

THE GOOD NEWS

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS

The Good News #13; Lent #6, 28/03/2021, Richard Saint

John 12:12-16

1. The things that Jesus did and said caused division with some people coming to faith whilst others came to the decision that he must die. Why do you think Jesus provoked such polar responses? Does Jesus continue to do the same today?
2. Why do you think the crowds from the passage misunderstood the purpose that Jesus was there for?
3. Richard proposed that there are three important facets of calling for help that need to all be correct if we are to confidently expect an appropriate and effective response: Person, Plea, Purpose. Do you agree? Would you add / remove / change any of them?
4. **Purpose** – If your car engine is smoking you wouldn't direct the engineer to replace the tyres. Do we sometimes try and ignore the severity of our broken relationship with God either for ourselves or when talking about faith with others?
5. **Plea** – the crowds cried, "Please, save us!" When we cry out the same, how confident are we that it is heard? What might increase our confidence? Can you think of any verses from Scripture that can help (Psalms for example)?
6. **Person** - We might not pray to superman, but do we sometimes "forget" that Jesus is the only way and try to go it alone without calling out? Why is this?
7. Kirsty prayed that we might be able to share the Good News of Easter to those who misunderstand and are in darkness – how might we do that?

The Good News #12; Lent #5, 21/03/2021, Keith Brindle

John 12:20-33

People find out about Jesus through people they know who know Jesus

1. How did you find out about Jesus? Were other people involved? How did they 'lead' you to Jesus? (Did they simply tell you about him, walk with you through a difficult time, or were you friends, etc)
2. Do people who you know, know that you know Jesus?
3. Do you know people who don't know Jesus? Are you in touch with non-Christian friends? Are your friendships such that they'd be able to come to you to see Jesus?

Jesus isn't Jesus without the cross

4. What does Christianity look like without the cross? In what ways is the cross central to Christianity? (The cross achieves more than one thing, so there is more than one way to understand its centrality.)
5. Think about the language (was it religious language; with religious illustrations, metaphors, ideas, etc) that you used to answer question 4 above. How might we need to alter our language to make the case for the centrality of the cross to everyday life (using non-religious language, illustrations, metaphors, ideas, etc)? How do/could we make the centrality of the cross in everyday life accessible to those who don't have a faith?

The cross isn't the cross without sin

Keith defined sin as 'Sin is **anything** you do, or say, or think, that puts a barrier between you and God, you and others, and you and creation. Therefore, the result of sin is always a breakdown in your relationship with God, yourself, others and creation.

6. How do you respond to the word 'sin'? (Keith, provocatively, said he hated the word.)
7. Does the definition that Keith gave of sin help or hinder?
8. How might it be useful to think of the result of sin as being a breakdown in relationship? (This can be considered on individual, group, national, and systemic levels.)
9. Can such a definition help you to delineate between the things that you do in your life that are sinful and those things that are not? (Helpfully, Anthony Rose said recently, that if we look at ourselves honestly in the mirror, we know what we know what our sins are.)
10. Thinking pastorally, does this mean that all breakdowns in relationships are due to sin? This is a tough question; and needs to be followed up with a discussion on the need to recognise our individual contribution (or not) to the breakdown of a relationship, and the possibility/hope of forgiveness, reconciliation and resurrection.
11. How do you respond to idea, that for Jesus what troubled his soul as he considered the cross was not so much (or not only) the physical pain, but also (or mostly) the pain caused by the loss of his relationship with everything else? (Matthew 27:46)

The Good News #11; Lent #4, 14/03/2021, Anthony Rose

Exodus 2:1-10 Letting go & Trusting

12. What particularly speaks to you in the passage?
 - a. In what ways could the story be seen as 'good news'?
13. Are your memories of childhood and growing up generally happy or not?
14. Do you think your parents were/have been able to 'let you go' and flourish as a person?
15. If you're a parent, do you find the concept of 'letting go' of your children a difficult one?
16. Are there other kinds of 'children' in your life, things that are precious to you, that you could be in danger of holding on to?
 - a. Can you think of a particular time when this has been relevant?
17. How do you think Moses' mother or Mary the mother of Jesus felt as they saw them growing up?
 - a. What gave them the strength to trust God?
18. It is often said that Faith is spelled R.I.S.K. Have you had times in your own life where following Christ has been a matter of risk? How did you feel at the time?
19. Do you think God has a plan for *his* children, the church?
 - a. If so, what do you think the church will be like in 10- or 20-years' time?
20. Why do you think God chooses to use ordinary, frail human beings to do his mission, and not others such as angels or 'super apostles'?

