



wholehearted

Autumn 2024 at Christ Church

Autumn Term Notes

September to December 2024

Helping people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly

Read: Matthew 16:13–20; Luke 9:1–6

Jesus asks his disciples “who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). This acts as a warm up to prepare them for the more challenging question in verse 15: “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” In these two questions Jesus is helping his disciples discover who he is. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Jesus blesses Simon Peter and acknowledges that this revelation of who Jesus is was given “by my Father in heaven” (16:17).

In this interaction between Jesus and his disciples we see a glimpse of the work we will do in his name and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We get to help people see who Jesus is and, if they choose to follow him, to help them understand and put into practice the daily work of following Jesus with all their heart. Being involved

in this kingdom work is an immense privilege. Jesus entrusted Peter with the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” and he does the same for all who follow him (see: Matthew 18:18; Luke 10:8–17).

Jesus trained his disciples through experience. They literally followed him and observed him, speaking about who he was (John 8:12, 58; 11:25; 14:6), forgiving sins (Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:48), healing the sick (Luke 4:40; Matthew 8:3), driving out demons (Matthew 8:32; Luke 11:14), proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Matthew 9:35; Luke 4:43), praying (Matthew 26:36; Luke 9:28; John 17:1). They didn’t just observe him, they also did what he did. Jesus ‘sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick’ (Luke 9:2).

Like the disciples, we learn to follow Jesus through experience. This requires us to walk alongside each other, to get to know each other well and to be active in mission together, doing what Jesus did. As a family we encourage and equip each other to grow closer to Jesus and be increasingly confident in proclaiming the kingdom of God and praying for people. In this way we introduce people to Jesus and pray for the work of Jesus in their lives.

Application

The challenge this week is to explore God's call for you to be involved in his mission in and through the community at Christ Church.

Share: what are the various ways you could be involved in God's mission in and through the Christ Church family? How do these ways reflect God's call on your life?

Pray: for each other to know God's call to specific ministry areas.

Act: find out how you might contribute to the ministry areas you feel called to.

Inviting everyone to follow Jesus

Read: Matthew 4:17–25

Jesus called to Peter and Andrew “come, follow me . . . and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matt 4:19). In this simple invitation we see a couple of important things. Firstly, that we are not forced, but rather invited to follow Jesus. Secondly, that in following Jesus we will play our part in God’s kingdom coming here ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt 6:10).

Jesus calls James and John (Matthew 4:21). And later we read that ‘large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him’ (4:25).

As followers of Jesus we are given the responsibility of extending Jesus’ invitation “come, follow me” to those who don’t yet know him. There are no boundaries to Jesus’ invitation; all are invited. There are many ways we can invite people to follow Jesus. By listening to the Holy Spirit we can know what to pray, say or do in each situation. Sometimes our work may be to share a story from our own life; at other times it may be expressed in a particular decision we make in a work or social context, or in an offer to help someone else.

In what ways is ‘the kingdom of heaven near’ in your community?

Jesus presents two invitations (verses 17, 19). How might we express similar invitations today?

At Christ Church we do this work as a family, each of us playing our part. Encouraging one another, praying together and working together to establish God’s kingdom as he leads us by his Spirit. Wherever and whenever someone comes into contact with the Christ Church family, our goal is that they will find the welcome and invitation of Jesus. An invitation to come and be part of the family, to encounter the Holy Spirit and to walk with Jesus.

Jesus calls the disciples into kingdom building activity. They will be fishers of people. As we read through the New Testament, we see many different examples of this work where the different characteristics and gifts of followers of Jesus come to the fore. Later this term we will look again at the ministry gifts in Ephesians 4. The key takeaway here is that every one of us has a part to play in God’s mission in and through the people who together are Christ Church.

Application

The challenge this week is to commit to following God's call for you to be involved in his mission in and through the community at Christ Church.

Share: about how you will commit to being involved in God's mission.

Pray: for the strength to commit to God's mission.

Act: get involved, in prayer, service, giving. Whatever ways the Holy Spirit calls you to.

Where has God planted you?

