

making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples

Recognising the risen Jesus

Christ Church
Homegroups
Summer 2018

On the first Easter Day, Jesus rose from the dead. But when he appeared to his disciples, mostly they failed to recognise him. They had seen him die – they had no expectation of ever seeing him again – so when they did see him – it just wasn't what they expected.

Our circumstances are very different to theirs, but I wonder if we make the same mistake. We might talk about Jesus being at work in his world, but how often do we fail to see it? Do we subconsciously only think in terms of Jesus being at work when something obviously miraculous happens?

Perhaps the experience of Jesus' first disciples can help us to recognise his presence in the everyday events of our lives today.

HOMEGROUP PROGRAMME for this series

w/b Mon 9 th April	Study 1 – Through the Scriptures
w/b Mon 16 th April	Study 2 – Peace be with you
w/b Mon 23 rd April	Week of Prayer for Christ Church
Wednesday 2 nd May	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 7 th May	Study 3 – Encouragement
w/b Mon 14 th May	Study 4 – Lead us not into temptation
w/b Mon 21 st May	Study 5 – Another Advocate
w/b Mon 28 th May	Half Term – free week
Wednesday 6 th June	Prayer Meeting

1. Through the Scriptures

WELCOME

What is your favourite verse / passage in the Bible?

WORSHIP

We've just celebrated Easter. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that the death, burial, resurrection and appearance of Jesus are 'of first importance' – the most important events in history. Praise God for the difference the death and resurrection of Jesus have made to you.

WORD

From the earliest days of the church, Easter has always been the greatest Christian festival. The early Christians, who were all Jews, would have been used to meeting for worship on Saturday (the Sabbath), but very soon they started meeting on Sunday, because that was the day that Jesus rose. And it seems that long before Christians started making anything big of the celebration of Christmas, the annual celebration of Jesus' resurrection was the high point of the year.

But for the disciples, it must have been very different – the first Easter was a time of confusion. Even though Jesus had told them that he would rise again, that was something that they just didn't understand, and they certainly didn't expect to

see Jesus alive again. In fact, the reports of the empty tomb just added to their confusion. Whatever they were expecting to happen next, it certainly wasn't seeing Jesus.

Read Luke 24:13-27

- Why were the disciples disappointed? (Other than the obvious disappointment of losing their master.)
- Why did they fail to understand what had taken place?
- What two things did the Scriptures predict about the Messiah? How do these relate to what happened in Jerusalem?
- What three things had happened that amazed the disciples?

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12

We don't know which passages Jesus referred to when he explained what the Scriptures said about him, but this passage was most likely one of them. What do each of these sections tell you about Jesus:

- Isaiah 52:13-15
- Isaiah 53:1-3
- Isaiah 53:4-6
- Isaiah 53:7-9
- Isaiah 53:10-12

This occasion on the road to Emmaus wasn't the only time Jesus spoke of his relationship to the Scriptures. In John 5:39-40 Jesus told the Jewish leaders: *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. There are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

Jesus expected that his followers would recognise him in the Scriptures. Of course, for the earliest Christians the only Scriptures they had was the Old Testament, whereas we also have the New Testament.

- When you read the Bible, do you expect it to reveal Jesus to you? Why, or why not?

Whilst some passages in the Old Testament do clearly point to Jesus, there are others which it is much more difficult to see in this way. But all of Scripture is 'the word of the Lord' – we should expect to hear Jesus speaking to us through it.

- Have there been times when you have been aware of Jesus speaking to you as you have read the Bible?
- What might stop us from hearing him when we read the Bible?

Read Luke 24:28-35

- How did the disciples come to recognise Jesus? What part did the Scriptures play in that?

- What do you think it means that their hearts were 'burning within them' as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them? Has that ever happened to you?

WORK

We live in a world where there is much which prevents us from recognising Jesus, and that can be true of times when we are reading the Bible. Pray this week for one another to read the Bible expectantly, that each will have a time when their hearts burn within them as they read the Bible.

Be prepared next time to share anything you have learned from meeting with Jesus in his word this week.

2. Peace be with you

WELCOME

Last time we thought about recognising Jesus as we read the Bible. Has that happened for you this week?

WORSHIP

Psalm 62 says: *Truly my soul finds rest in God.* Psalm 62:1. Praise God for the peace that he can bring into our restless lives.

WORD

This year marks the end of World War 1 – the bloodiest conflict the world had seen. In total 20 million people died in the war – and yet despite the intention that never again would such a horrific war be fought, only 20 years later the world was at war again. In the 2nd World War 72 million people died. And since the end of World War 2 there have been over 250 major wars, in which more than 25 million people have died. And today – in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Sudan, in so many other places, it is still going on.

