

6th November 2022

#8. Witnesses (Acts 1:6-11)

1. Jesus' directive to his disciples was, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
 - a. What does the phrase "being a witness" bring to mind for you?
 - b. How does this help you understand Jesus' words?
2. How do you think that church successfully points people to Jesus in
 - a. Sunday services?
 - b. In and to our community?
3. What do you think helps us be effective witnesses?
4. Richard suggested that being an effective witness often leads to the question, "why?" as people wonder why we do the things we do. With this expectation we need to know what we might say.
 - a. What might be your answer to the question, "why?"
 - i. What would you include?
 - ii. How would you use the opportunity to point people to Jesus and God's love for them
5. The angels challenged the disciples to not fuff, procrastinate, or simply become stargazers.
 - a. Does anything cause us to fuff, procrastinate, or stargaze instead of being effective witnesses?
6. As we have reached the end of this series, what has stuck with you from the talks, prayers, worship songs, or something else?
7. Is there a challenge that you want to set yourself as a result of this series? Maybe share it with someone to help you tackle it.

30th October 2022

#7. Grow (Luke 8:41-42,49-56 & Mark 6:34-44)

- 1) Mike tells a few stories about how meeting with others has helped someone to grow and to flourish. Have you got your own story to share about your own experience of church?
- 2) The suggestion is that 'being church' is a broader concept than simply meeting together in a building once a week on a Sunday. Can you think of other examples of how you find it helpful to meet together? In what ways are they helpful?
- 3) Is it helpful to see the Good News of Jesus as an invitation to a journey rather than an answer to a question? How does that change our approach to being church together?
- 4) We can give as well as receive. Sometimes we may think that we have little to offer – does the story of the feeding of the 5,000 offer an alternative view? Do we all have something to offer that can help others?
- 5) Growing up may mean that long-held views and prejudices are challenged (see the example in the sermon of Peter and his visit to Cornelieus). Are we open to having our views and prejudices challenged at church? Discuss any personal examples of where this has happened for you.
- 6) We can grow and flourish as individuals. Can we grow and flourish as a church? What does that look like? What would help us?
- 7) 'Dear Friends, let us love one another' says the author of 1 John. Is learning to love others one of the keys to a fulfilled life? Discuss what this looks like in practice.

23rd October 2022

#6. Challenge (Philippians 2:1-5[6-11])

1. Do you like pizza with or without pineapple?
2. Keith talked about coercive control/leadership as a very unhealthy way to suppress the challenges we face as a family with a diverse bunch of people.

- A. Have you, whether in the church, or elsewhere, experienced such leadership?
- B. What was it like?
- C. How did it make you feel?
- D. How do we avoid it at St James?
- E. Reflect on the leadership example found in 1 Peter 5:1-4

(WARNING: This is a sensitive subject. Confidences may need to be kept. Be aware that other parties – the leaders - are not around to give their account/defence.)

2. Keith discussed 3 challenges that we face as a result of being a mixed bunch of people; [1] the necessity for forgiveness as things will get damaged and broken [2] the potential for factions to form that can separate us, and [3] how we deal with our differing preferences.

Can you think of any other challenges that come about from being a family of very different people? (You may want to consider the challenges that Paul faced in the early churches he wrote to.)

3. Including the 3 Keith mentioned on Sunday and the ones you have identified in Q2, which of these challenges

- A. do you struggle with most?
- B. do you think St James is most susceptible to?

4. Though we are primarily/ultimately united with/in Christ,

- A. what are the other things that unite you in your CG? (Give thanks for these)
- B. what are the differences in your CG? (Give thank for these)
- C. how does your CG live with and benefit from these differences?

5. Read through Philippians 2:1-11 and share your thoughts.

6. How has it felt when you have encountered a humble person? What were they like?

7. "We flourish and grow more like Christ when we face [the] challenges [of being a diverse family] with humility." What has been your experience of this?

8. Looking at the culture around us today, in what ways is facing the challenges of life, and the challenges of being a diverse and large family, with humility, radically counter-cultural? How might this lead others to faith?