Read: Luke 24:13–34; 2 Timothy 2:1–7

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32) The two disciples were walking to Emmaus feeling downcast and confused. They met a stranger who opened the scriptures to them. Jesus connected with them in the midst of the ordinariness of their lives and transformed them into disciples who confidently proclaimed “It is true! The Lord has risen... (24:34)”

For these two disciples, the road between Emmaus and Jerusalem was a place of encounter and growth. When they returned to Jerusalem, they became a source of encouragement for the disciples gathered there.

The two disciples gained insight from their encounter with Jesus. Timothy gained insight from his encounter with the Lord. What do these encounters show us about our own encounter with Jesus?

Are there times when you have encountered Jesus without realising it?

We will each have different places of encounter and growth. These may be places where we are on our own with the Holy Spirit: often, they will be places where we are gathered with other followers of Jesus.

For Timothy, friendship with Paul was a place of growth that shaped his encounter with the Holy Spirit. Paul encourages

Timothy to ‘reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this’ (2 Timothy 2:7). There is no hint of doubt – Paul is confident that the Lord will give Timothy insight. Timothy gained his insight from the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus says will lead us into all truth (John 16:13). Paul’s part was to provide the encouragement and direction as a catalyst for Timothy’s growth in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

God often does his work in our lives through other people. An important aspect of our growth as followers of Jesus is to recognise and invest in those places where we meet with those followers of Jesus through whom God is at work in our lives. These will be different for each of us and the Lord will give us insight into where these places are.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify the places where God has planted you and in which you are actively growing in your relationship with Jesus.

Pray: which contexts is God asking you to invest in to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus?

Share: what is it about these contexts that will enable you to grow?

Act: be intentional in investing in at least one of these contexts. Arrange to meet with people.

The value of a rule of life

Read: Psalm 19; Mark 1:32–39

The psalmist declares, “may these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14). Our actions – in this case words – **and** our inner thoughts (meditations) are to be pleasing to God. How are we to achieve this?

We get a clue in the focus of the psalm’s beginning: ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge (19:1–2).’ God’s glory is revealed through the work of his hands day after day and night after night.

Elsewhere we read that God’s mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22–23). There is a present and continuous nature to the way God relates to us and transforms us.

Rather than coming before God once in the hope of total transformation, we are invited to come before him day after day to gradually be transformed into the image of Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is best achieved by ordering our lives in ways that enable us to frequently and consistently come close to God. Creating a rule of life is one way we can provide this order and consistency.

‘Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed’ (Mark 1:35). This was following an evening when Jesus had healed many of various diseases. It is evident that Jesus knew how to pace himself in order to fulfil his ministry – and when he needed to be with people or alone. The gospels contain many examples of Jesus following spiritual disciplines. For example, solitude (Mark 6:31, 46; Luke 5:16), fasting (Matthew 4:4), prayer (Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16; 6:12), service (John 13:3–5).

As we think about our own rule of life it’s important to remember that its effectiveness is seen in the fruit that is produced. The frequency and expertise with which we pursue spiritual disciplines are not the point. It is our growth in relationship with God that matters. This growth requires us to invest much time and effort in being present with the living God.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify one spiritual discipline that you will include in your weekly rhythm.

Share: which spiritual disciplines are, or could be, part of your weekly rhythm.

Act: choose one spiritual discipline and include it in your weekly rhythm.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen you as through your encounter with him.

Why does our spiritual growth need to happen one day at a time?

What does knowing God look like in our lives?

How do we keep spiritual disciplines as a means of knowing God and not an end in themselves?

The value of community

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Luke 11:1-10

‘One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples”’ (Luke 11:1). Jesus is **with** his disciples. They have prayed together and now they learn together. This is one of many occasions where the disciples learnt together; on this occasion, about prayer.

What do you think it was like to be with Jesus, to pray with him and to learn from him?

How is it different for us being filled with the Holy Spirit?

How important would it have been for the disciples to learn together? What benefits would this have brought?

God has designed us for relationship. Community is the intended environment in which we grow in our relationship with Jesus. The writer of Ecclesiastes expressed it brilliantly. ‘Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up’ (4:9–10). When we work and learn together in community, we create a safe and supportive environment.