And what is true on the international stage is mirrored in personal lives. In 2016 64.7 million items of anti-depressants were prescribed in the UK alone. Peace, whether it is between nations, or between individuals, or even in individual lives, seems impossible to attain.

But when Jesus met with his disciples after his resurrection, one of the first things he said was 'Peace be with you.'

Read Luke 24:36-49

As we saw last time, in verse 34, all the disciples were aware that Jesus had risen. But now, in verse 37, just moments later, when Jesus appears they think it is a ghost.

- What does Jesus do to convince them that he really is alive?
- What was it that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand?
- 'Peace be with you' was a common greeting, but as Jesus uses it here, it seems to mean much more than just 'hello.' Why did Jesus need to give the disciples his peace?

In John 14:27 Jesus tells his disciples: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

- In what way is the peace Jesus gives different from the world?
- How does Jesus peace prevent us from being troubled and afraid?
- Have you experienced that peace?

In a world so short on peace, we should recognise that ultimately only Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can give true peace. So whenever we experience that peace, either in our lives or our relationships, that is an invitation to recognise Jesus at work.

Read Hebrews 13:20-21

This is a blessing which is often used after Easter, speaking as it does in the Resurrection.

- But – why do you think the writer starts his blessing by referring to 'the God of peace'?
- What is the relationship between 'peace' and God working in us what is pleasing to him?
- Why is this all 'through Christ Jesus'?

Read Philippians 4:4-9

- What does Paul mean when he says that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds **in Christ Jesus** (v.7)?
- What might prevent us experiencing this peace?

WORK

Among your group, where in your lives at present do you need to know the peace of Christ? Pray this week for those specific situations, and pray that each of you will in some way recognise Jesus bringing his peace into your lives and relationships this week.

CHRIST CHURCH WEEK OF PRAYER

We have set aside the week 22nd – 29th April to be a Week of Prayer for Christ Church, so our Home-groups this week will be a part of that.

WELCOME

Share a time when God has answered prayer in your life.

PRAYER

Read Matthew 6:9-13

We will use the Lord's Prayer as a framework for our prayer for Christ Church.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

- Begin by praising God for who he is. (You could use the words of some of the Psalms to help you.)
- Thank him for making you his child.
- Ask him to give you a deeper love for him, and a real desire for him and his honour.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

- Pray that God will deepen your trust in him, so that you will know that his will for you is best.

- Pray for his will to be done within Christ Church
- Pray for wisdom, so that as a church we might be more aware of what God's will for us is, so that we will be able to be more faithful as disciples.

Give us today our daily bread

God invites us to bring our needs to him. As a church, we face 5 particular challenges at present. Take some time to pray about each of them:

- **Finances.** Last year we were underfunded, and the first part of 2018 looks even more serious. God has given us work to do here in Moreton, pray that he will also give us the finance we need to do it.
- **Leadership.** God has blessed us in the past with good and godly leaders, but with Jeremy moving, Eileen finishing as Church Warden (and Angela finishing in a year's time), we do need to see the next generation of leaders being called and equipped.
- **Children and Families Work.** It is great to see the work that Kat has already started, and the plans she has for future work. But if that work is to grow, we need to see several more people involved with Kat in children and families ministry. Pray that God will be calling those people.
- **Worship.** Over the past decade we have seen something like a 30% drop in attendance on Sundays. Although you can't determine the spiritual life of the church purely on the numbers attending on Sunday, it is a good indicator. We need to pray for our welcome, and

for new people who do start coming to be drawn into active discipleship.

- **Evangelism.** Although we have been involved in things like Hope Moreton 2016, we have seen little fruit. Few people have been interested in attending Life Explored, numbers of confirmations have been down. We need to pray for new opportunities to share the gospel, and that God will be opening hearts to receive the Good News.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

- Whilst we seek God's blessing on the areas we've just prayed about, we need also to pray for his protection on our relationships – for a real sense of love and forgiveness within Christ Church.
- If there are those who you are struggling to get on with, please pray for them.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one

- When we pray, you can be sure that the enemy will be at work. Pray for God's protection for us as a church.
- Pray that we won't try to find answers to the challenges we face in the wrong place.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Although these words aren't part of the original prayer Jesus gave, they do form a fitting way to end our prayer.

Finish by praising God.

Thank him that there is nothing beyond his power.