The Good News #10; Lent #3, 07/03/2021, Richard Saint

John 2:13-22 Temple Resurrected & Temple Replaced

Questions for group discussion:

1. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in 3 days I will raise it up". His promise was fulfilled in two ways by both the resurrection of his body and the replacement of the temple building in Jerusalem with himself. What is the significance to us of each of these fulfilments?
 - a. Resurrection of Jesus' body
 - b. Replacement of the temple building
2. What impact could resurrection and replacement have on our daily lives?
3. For over a year we have been unable to gather in the church building. How does this passage give us encouragement for our current situation?
 - a. How does it challenge us as we move towards a reduction of restrictions?
4. When speaking with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:19-25), Jesus talked of a time when worship would not be restricted to a specific location but would be done in spirit and in truth.
 - a. What do you think Jesus meant by "spirit and in truth"?
 - b. What does worshipping the Father in "spirit and in truth" look like?
5. The people that Jesus accused of abusing his Father's house tried to divert attention from their behaviour instead asking Jesus to prove his identity and authority.
 - a. Do we sometimes try to divert God's attention away from ourselves and provide excuses for our actions or inaction?

Questions for personal reflection:

1. **Locate** yourself: Where are you right now? (physically, emotionally, spiritually)
2. **Remind** yourself: God is available to you right now, wherever you are and whoever you are
3. **Believe**: Ask God into your life, ask for his forgiveness, ask for restoration of your body, mind, and spirit.

The Good News #9; Lent #2, 28/02/2021, Keith Brindle

Mark 8:31-38. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

What stuck you most about what Keith shared on Sunday? What helped? What didn't help?

What made you think further? What challenged you? What questions are you left with?

Deny Yourself

1. What are your gifts, experiences, characteristics, joys, passions that God loves to see you use, develop, flourish and delight in? (This is no time to be modest! Talk about the things that you love, and that God loves about you. Don't we love to see children light up when they talk about or do the good things that they are passionate about - God the Father is no different.)
2. Keith described two extremes to avoid; the 'Harder is Holier', and the 'Happier is Holier'? I think because of our character, life experiences, etc, we will each have an inclination to one of these two extremes. Which one do you incline to? How does this play out in your journey as a follower of Jesus? How do you/can you take the middle route and avoid the extreme you are inclined toward?
3. Denying yourself is accepting (which is passive) that 'hardier is holier', but choosing (which is active) to say 'yes' to God. Share examples of when Jesus actively chooses to do say 'yes' to the Father (this shouldn't be difficult!). Note how some are hard, but some are joyous, mischievous and even fun. Note also how the different people around Jesus respond to Jesus following the will of the Father (including Peter in our reading).
4. How can you give yourself the space routinely to evaluate your thoughts, words and actions against what the Father wants for you and wants to do through you? How can you routinely ask the Father to show you (through prayer, the Bible, others you trust, the Holy Spirit, etc) what his will is for you and what he wants to do through you?

Take Up Your Cross

5. What are the crosses that you have chosen? You may want to write them down. You may want to prioritise them. Which are important to you? Which are important to God? In which do you succeed as a follower of Jesus? In which do you do less well?

6. What are the crosses that have chosen you? You may want to write them down. You may want to prioritise them. You may want to prioritise them? Which currently have the most significant impact upon whom you are, your life, being a follower of Jesus? What does it look like to pray that hard prayer - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Follow me

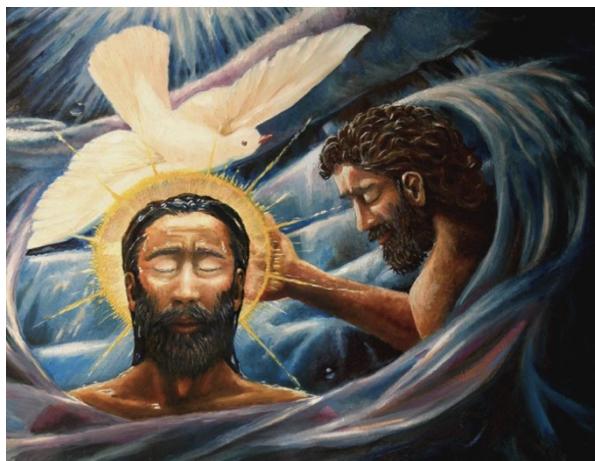
7. Keith talked of Jesus' instruction to 'follow me' as being to follow Jesus to the cross, through the cross, and to victory over the cross (sin and death). Share from Acts and the Epistles, times when the earlier followers of Jesus, followed Him to the victory he had won over the crosses that they were carrying.