If anyone is struggling, they can be encouraged and helped to stand again. It is in community that we find the strength for the long daily walk of wholeheartedly following Jesus. ‘Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken’ (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Life is full of challenges and for us to face these challenges as wholehearted followers of Jesus requires encouragement and support from others.

Growing increasingly close to each other in community requires us to grow in vulnerability with each other; and that requires an environment shaped by forgiveness. Jesus is clear in his teaching on prayer that we are to forgive each other (Luke 11:4). This type of environment is one where we feel safe to share both those things we see as successes and those we see as failures. It becomes a place where we can be present with each other without masks. This type of community embodies our vision of inviting everyone to follow Jesus and helping people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly. It’s a community that demonstrates God’s kingdom in action.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify the people who are walking alongside you helping and encouraging you to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify the people who can help and encourage you to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Share: chat with one of these people about your relationship with Jesus.

Act: Invest in one or more of these relationships.

The value of gathering

Read: Mark 6:30–34; Revelation 7:9-17

Last week we looked at the value of community; this week we look specifically at the value of our regular weekly gatherings. In the gospels we see that people wanted to be with Jesus. ‘The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught’ (Mark 6:30). Later, Jesus is in the midst of a large crowd and he teaches them many things (6:34). There’s significance in being together with Jesus in both large numbers and small. The picture of heavenly worship described in Revelation includes ‘a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb’ (7:9). This multitude ‘cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”’ (7:12).

When we gather, we have the opportunity to give our praise and worship to Jesus and to remind each other of his glory. The worship we see in Revelation 7 is loud and physical. Worship doesn’t have to be this way because God looks at our hearts. However, worship which is outwardly demonstrable helps us show each other how worthy Jesus is of our praise.

Similarly in corporate prayer, God hears everything, even the silent groaning of our hearts. If we are to pray corporately and not be a group of individuals who happen to be praying in the same space then we need to find ways we can share with each other the things that God is putting on our hearts.

In what ways can corporate worship and prayer be outwardly demonstrable?

How has seeing other people worship Jesus and hearing them pray shaped your own walk with Jesus?

As we join in welcome, worship and prayer, Gatherings provide an environment in which we can learn to focus not just on ourselves but on Jesus - and our brothers and sisters. Learning to focus not on ourselves but others is an important aspect of being wholehearted followers of Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews says, ‘let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching’ (Hebrews 10:24–25).

Application

The challenge this week is to understand what you give and receive in weekly gatherings.

Pray: before the next weekly gathering you attend, ask the Holy Spirit what he would like you to give and receive in the gathering.

Act: go to the gathering and look for opportunities to give/receive as the Holy Spirit has led you.

Share: after the gathering, talk with others about your experience of the gathering.

Mission happens where you are

Read: Matthew 10; 1 Corinthians 16:5-20

The disciples have been following Jesus around as any good pupils of a rabbi would. They've been with him as he proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom, healed the sick, prayed, and much more. Matthew 10 recounts the disciples being sent out by Jesus, given the opportunity to

demonstrate what being his followers means in practice. Jesus tells them to "proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (10:7-8).

Being wholehearted followers of Jesus requires us to be intentionally 'in the world', mixing with people who don't yet know Jesus. The twelve disciples had different ministry gifts. None of them got to stay at home because their gifts were more suited to those who were already following Jesus. They were all sent out to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom.

Last week we looked at how our weekly gatherings help us learn to be focused on Jesus and other people. The natural direction for this focus is outside the walls of the church to the people we are amongst in the rest of the week. The disciples were sent into the towns and villages (10:11), to the lost sheep of Israel (10:6). Our call is broader – to all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus prepared his disciples for the reality that some would welcome them and others would not (Matthew 10:40). The same is true for us as we speak of Jesus to those who don't yet know him. We are likely to face opposition. Jesus doesn't say he will remove this opposition, rather, he reassures us that we will be acknowledged before his Father in heaven (10:32).

This is all a work of the Holy Spirit. We are to listen to the Spirit to know when, where, how and to whom we will speak of Jesus. And to know with whom we will do this work. Reading Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 16 it is evident that he had many partners in the gospel: later this term we will be exploring who our partners in the gospel are.

In what ways are Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10 relevant to today's culture?

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit leading you in mission?