#5. Belong (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

1. What factors (internal and external) increase the likelihood for experiencing 'imposter syndrome'?
2. How can we at St James limit the factors that might make someone on the fringes of church/faith from feeling like an imposter?
3. What are the factors (internal and external) that can prevent a person from being fully known by others? (For example, Keith recognises that for some losing contact with old friends means they no longer have the friends who know them well.)
4. What healthy and appropriate relational things can we do to increase being known and knowing others. (For example, in response to his answer to Q3, Keith recognises that some may need to make time in their diary to regularly meet up with friends.)
6. Read through 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, replacing the word 'love' for 'Jesus'. Reflect on how the statements compare to the life and character of Jesus. (You might want to think of specific situations from the Gospels that illustrate them; for example 'Jesus is slow to anger' - there are many examples when Jesus had just reason to be angry, but wasn't; and a few when he was, for example the turning of the money lenders tables in the Temple courts.)
6. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 again, this time replacing the word 'love' for 'St James'. Reflect on how the statements compare to the life and character of St James. Where is there work to be done, so that we are more Christlike?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 again, this time (if you dare) replacing the word 'love' for 'I (am/do/etc)'. Reflect on how the statements compare to your life and character. Where is there work to be done, so that you are more Christlike?
8. To consider privately/not to share. Do you hide behind a mask or project a version of yourself? Who are the friends/family who know you well and love you? Who are the people in your life who you know well and love dearly? For these friends and family who do not have a faith, where is the opportunity for you to
9. To consider privately/not to share. For those of you today do not recognise that they belong, by a God that both fully knows and fully loves them, are you able to pray this prayer at the start of each day. *Jesus, I hear that you know me fully and that you love me fully, but I am struggling to believe it. Show me today the love that you have for me, and help me to be open to your love. I want to belong. Amen.*

Please send answers to 2, & 6 to Keith at vicar@stjamesdevizes.org)

02/10/22

4 Focus. (Acts 2:42-47)

1. Can you list the good things and the bad things that modern technology has brought us?
2. What things distract you and make your life less 'focused'?
3. Are there things you can do to be less distracted and more focused on living the life of a disciple of Christ?
4. Do you enjoy meeting and worshipping with other Christians? Be honest! What do you enjoy most about church?
5. What do you think are the main reasons why people are put off going to church?
6. How is being part of a small (connect) group helpful? What elements of 'church' can such groups have?
7. Evidence suggests that between a quarter and a third of church members have not returned to church after the pandemic. Why do you think that is?
8. Is watching a church service online a good substitute for being with others in person?
9. What gave the early church its dynamism? What do you think about the description of it recorded in Acts 2:42-47? Is it possible to recapture all or any of those qualities described?
10. How can we help people who cannot make it to church very often (because of work, family or whatever) feel they belong?
11. Do you think that people might be searching for more at the moment (due to the state of the world, fear for the future, loss of the Queen, etc.)? If so, how can we the church reach out to them?
12. The Church of England communion service says 'it is our duty and our joy' to worship God. How can we achieve a balance, so as to enjoy worship but also see worshipping with others as something we do even if we don't feel like it?
13. It can take some time to develop a good habit, but a lot less time to fall out of it! What practical things can you do to keep or develop the habit of regular fellowship with other believers?
14. Do you think the church should try to cater for all the different 'tastes', cultures and sub-cultures in the UK today? How can we reach out to everyone without losing the basic character of church?

25/09/22

#3 People. 1 Peter 2:4-10

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10

1. Is there a difference between “people” and “a people”?
 - a. In the Old Testament God called Israel (a people) not Jacob (a person). After this point the words Jacob and Israel are often used interchangeably. Is this relevant do you think?
2. What do you think it would have meant to the new Gentile Christians suffering persecution to receive this letter from Peter?
 - a. What would it have meant to the Israelite Christians who had lost their identity with the destruction of the physical temple?
3. The cornerstone in a building is the first stone laid, which positions and orients the building in a specific direction. In verse 7 “cornerstone” is sometimes translated as “capstone”- the stone fixed on the top of a wall or building. Discuss what it means to have Jesus as the cornerstone and capstone of the church.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 3:16-17. As Christians we are God’s temple as individuals and together as a church. Discuss what this means for us as individuals and then as a church.
5. Emergence is the principle that occurs when “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. How/where do we see this in life and in the church?
6. We have the privilege of being the church, God’s chosen people. What are our responsibilities and the work we are called to, as the people of God?
7. From the talk, or from your own discussions, discuss how the church is different and distinct from any other “club”.

