrageous love of God.

That love gave her, and gives us, the freedom to chose, to start again, to change. If we want to. Jesus calls her to "Go, and do not sin again."

And so it is with us. We are first of all loved, and secondly we are called. God loves you, each person here, more than we can possibly know or imagine. And it is as we say 'Yes' to that love, that we are given a new sense of purpose and possibility for our lives. We are freed from the human, limited expectations of the people and world around us. Free to be who we truly are, who we are created to be.

No one else can spell out for you what that is. That is your journey, and it will take you all your life long. The more you say 'Yes' to God's love, the more you allow that love to go deeper and deeper into your life, and the more you long to be free from everything which blocks that or distracts you from it.

Nothing else will give us true joy or fulfillment. No other changes will make any real difference.

It's time to change. Not to put on christianity like a nice new set of clothes. It's not the way you look or act or speak, or who you hang out with that really matters. It's time to change from the inside - out. It's time to let God change us. To let go into his love, not holding anything back. To step out on the most wonderful and exciting journey life can offer.

I invite you now to relax, just where you are. Be aware of your breathing. Listen. God is calling you.

I have been with you every moment of every day.

I know you inside and out.

I love every part of you. All of your joy and hopes, sorrow and shame. ~~Every dark corner,~~
~~every shining smile.~~

Let me fill every part of you - light every dark corner,
touch every ~~part~~ wound with healing

SONG: ~~You are God~~ Everything that has breath