Application

The challenge this week is to identify the places where you are connected to people who don't yet know Jesus.

Share: about the various places you are already connected with people who don't yet know Jesus.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify which of these places you should invest in over the next month.

Act: be intentional in investing in the connections you have in this place. Look for ways to share Jesus with these people.

Family and friends

Read: Matthew 13:53–58; 2 Corinthians 4:1–6

When Jesus returned to his home town, he was at first recognised for his wisdom and power (Matthew 13:53–54). However, when people realised that he was the carpenter’s son, the boy who grew up in their community, ‘they took offense at him . . . and he did not do many miracles there’ (13:57–58). If Jesus found it challenging to reach the people he grew up with, how much more challenging might we find it to speak of Jesus to those closest to us?

What challenges do you face when sharing your faith with family or friends?

How has the Holy Spirit led you in these ministry opportunities?

What opportunities do you have now to share your faith with family and friends?

There is so much at stake when we think about speaking to our family and friends about our relationship with Jesus. How they react matters deeply to us. We don’t want to cause offense or distance in our relationships. The risks can seem so great that it feels safer to not try.

Paul writes, ‘therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose

heart’ (2 Corinthians 4:1). This follows Paul’s declaration, in chapter 3, of the hope we have in Jesus; a hope so certain that ‘we are very bold’ (3.12). The key to overcoming the risks mentioned above is to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Our first step in this work is to pray for our family and friends that they would come to know Jesus. We pray day after day, bringing these people before the Lord, asking that they would no longer be blinded by ‘the god of this age’ (4:5). Many of you will have been praying faithfully for specific family members and friends for many years. You may have tried at times to speak of Jesus with no apparent success. Hear Paul’s encouragement to ‘pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people’ (Ephesians 6:18).

When the Holy Spirit leads you to opportunities to share something of your love for Jesus with family or friends, trust him and follow his lead. He is wholly aware of how challenging this may feel for you. The risks may be significant, but the reward is eternal.

Application

The challenge this week is to commit to praying for five family members and/or close friends to encounter Jesus.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to show you which of your family members and/or close friends to pray for over the next couple of months.

Share: about how you will commit to praying for these people.

Act: pray for them every day.

The Gospel

Read: Luke 15:11–32

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). In one sentence Jesus communicates the immensity of God’s love for us.

The son has rejected his father, squandered his inheritance and, only when destitute, come to his senses. His best hope now is to become a lowly servant in his father’s household. Instead, he receives his father’s forgiveness, love, and full restoration as his son. The son couldn’t imagine receiving any of this, yet as he approaches, his father sees him first and runs to him.

What was your first encounter with the gospel?

How did you feel when you first met Jesus?

How would you describe the extravagance of the gospel to someone who doesn’t know Jesus?

The gospel of God’s kingdom is breath-taking. God’s grace is outrageous. The breadth and depth of God’s love for us is beyond comprehension. God moves towards us to meet us where we are. No matter what we’ve done, or are doing, God meets us, right there. He invites us to receive his love and forgiveness made possible by Jesus. He offers this gift freely asking only that we choose to believe Jesus is who he says he is, the Son of God – and trust

him with our lives. He receives us as sons and daughters in his family at the very moment we seek his forgiveness and place our trust in Jesus. He knows us completely; knows that it will take our lifetime to grow in our understanding and trust and in the extent of his forgiveness and love for us.

The good news we receive in Jesus is so vast, so extravagant, so full of certain hope that we can prayerfully reflect on it again and again and again, each time growing in our love for Jesus and our thankfulness for all he has given us. Often our most fitting response is to offer our praise and worship to Jesus. To say or sing, as Mary did, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46–47)

Application

The challenge this week is to hear the Gospel afresh.

Share: what you find exciting about the gospel.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit for courage to share your excitement for the gospel with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus.

Act: write down something about the gospel that you are excited about and how you might share it with someone.

Community connections

Read: Mark 14:1–9

Bethany was an important place in Jesus' life. His friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived there (John 11:1). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead there (John 11). It was where Jesus was anointed (Matthew 26:6–7; Mark 14:3; John 12:1–3). It was the place he visited during the week leading up to his death (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11). Jesus ascended to heaven from a place nearby (Luke 24:50–51).

