

Shirley Parish Lent Groups 2022 - Live Lent – Embracing Justice

Session 5 (Readings 31st March – 6th April)

1. Welcome everybody to the course

Begin with this prayer:

Loving God, we bring ourselves, our church and our world before you; we ask that you show us, alone and together, how to turn and walk in your ways. Amen

2. Summary of the week

This week we look towards the cross. We see Jesus acting out what true leadership is by washing his disciples' feet; we see Jesus on the cross between two criminals and we looked at how the message of the cross is foolishness to the world – it goes against all the assumptions and ethics of the way the world is.

We then began to see that celebrating the communion can be an acting out of the way God wants to see justice. It is a communal act teaching us by what we do as well as what we say of the love and sacrifice of Jesus. We finish by being challenged about the make up of our churches – are we excluding people either intentionally or unintentionally?

3. Conversation starter

How would you explain “grace” or “the cross” to someone?
How does our church reflect our community?

4. Bible reading – James 2:1-17

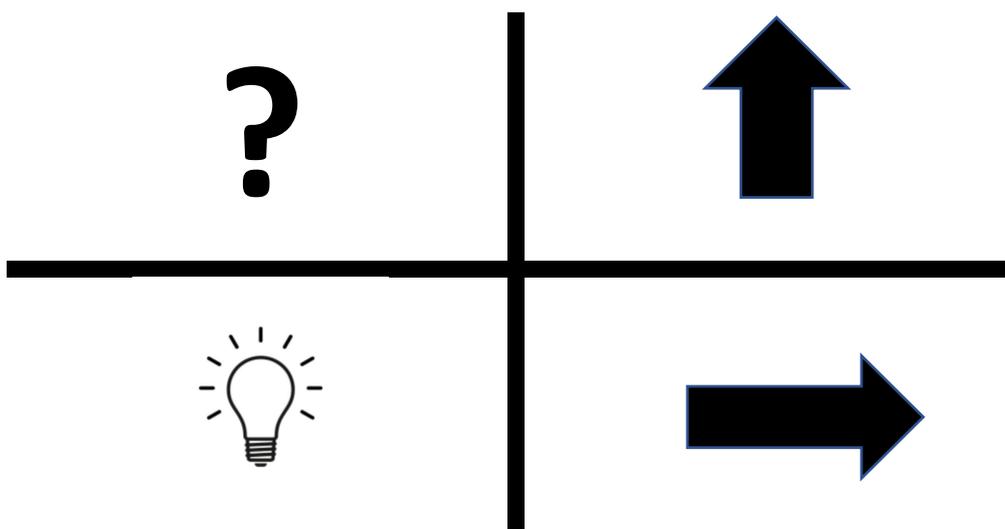
My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please’, while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there’, or, ‘Sit at my feet’, have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen

the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

To help us think about this passage we will use the "Swedish Bible Study Method", allowing each member of the group to think and talk about the questions below.



- Is there anything I don't understand?

- Is there something new that I have never noticed before (a lightbulb moment)?
- What does this passage say about my relationship with God?
- What does it say about how I should relate to others (and myself)?

5. Reflection

In the notes in the booklet this week (Tuesday week 5) we read “the most obvious thing about Holy Communion – yet perhaps something we rarely reflect on – is how physical it is.” We take bread and wine and we eat and drink. The bread and wine is both food for our spirit in terms of what it signifies, and also food for our bodies in terms of what it is. The words of administration from the old prayer book service reflect this “The body / blood of Christ which was given for you / shed for you preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.”

In the chapter from the letter of James he is trying to show how this works out in practice. Faith and works go together. In other words Christianity is about both our spiritual life and relationship with God (faith) and the way we live our lives in the world around us (works). It is both body and soul. Paul makes a similar point in the letter to the Romans where he says “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship.”

The daily readings encourage us to think about the make-up of our churches. This seems to be making the same kind of point as Jesus was making when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our neighbour is anyone and everyone. Our churches should be communities that can embrace anyone and everyone. Our works, our good deeds, should reach out to anyone and everyone. This might seem foolishness to the world, but it is what the cross is all about.

6. Discussion questions

Some say religion is about the spiritual and politics about the physical and that religion and politics don't mix. What is your reaction to that statement?

How can our churches better meet all the needs – physical and spiritual – of our communities?

7. Final thoughts

Ask each group member to say one thing they have learned from the session, and one thing they might do as a result.

8. Final prayer

Jesus, Lord of time

Hold us in your eternity

Jesus, image of God

Travel with us the life of faith

Jesus, friend of sinners

Heal the brokenness of our world

Jesus, Lord of tomorrow

Draw us into your future.

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Session 6 (Readings 7th – 17th April)

1. There is no study this week as it is Holy Week and there are services each evening in church. These notes are for you to think about on your own, and are based on the readings right through to Easter Day.
2. You might like to begin your time with a prayer and a few moments of quiet before God
3. Summary of the week

The week starts with some more thoughts on Holy Communion. How our acts of confession need to embrace the ways the whole world – of which we are part - falls short of God’s ideals. How we are sent out to love Jesus and serve him and how that affects all we are and all we do. It begs us to ask the question – are we changed by Communion?

The Holy Week readings take us through the events of Holy Week – the anointing of Jesus, the new commandment to love, the example of service and how the crucifixion challenges all the world’s assumptions about power and justice. The Easter reading finishes by challenging us as to where God is calling us and what he might be calling us to do.

4. Some questions to ponder

How can we bring the injustices of the world into God’s presence?

What does it mean for us to “love and serve the Lord”?

What does the cross tell us about truth and power?

What am I being called to do, or what am I being called to be?

5. Bible Readings

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

John 21:15-19

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

6. Reflection

These two readings are readings that illustrate the transformation brought about by the resurrected Jesus.

The couple on the way to Emmaus are dejected and downcast. They meet a stranger on the road who helps them to understand the scriptures they knew so well. He brought a new understanding which shed light on their situation and changed the way they saw the world. Where there was despair now they could see hope; where they had no future now they could see a joyous future. The transformation was finalised when Jesus broke the bread.

Peter was full of regret for his denial of Jesus. Remember the scene in the High Priest's courtyard. Three times Peter was accused of knowing Jesus, three times he denied it just as Jesus had said. One account has Peter's and Jesus's eyes meeting when the cock crowed. On the lakeside Jesus met Peter where he was in his regret, and moved him on. Three

times he asked the question "do you love me"; three times he challenged him with a new task.

Two stories of transformation brought about by the risen Christ.

7. Final questions to think on

How have you changed as a result of these readings and this course?

Can you set yourself a challenge or some challenges of things you plan to do / say as a result.

Make a note to check up to see how you are doing (or ask someone you trust to do this for you)

8. Final prayer

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