From the end of Sunday's talk (possibly for private reflection, rather than group discussion)

8. What is the thing that you want to do, that God also wants you to do? Don't deny yourself. Do it. (Hint: If you can't think of any good reason why God wouldn't want you to do it, then do it.)
9. What is the thing that you keep on doing, that you know God does not want you to do? How are you going to stop? Tell a Christian you trust. Ask them to pray with you about it. Be accountable to them.
10. What is the cross that you are carrying today that is too heavy for you? Ask God in prayer for a way forward, for healing, for help, for his victory, his power, for his comfort. If you've not shared it with anyone, especially if you are a bloke, speak to someone you trust. Ask those that God has placed around you for help.

The Good News #8; Lent #1, 21/02/2021, Richard Saint

Mark 1:9-15



Baptism of Christ. Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John, David Zelenka, 2005; Creative Commons

1. Looking at the painting by David Zelenka, what do you think its strengths and weaknesses are in portraying the Trinity and Jesus' experience at his baptism?
 - a. How would you describe the Trinity to someone; what would you focus on?
2. How do you think Jesus might have felt going from his brief mountain top experience of perfect union with the Father and Spirit to a prolonged period of total isolation in the wilderness?
 - a. Can you relate to this experience?
3. Jesus proclaimed the good news of repentance. What does the action of repentance bring to your mind? Is it positive or negative?
4. What difference does it make to your view of the good news of repentance that God made the first step towards us by coming to earth?
5. Jesus was tested by Satan whilst in isolation in the wilderness with temptations that relate to self-sufficiency and self-importance. We might have also been tempted by various things which can lead to despondency or despair. What can we learn from Jesus' time in socially distanced isolation that can nourish us in the here and now?
6. What steps can you take to live out the Good News that, "The Kingdom of God has come near" in the knowledge that you are loved, you are cared for, and that through repentance you are accepted by the Father whose arms are open wide.

The Good News #6, 07/02/21 Anthony Rose

Colossians 1: 15-20

If you were an intrepid explorer, where would you like to go?

1. What particularly grabs you about the passage?
2. Do you agree that the more we know of the universe, the smaller we seem in relation to it? If so, how does that make you feel? Does it affect your relationship with God?
3. How are Paul's words here 'good news'?
4. How many attributes of the Son can you think of that reflect those of God the Father? Which ones do you relate to the most?
5. How do you feel when you hear people misusing the name of Jesus?
6. What answer would you give to someone who says that Jesus is only one of many ways to know God?
7. How would you explain to someone, who had never heard, just what was achieved on the cross?
8. Can you think of other Bible verses or passages that point to Jesus' being God come to us as a human being?
9. Does it help you to worship and pray knowing that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' and that all God's 'fullness' lives in him?

The Good News #5, 31/01/21, Keith Brindle

Luke 2:22-40

'Live in the now. Live for the not yet?'

1. What are your first thoughts when reading the passage Luke 2:22-40?
2. How do you interpret the title of the talk? Live in the now. Live for the not yet?
3. What is the difference between living for the now, and in living in the now? Could you give examples.
4. Can you identify how living for the now, could impact negatively upon your mental/spiritual wellbeing, whereas living in the now could impact positively.
5. Read Psalm 118:24 followed by Matthew 6:25-34 (re-reading the final verse). How do these readings put helpful bounders around each day?
6. What are the 'not yet' things (future hopes, things you are looking forward to) that you are living for? How can you bring something of those future hopes, into your now? How might that help you in the here and now? (For Keith, though he can't go to gigs, when he does spend time listening to music, he feels more himself, more rested, and less hurried).
7. Look at (and list) the qualities of Anna & Simeon. Discuss how these qualities would have been formed by them choosing to invest each day with their future hoped.
8. Look again at your list of 'not yet' things you made in question 6. How certain are these? (It is likely, for Keith, that his favourite festival will be cancelled again this year. For others, plans for holidays, will have to be postponed.) How does any uncertainty make you feel? (Because we live in the now, not for the now, we can be honest about how this makes us feel.) If the future hope didn't happen, can you see how there are benefits to having brought them into the now.
9. Jesus was the ultimate example of living in the now, whilst also living for the not yet. Apart from the wedding in Cana, can you think of an account in the Gospels that illustrates this.