Jesus would have been known there as the man from Nazareth. Only some recognised his full identity as Son of God. The woman who anointed Jesus' feet recognised him (Mark 14:3). Those who complained of the waste (14:4) didn't. If they had known that they were sitting with God they would have reacted differently. There is much that could be explored here. The point we will consider relates to how we are recognised in our communities.

In what ways do the different reactions to Jesus in Mark 14 compare with people's reactions to Jesus today?

What reactions have you experienced when people discover that you love Jesus?

As followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us. This is an important aspect of our identity – we are children of the living God. People recognise us in the communities we are part of. But not all will recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Some may be unaware of or ambivalent to – and some may be antagonistic towards – the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Jesus brought life (literally in the case of Lazarus) to this community at Bethany and to the many other communities he visited. Jesus calls us to do the same, in his name and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the communities we are part of. We will meet opposition as we bring the life of Jesus to our communities. However, we will also meet welcome and acceptance. People often carry with them important questions about life and faith. Often, people will welcome someone who will listen to them and help them explore these questions. The majority of people will accept an offer to pray for them. Praying for our communities and being known in our communities as people who love Jesus can make a huge difference to the opportunities we will find to speak of Jesus.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify one connection you have in a community you are part of.

Share: about the opportunities for connections offered by the communities you are involved in.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify one of those connections you should focus on for mission.

Act: write down three ways you can establish and develop that connection.

The rest of the week

Read: Matthew 5:13-16; Exodus 36:1-13

“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14). These are big statements about our identity as followers of Jesus. Coming from anyone else we might question their validity, but these are the words of Jesus. We are called to be salt and light in this world. In the ancient world salt was used for flavouring and preservation. So Jesus is calling his followers to make the world a better place. Light makes things visible. A town full of lights is visible from far away. A lamp in a room makes the people and contents of that room visible.

In what ways do Bezalel, Oholiab and the other skilled workers (Exodus 36) give glory to God in their actions?

What is the culture like in the places where you are in regular contact with people?

How are we to be salt and light in this world and how does this relate to our daily lives? In this session, we will focus on the places and times in the week where we are in regular contact with the same groups of people. These might be places of work (paid or voluntary, within or beyond the home) or

education. These are places where how we live and what we do will be seen by others; places where we will be in contact with people who don't know Jesus. They will experience first-hand the ways in which we relate to them, whether socially or professionally. It will be evident in these contexts whether we care about the people we are with and the things we do.

If we are being salt in these places, we will make those places better. People will recognise that we bring something of value to these communities. Often, they will not be able to describe it fully; they're simply grateful to have people like us around. Similarly, if we are being light in these places, we will both be visible, coming together with others who know Jesus, and help others, especially those who don't know Jesus to see him.

Being salt and light in these places happens day after day. We show up each day, often over many years. People get to know us closely and the work we do thoroughly, through many different situations. We do this in the strength of the Holy Spirit and therefore need to pray often for the Spirit to lead us.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify three ways in which you can represent Jesus at your place of work / education / local community

Share: about the various ways you represent Jesus at your place of work / education / local community.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify three specific ways you can represent Jesus in this place and to provide opportunities for you to do this.

Act: follow the Holy Spirit's lead by representing Jesus.

Local community

Read: Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:6–10; 1 Timothy 2:1–3

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Mission is a work of the Holy Spirit. It takes place in both the heavenly realms and here in the earthly realm. We, therefore, are to be a people who are obedient to the Spirit in our actions in both realms. In previous weeks we’ve focused on our actions in the earthly realm. This week we focus on our actions in the heavenly realms.

The heavenly realms are directly seen by God, but only in part by us. We don’t need to see what is going on here. Rather, we are to trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us in our prayers. Through our faithful, obedient action in prayer, we will play our part in what God is doing in the heavenly realms.

In what ways does the Holy Spirit lead us in the mission of God?

What role does prayer have in our involvement in the mission of God?

How can we be aware of the impact our prayers have?

Paul urges ‘first of all, that petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people’ (1 Timothy 2:1). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God instructed his people to, ‘pray to the Lord for [the city], because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ (Jeremiah 29:7). Jesus instructed his disciples to pray ‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10).