Ask again that he will help you to trust him with all the things you have prayed about.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

3. Encouragement

WELCOME

Last time we finished by praying that one another would recognise Jesus as he brought peace into areas of their life where it had been missing. If you are following these studies by date, that will have been 3 weeks ago – so share any answers to those prayers.

WORSHIP

Psalm 40 speaks of God as the one who lifts us out of the pit (see verses 1-3). Praise God for times when he has done that for you or for others you know.

WORD

I said in study 2 that peace is hard to find in our society, and I think that is equally true for encouragement. It has often been noted that most people are a lot better at putting others down than at building them up. It might well be down to the inbuilt tendency that we all have to look out for ourselves – in order to make ourselves look better we need to make others look worse.

And that means that raking up other people past failures and sins, and then using them to knock someone down, happens all the time. As soon as someone is appointed to any significant position in the country, the first thing the media will

do seems to be to trawl back through all their old tweets, looking for something they can discredit them with.

Just think how the press today would respond to Peter. He had failed Jesus miserably. He promised to give up his life if necessary to protect Jesus but then a few hours later denied even knowing him. They would have a field day with that, wouldn't they?

Read John 21:1-14

- What do you think is the significance of Peter's decision to return to fishing?
- What do you think Jesus was trying to show the disciples by allowing them to catch such a large number of fish? (see Luke 5:4-11)

When Peter hears that 'it is the Lord', he jumps into the water and begins swimming ahead of the boat.

- What does that tell you about Peter and his relationship with Jesus?
- How would you have responded if you had denied Jesus just a few days earlier?
- Could Peter have ever been the same if Jesus had not returned from death and met with him?

Meeting the risen Jesus changed Peter's life. At the start of the chapter, he is going back to his fishing, by the end of the chapter he is recommissioned as a servant of Jesus.

In Romans 15:5, Paul calls the Lord *'the God who gives endurance and encouragement'* In a world so short on encouragement, we should see anything which encourages us as something that comes from the Lord Jesus – we can recognise him in any act of encouragement.

Read Hebrews 10:19-23

- How is it possible for us to draw near to God? What has Jesus done to make it possible?
- How can we have full assurance of faith?
- Why should realising this make us want to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds'?
- Why should looking forwards to the return of the Lord Jesus (the Day, v.25) make us want to meet together and encourage one another?
- Do you find times of meeting with other Christians encouraging? What should be involved in being an encouraging community?

Thinking about recognising Jesus in acts of encouragement done for us is a reminder that often we meet Jesus through the acts of his people. Which means that when we encourage one another, we are ministering Jesus' encouragement.

WORK

How can you encourage one another in the coming week? Are there specific issues over which those in your group need encouragement? Pray for opportunities to encourage, and that you will each be aware of meeting with Jesus through those acts.

4. Lead us not into temptation

WELCOME

Last time we thought about encouragement. Share any ways in which Jesus has used one of his people to encourage you this week.

WORSHIP

Hebrews 4:16 tells us that through Jesus we can approach God with confidence, and that we can 'receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.'

Praise God for any times when you have been aware of his help in difficult situations.

WORD

Thursday 10th May was Ascension Day. I guess it would be fair to say that of all the great Christian festival, the ascension is the most neglected. We celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas (though sometimes it is a struggle to remember what Christmas is really about!), we celebrate Jesus death and resurrection at Easter, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but the Ascension is all too easily forgotten.

That is sad, because it is the Ascension that brings the earthly ministry of Jesus to an end. Jesus is no longer teaching and healing in Galilee and Judea, he no longer appears to his

disciples as he did after the resurrection. But the story of Jesus is not ended.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

- Why was it important for Jesus to be able to tell his disciples that all authority had been given to him?
- What work did Jesus give his disciples?
- Why would knowing that he was with them be important as they did this?

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

When Jesus rose from death, although his appearance had changed, one thing was still the same – he still bore the scars of his crucifixion. They were a sign that Jesus didn't somehow stop being human when he rose and ascended.

- Think of some of the experiences that Jesus had of temptation, of rejection, of abandonment. How does knowing that Jesus has experienced these things help you to pray?
- Jesus 'was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.' Why might Jesus' victory over temptation encourage us to come to him for help?

Read Hebrews 7:23-28

Admittedly Hebrews isn't the easiest book in the New Testament – largely because of its Jewish background, with all its reference to priests and sacrifices.

- What do you think it means when it says that Jesus is 'able to save completely those who come to God through him'?