The Good News #4, 24/01/21, Richard Saint

John 2:1-11

1. What are your first thoughts when reading the passage John 2:1-11?
2. Why do you think this passage is so memorable?
3. Are there times when we only want God for his impressive “party-tricks”? Why is this?
4. How do you understand Jesus’ truly impressive spectacle, his death and resurrection?
 - a. How often do you think that something you are struggling with is too insignificant to bring to God?
5. Read Psalm 8 – what does this psalm tell us about God’s perspective on human beings?
 - a. Spend some time thinking about the areas of your life that you are not allowing God to be involved in and consider inviting him in.
6. Do we sometimes try to use our own efforts (ritual washing) to keep ourselves free from sin? Why might we do this?
7. Reflect on the fact that by accepting the gift of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross (good wine) we can have total confidence that we are made fully clean not only on the outside but inside too. Perhaps thank God in prayer and ask God to always remind us of this.
8. Jesus’ actions at the Wedding at Cana were a sign that pointed away from itself to something greater. How can our lives be a similar sign?

The Good News #3, 17/01/21, Keith Brindle

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

1. What did you value from the talk? What resonated with you?
2. What did you find challenging?
3. What were you unsure about? What questions do you have?
4. How, when you were a child/teenager, did you respond to the idea of an ever-present God? Is it possible your experiences as a child/teenager, especially your relationship with your parents, could influence this response?
5. What is your immediate physical and emotional response to God being with you from you waking up to you lying down, and that he knows you inside out? How does that compare to the Psalmist response?
6. Though Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was considered a brilliant theologian, and a man of integrity and strength of character, he saw within himself fragility and doubt. The difference between how others thought of him and what he knew of himself, caused him to ask, ‘Who Am I?’ in his poem of the same name (which you can read in full here <http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/who-was-db2.htm>). The poem ends with the line, ‘Whoever I am, you know me, I am yours God.’ How do you respond to knowing that your value comes not from what others say about you, or even what think about yourself, but from being a child of God; known and loved by Him.
7. In the Book of Common Prayer, the Communion starts with this prayer, **‘Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:** cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.’ The words in bold, encapsulate some of Ps 139. How do the underlying truths of Ps 139, and the words in bold above, set you free? What do they set you free from?
8. Free to do what? Nothing? Or, as the Atheist Bus suggests ‘enjoy life’? Is freedom, the freedom we have in Christ, to be squander? What are you going to do with your freedom tomorrow?

THE GOOD NEWS

Thanksgiving Service, 10/01/21, Keith Brindle (a PDF of the talk can be found by the YouTube of the talk on the Watch Again page at stjamesdevizes.org)

Luke 10:25-37

9. What did you value from the talk? What resonated with you?
10. What did you find challenging?
11. What were you unsure about? What questions do you have?
12. Is it possible to always find things to be thankful for?
13. How is it possible for you, with your personality, biography and culture, to only see part of reality? Where might your blind spots be, that stop you from seeing glimmers of light in the darkness?
14. What does/could it mean for you to put in a bit of effort, engage and be open to being thankful?
15. What does/could it mean for you to put in a bit of effort, engage and be open to connect with God (our source of reality and all that we can be thankful for)?
16. Who are the people that inspire you, either because of who they are or what they have achieved? Is being thankful part of who they are? (When I thought about this, I struggled to think of anyone who inspired me, who wasn't also thankful. This was especially true for those who had experienced real hardship and struggle.)
17. For those of us who are feeling they've nothing left to give, can't engage with anything, and are feeling closed (and this is likely to be all of us at some time), saying 'try harder' isn't going to help. What will help? Where in the Bible might we find resources to help, wisdom to guide and stories to inspire?
18. Looking at the reality of the impact of the pandemic in all its entirety, in what ways do you feel we are called to respond that would be more like the Good Samaritan, and less like the two who passed by the beaten man