Prayer is our first and ongoing action: this is the way we begin and sustain our response to Jesus’ great commission in Matthew 28:18–20. Prayer walking can help us engage with missional prayer. Walking through the midst of the communities that Jesus has called us to, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us see these communities through God’s eyes and understand how to pray for people.

It was as Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem that he ‘saw the city, [and] wept over it’ (Luke 19:41). Often, it is when we are physically in a place that we feel something of both the earthly and heavenly reality of that place and are moved to pray. Jesus was **with** his disciples in this moment. Similarly, it’s good for us to prayer walk with others.

Application

The challenge this week is to go prayer walking with another follower of Jesus in your local community.

Share: about any experience you have of prayer walking. How did you find it? Would you do it again?

Pray: for people to go prayer walking with in your local community.

Act: go prayer walking in your local community and write down anything you hear the Holy Spirit show you during the walk.

Co-workers in mission – Part 1

Read: Mark 6:30–44; Colossians 4:7–18; 1 Corinthians 3:5–15

‘The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught’ (Mark 6:30). In this brief insight we see the importance of being together in mission. They had been sent out ‘two by two’ (6:7) and on returning, their community conversation was focused on the missional work they had done. We see that mission is a shared pursuit. ‘We are co-workers in God’s service’ (1 Corinthians 3:9). One plants, another waters (3:6), and another wrestles in prayer (Colossians 4:11). There are, of course, many other ways in which we work in God’s service.

As we read through the gospels we frequently see Jesus working together with his disciples to fulfil God’s mission.

In Colossians 4, Paul lists many ‘fellow servants in the Lord.’ Tychicus and Onesimus are travelling together (4:7–9). Aristarchus is in prison with Paul (4:10).

Others are greeted as a group: ‘the brothers and sisters at Laodicea,’ and by name, ‘Nympha and the church in her house’ (4:15). These updates and greetings show us a warmth and connectedness amongst the followers of Jesus. They were brothers and sisters, together involved in God’s mission.

Today, we are invited as followers of Jesus into the same warmth and connectedness with each other. We are brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. We play our part in God’s mission alongside each other, often working together to achieve far more than we would alone.

The disciples gathered around Jesus. Similarly, we can gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit to share what we are doing to fulfil the part that God is calling and equipping us to play. In these conversations we can share who and what we are praying for, the people and places we feel called to reach for Jesus, our hopes, dreams, challenges and uncertainties. These conversations can become catalysts for praying together and undertaking specific missional work together.

With whom do you regularly share conversation about what you are doing in response to the Holy Spirit’s call? Who might the Holy Spirit be connecting you with in order to reach people for Jesus?

What does it look like today to be ‘fellow servants in the Lord?’

Where are you working with others to plant, water and wrestle in prayer?

In what ways is working together in mission easier than working alone?

Application

The challenge this week is to make a list of your partners in the gospel in the mission contexts you identified in week 7.

Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify who your partners in the gospel are.

Share: about those people and how you might work together in mission.

Act: talk to these people about specific ways you can work together in mission.

Co-workers in mission – Part 2

Read: Matthew 9:35-38; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:7–13

Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37–38). Today, two thousand years later, Jesus still calls us to the harvest field, to those beyond the walls of the church who need us to help them find Jesus.

Where was the ‘harvest field’ in the first century? Where is our ‘harvest field’ today?

Which gifts identified in 1 Corinthians 12 will be helpful to you in fulfilling your calling to one of the ministry gifts in Ephesians 4:11?

What is involved in making disciples?

We read in 1 Corinthians 12 that we each have different kinds of gifts, service and work; and are all involved in the mission of the one true God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s mission for us is that we ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:19). This, then is the work that we are involved in together.

Do you know the part God is calling you to play in this work? Do you know the part that your co-workers in mission are called to play? The more we know each other, the better equipped we will be to work together. Last term we looked at the ministry headings identified in Ephesians 4. We thought about how the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding, and teaching (APEST) callings might be spread through our church family. One of these callings is likely to be central to each person’s ministry and mission. The Holy Spirit’s gifts enable the work we are each called to, and help us fulfil our apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding, or teaching calling.