The writer tells us that although Jesus work of salvation is finished, he still lives to intercede for us. It is a reminder for us that though we are saved, we are still sinful. We still need help if we are to persevere; we need help to grow in grace.

- *How might knowing that, no matter how at times we do fail, Jesus is interceding for us – that he is at work for us – help us to persevere as Christians?*

Temptation is a constant reality in the Christian life. And in our own strength, we will constantly fail. But Jesus is the one who can help us stand against temptation. So whenever we are able to resist, it will be because Jesus has been at work for us – we should recognise Jesus whenever we are able to stand against temptation.

WORK

Talking about temptation can be difficult – the temptations we face are often things we don't want to talk about with others (or admit that we do at time give in!)

But praying for one another in the face of temptation is important. So if there are particular temptations that you are facing, and which you are happy to speak about, do share them so that the whole group can be praying for you this week.

5. Another Advocate

WELCOME

Have you had any experience of resisting temptation this week?

WORSHIP

Psalm 139 tells us that as God's people, God's Spirit is constantly with us (verse 7). Praise God for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

WORD

Pentecost is one of the greatest days in history – the day the Holy Spirit was given to the church. Of course, the Holy Spirit is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, right back to the creation in Genesis 1.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit was given to certain of God's people to equip them for a particular task. But Pentecost marks a new era, when the Spirit is given to all Christians. And it is an important event to remember, because without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be impossible, and the church could not exist. As John Stott puts it '*As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead*'.

Read John 16:5-15

The word Advocate (v.7) means one who is called alongside to help (other versions of the Bible often use the word 'Counsellor').

- In what ways does this passage describe the help the Holy Spirit gives?
- Have you experience of the Holy Spirit helping you in these ways?

Because Jesus is going away, the disciples are filled with grief (v.6).

- Why is this 'bad' news about Jesus actually good for the disciples and for us?

The Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment (v.8)

- Have you had experience of this conviction?

Jesus tells his disciples that *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.* (v.13)

- How does the Spirit guide us in God's truth and bring glory to Jesus today?

Read Acts 2:1-13

The disciples were together, when they heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind, and they saw what looked like tongues of fire.

- Why might wind and fire be symbolic of the Holy Spirit?

Anyone doing the reading in church on Pentecost Sunday has the worry of negotiating their way through the list of nationalities in Acts 2:8-11!

- Why do you think that Luke emphasises the international, multilingual nature of the crowd?

The day of Pentecost symbolised a new unity in the Spirit transcending racial, national and linguistic barriers. Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.

An important element of the work of the Holy Spirit is unity. Just as at Pentecost the coming of the Spirit brought people together from many different backgrounds, so today where the Spirit is at work he will bring unity.

This is important in a world where disunity is so common. Once again we see that we should recognise the risen Lord Jesus wherever we find Christians from different backgrounds, living together in unity. It is not only something that should help us to recognise Jesus, but it should be a powerful witness to the

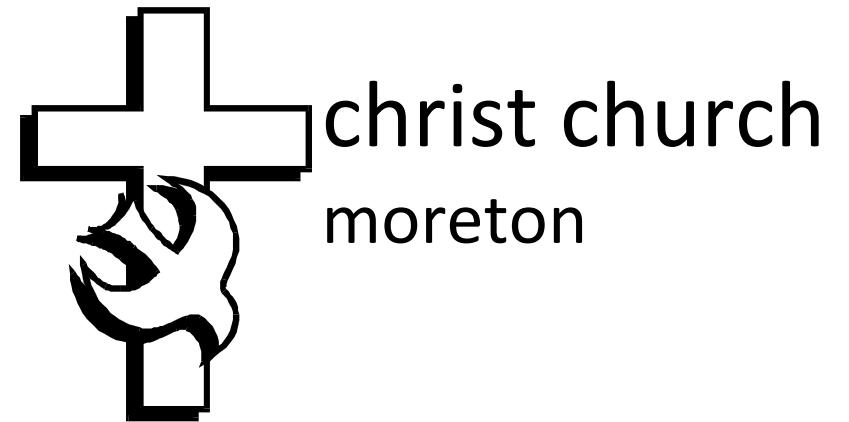
world – Jesus told his disciples *‘by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’* John 13:35

- Have you had the experience of finding that as a Christian you are able to love those who otherwise you would not have had anything to do with?

WORK

We don't have to create unity in the church – that is a gift of God. All we are called to do is to maintain the unity which God through his Spirit has created.

Are there situations, or people, within Christ Church who you need the Spirit's help to maintain that unity with? Pray about those situations.



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