11/09/22

#2 Truth. Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16

1. At her coronation the Queen was presented with a Bible as these extraordinary words rang out in Westminster Abbey, and around the world:
“We present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom, this is the royal law, these are the lively oracles of God.
 - a. How do you approach the Bible? As a book, like others. As a source of wisdom, and truth.
 - b. If the Bible is a source of wisdom and truth, what care do we need to take when we read it, interpret it? (You may want to think back to Craig Bain’s talk on How to Interpret Scripture (Your Questions, 13/03/22, <https://youtu.be/yhZQzOeUBvg>
 - c. How can reading and interpreting the Bible together as the church family and with other Christians help us when it comes to handling the most valuable thing this world affords?
2. Read vs 11-13. Note that Christ gave apostles, the prophets, etc to equip his people collectively, rather than individuals 1-2-1. What are the consequences (positives or negative) for our growth and unity of being equipped (1) collectively and (2) as individuals.
3. Also note it is so that ‘the body of Christ may be built up until **we** all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’ What, can we individually can we do to become more like Jesus? What, can we collectively (or is easier to do and maintain) to become more like Jesus?
4. What clubs / societies / other organisations are you involved with?
 - a. Why do you go to them?
5. What are the guiding-truths that direct your life and are shaping your character now (some may be positive/helpful, some may be negative/unhelpful)? Can you see, over you life, how your guiding-truths have changed? (Remember, the truths we accept may be truth, part-true, completely untrue)

6. Today, how do you respond to the truth that 'God love you completely and without limit'?
7. Do you have a testimony of how coming together as the church family to receive truth in love has directed your life and shaped your character? (Keith spoke at the end of his talk of how it was through a small group of Christian friends that he was embittered and cold-hearted as may have been the case if he remained directed by the truths of his late-teens/early 20s.) Share and give thanks for those people and situations.

Alternative Questions (kindly provided by Peter Kent)

8. What was most memorable in the talk?
9. What impressed you most?
10. What were the truths in your life at age 15 and were they 'true'?
11. How about now - and what would you be now if you had lived by your 15 year old truths?
12. Dhare memories of Elizabeth and compare her truths to our own and other people in power?
13. In the light of all this - why should we come to church?
14. Keith said ' if God loves us unconditionally we need to love those around us - even those we do not like - discuss!

04/09/22

#1 Introduction. Hebrews 10:23-25

Heb. 10:23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1. What clubs / societies / other organisations are you involved with?
 - a. Why do you go to them?
2. What are some of your experiences of church – good and more challenging?
 - a. Are you often excited about coming to church?
 - i. Why and why not?
 - b. Have you ever felt that church doesn't add more to life than any other club?
 - i. Why do you think this was?
 - ii. What should distinguish church from any other club?
3. If you were able to be at church or watch it since online, what do you make of the two different introductions by Richard? What resonated with you?
4. How might you describe church to someone you know? What would you choose to focus on?
5. The book of Hebrews was written to a struggling Christian community. One that was worn down by hostility and broken by the situations in the world around them. Do you feel similarly disheartened at present? What specifically is on your mind and heart? Perhaps spend some time right now in prayer for these situations.
6. The book of Hebrews was written to encourage, nourish, and challenge the community to perseverance and in the passage (10:23-25) three things are reminded to the community. Which do you need reminding of the most?
 - a. God's faithfulness to His promises
 - b. Keep clinging to our hope in Jesus
 - c. Keep gathering together
7. What do you think of the following statement?
 - a. Church is not only about "me" it is about "us". Church is actually a responsibility we have to each other, to share hope, to draw near to God together, to minister to one another in love, and to provoke each other to love and good deeds.