When we work as a community to reach people outside the church we reflect God’s intention: ‘you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it’ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Whether it is an apostolic person creating the right environments for encounter, a prophetic person discerning the details of the Holy Spirit’s call, an evangelistic person finding creative ways to introduce someone to Jesus, a shepherding person providing listening and care, a teaching person carefully explaining the detail of the gospel, we work together to help people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly.

Application

The challenge this week is to identify the different roles that your partners in the gospel have and how you can work together.

Share: about your APEST ministry gift and what you bring to God's mission.

Act: talk with your partners in the gospel about the different APEST ministry gifts you each have and how you might each play your part as you work together.

Pray: for each other to be equipped by the Holy Spirit and for opportunities to work together in mission.

Co-workers in mission – Part 3

Read: Luke 19:28–40; Isaiah 9:2–7

The whole crowd of disciples proclaimed, “blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:37–38) This offended the Pharisees, but Jesus responded, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (19:40).

Centuries before Jesus’ birth, the prophet Isaiah declared “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2).

When we choose to follow Jesus we are taken from darkness to light. Our lives are transformed and we cannot keep silent. Like the disciples, we too, declare our praise and worship to Jesus. We seek to make him known to those who don’t know him, that they too might experience transformation in their lives.

What words would you use to express your praise and worship of Jesus?

What are some of the ways you might introduce someone to Jesus?

What might prevent you from speaking openly about your relationship with Jesus? How could you overcome this?

Whatever our particular calling, our shared work is to make disciples of Jesus. That requires us to introduce people to Jesus, and one of the best ways of doing that is to share our own experience of walking with him. We’ve already looked at how prayer is an essential first and ongoing step in this. In prayer we prepare the ground, and hear from the Holy Spirit how, when and to whom we should speak of Jesus. Our response to prayer is courageous obedience to the Holy Spirit. That often involves sharing something of our story about meeting Jesus and walking with him through our lives. As we do this we will grow in confidence.

The disciples on the road to Jerusalem confidently offered their praise and worship to Jesus even in the face of opposition. How might you share your story of walking with Jesus, the ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6).

Application

The challenge this week is to share something about your relationship with Jesus with someone in your place of work / education / local community

Share: about who you could share with and what you might say or do, and who you could work together with in this.

Pray: for courage to follow the Holy Spirit's lead and share something of your relationship with Jesus.

Act: ask the Holy Spirit for an opportunity to share and, when that opportunity arises, to be bold in sharing.

Speaking of Jesus

Read: Luke 1:46–55; Romans 16:25–27

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46).

Even if we wouldn't use the same words as Mary, her words reveal the immense joy and reverence she felt towards God.

Christmas is a season when many of us will spend time with family or friends. We have opportunities for conversation, to get to know each other better and deepen our relationships.

Jesus is not simply a part of our lives – as followers of Jesus, he is the foundation of our lives. For others to know us fully, they need to know that Jesus has first place in our lives.

Mary continued, “for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name” (Luke 1:49).

What great things has God done for you?
How has he brought transformation in your life? How is Jesus bringing transformation to your life now? These are the types of questions to be thinking about before being with family and friends who don't know Jesus. By thinking about how we might share our story in creative ways, we prepare ourselves ahead of time to be ready to respond to questions about our faith.

Read Mary's song again and listen for how she expressed her love for God. In what ways do her words encourage and/or challenge you?

Read Paul's closing words in Romans and listen for his confidence in the gospel. How is your confidence in the gospel formed and what might cause your confidence to grow?

Paul ends his epistle to the church in Rome with the words ‘to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen’ (Romans 16:27).

He reminds us that we worship the only wise God who is eternal and whose glory is demonstrated through Jesus Christ. Our “Amen!” to this certain hope we hold is to speak openly of our relationship with Jesus.

Application

The challenge this week is to share something about your relationship with Jesus with a friend or family member.

Follow the same pattern as last week.

Share: about who you could share with and what you might say or do, and who you could work together with in this.

Pray: for courage to follow the Holy Spirit's lead and share something of your relationship with Jesus.

Act: ask the Holy Spirit for an opportunity to share and, when that opportunity arises, to