

“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently — they’re not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

Steve Jobs 1997

I am not a huge fan of Apple equipment – although I would struggle without my MacBook Air - and I don’t know a great deal about Steve Jobs, but I think he had something important to say here. Perhaps because I am sometimes the “troublemaker”! Recently in worship, we looked at the well-known passage from Acts 16 about the jailer in Philippi. It speaks of his conversion by Paul and Silas and the subsequent baptism of his family. As it concludes, all concerned join together for some food and to share hospitality at the jailer’s home. A wonderfully evocative tale of someone finding faith in Jesus.

But this account is about more than a simple story of conversion, it is about fundamental and profound change. Change is word that scares many and for most it is often difficult to even think about. In my current project at the Copleston Church and Centre, I am surrounded by new opportunities and social justice issues that require change. The congregations are satisfied with their fellowship but would like to experiment with their style of worship and share it more widely. This will require some change to their community and we are currently exploring what that might look like. They certainly do not want to stand still, and I truly admire the way they have embraced our tentative early discussions about both what could, and what should, be done. We have a long way to go but they are already daring to be the “round pegs in the square holes.” The jailer’s conversion helps us consider not only how difficult it can be to change, but also how challenging each other and ourselves can lead to transformative outcomes.

But change is not just about what happens in our church. South London has a rich history of community organising with Citizens UK. Recently, I attended a Peckham and Camberwell Citizens Assembly and joined many institutional leaders speaking about why we were there and the passions that drive us forward. There were representatives from schools, colleges, Christian churches of all denominations and other organizations all across Peckham and Camberwell. We agreed three areas on which to focus our campaigning; WELCOME – meaning to help those without recourse to public funds including refugees and asylum seekers; HOUSING – particularly regarding community land trusts and affordable housing – and finally, the SAFETY of young people locally, where police stop & search and on-going knife crime issues are everyday challenges.

This group came together motivated by a desire to affect genuine change with creative actions to gain the attention of local politicians, councillors and stakeholders. The ‘pay-off’ is not money or influence, but through listening to the local community, to make significant and long-lasting

change for the benefit of all. In those actions, everyone involved is also changed - the people involved in Citizens work, the organisers, and the institutions they return to – our congregation for one – by forming relationships and listening to each other. It proved to me that change doesn't have to be that frightening if we are taking the leap together.

So, how brave of the jailer - to listen and to take a leap. How courageous of the Copleston congregation to decide together to make some changes! What a wonderful example of positive action in Citizens UK chapters across the UK! And how do we encourage others, in churches, communities and in larger institutions? With grace-filled chatter, by leading by example, by being both bold and brave and sometimes by simply being different. Paul, Silas and the jailer did just that and looked what happened...

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