

making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples

We
Believe

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
Autumn 2018

At Christ Church we have the vision of being a church which is rooted in discipleship. And that in turn is rooted in the gospel – it is the gospel which enables a person to become a disciple, it is the gospel which leads to growth as a disciple, it is the gospel which is at the heart of the whole life of being a disciple.

This term we are going to study the Apostles' Creed. From very early in church history, God's people have found it helpful to have a summary of what we believe – the heart of the gospel. In modern language, the creeds are our 'identity documents' – they summarise who we are, and help us to hold to the truth whilst recognising and avoiding error.

The Apostles' Creed is not just a statement of facts which we acknowledge to be true. To say that we believe is also a statement of personal commitment. The things we believe should shape our lives – if the truths of the creed don't affect the way we live, we don't really believe them. So each study will have a 'so what'

section, which we think about how what we believe should affect the way that we live.

Sunday by Sunday, in most of our services, we use the words of either the Apostles' Creed or some other statement of faith. My prayer is that as a result of these home-groups, we will be able to use those words with renewed commitment and with a new joy and passion. Who knows, maybe saying the creed will become the high point of our worship!

Homegroup programme for this term:

w/b Mon 10th Sept Study 1 – God the Father
w/b Mon 17th Sept Study 2 – Jesus God and Man
w/b Mon 24th Sept Study 3 – Jesus Crucified and Buried

Wed 3rd Oct PRAYER MEETING
w/b Mon 8th Oct Study 4 – Jesus Risen and Ascended
w/b Mon 15th Oct Study 5 – Jesus Returning and Judging
w/b Mon 22nd Oct FREE WEEK
w/b Mon 29th Oct Study 6 – The Holy Spirit

Wed Mon 7th Nov PRAYER MEETING
w/b Mon 12th Nov Study 7 – The Church
w/b Mon 19th Nov Study 8 – Forgiveness of sins
w/b Mon 26th Nov Study 9 – Everlasting life

Wed 5th Dec INFORMAL COMMUNION

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

1. God the Father

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth*

WELCOME

What is the best place you have been to? What made it so special?

WORSHIP

Psalm 33 speaks about how God made the world and how he continues to rule it. Use the psalm together to praise God and to express your trust in him.

WORD

What thoughts or images come into your mind when you think of God? The majority of people around the world still say that they believe in God, but there is a bewildering array of different things people believe about him. For some, God is a distant, remote being, for others he is more like a kindly grandfather.

The Apostles' Creed starts with a simple statement about God. He is the 'Father almighty.' Those 2 words highlight 2 vital truths. As Father, God is personal, he relates to his world as a perfect father relates to his children. And he is also almighty – he is the sovereign God who has created the whole universe and

who has complete control over it – nothing can happen outside his sovereign control and will.

Throughout the Bible we see both God's fatherly love and his sovereign control – even in situations where his people could not see how both could be true.

READ Isaiah 40:1-11

God's people had been going through a tough time – conquered and taken into exile because of their sin.

- What good news did Isaiah have for the people?
- The image of God being a shepherd is a common one in the Bible. In what ways does God act like a shepherd to his people?

READ Isaiah 40:12-26

But could God help his people? Isaiah's word to them was: "Your God is too small!" In this passage he challenges us to see God as he really is – with the majesty, wisdom, grace and power of our incomparable God.

- How does verse 12 show us the greatness of God?
- Even small problems can seem overwhelming while we are experiencing them. How can the portrait of God in verse 12 encourage us at such times?
- What aspect of God's character is stressed in verses 13-14?

Israel had been conquered and the people taken off into exile in Babylon. Babylon was the super-power of the day – no-one could resist them.

- How do verses 15-17 help God's people in that situation?
- How might they apply to us today?

- Why is an idol a pitiful substitute for God (v. 18-20)?
- At what point do people or things become substitutes for God?
- Why do you think God challenges us to compare him to counsellors, nations, idols, princes and rulers?
- Israel complained that God seemed distant and uncaring (v. 27). How do verses 12-26 answer this charge?

READ Isaiah 40:27-31

- What encouragement does God give us when we feel weary and without strength (v. 28-31)?

- What does it mean to 'hope in the Lord'? (v.31)

AND SO?

God is the creator of heaven and earth – this is his world. How should recognising that this is God's world and not ours affect the way that we treat natural resources? Are there simple steps you could take in order to be better stewards of all that God has created?

2. Jesus God and Man

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary

WELCOME

What are you most looking forward to in the next 12 months?

WORSHIP

Philippians 2:5-11 speaks of Jesus laying aside his majesty to come to earth for us, but also of the glory that is now his. Use these words in thanks and praise.

WORD

I said last time that there is a bewildering array of ideas about God around in our world, and that is equally true with Jesus. There are so many ideas about him. A few years ago the hugely popular *The Da Vinci Code* brought some of these ideas into the mass market, and there has been no slowdown. But it is nothing new – one of the key issues which the Paul's epistles had to address was misunderstandings about Jesus. The Apostles' Creed tells us that Jesus is God the Son, and that he was born of a human mother. But what does that all mean?

Read Colossians 1: 15 - 20

One of the key reasons for Paul writing to the Colossians seems to have been that they were confused about who Jesus really was – false teachers had been leading them astray. How does Paul counter each of the following claims?

- *That Jesus wasn't fully God*
- *That Jesus wasn't really a man*
- *That Jesus was a created being*

- Do you recognise any of these claims from your conversations with non-Christians?

- Why is it important that we accept each of these things as true?

Paul says that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God'. That isn't to imply that Jesus is in some way an imperfect copy of God, but that he is perfectly like God. He is exactly the same as God. The writer to the Hebrews says *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...* (Hebrews 1: 3)

Read Matthew 1:18-2:2

It's only September, and the last thing most of us want is to be reminded about Christmas! But when Matthew wrote his gospel, he didn't give us the first 2 chapters just to provide Carol Service

readings, but because they were an important part of introducing the Lord to us.

- What three titles is Jesus given in these verses?

- Why is each significant?

Read Matthew 3:13-17

- What are we told about Jesus in v.17?

- If this is what Jesus is like, why did he need to be baptised?

AND SO?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. Each time we use the Creed, we acknowledge that Jesus is our rightful Lord. But living under his Lordship will never come naturally – the heart of sin is that we want to be our own lords. In which areas of your life do you find it most difficult to allow Jesus to be Lord?

How does knowing that Jesus lived a fully human life help you to live the life to the full that Jesus came to give (John 10:10)?

3. Jesus Crucified and Buried

*suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead*

WELCOME

What is the most embarrassing experience you have had?

WORSHIP

Although it was written centuries before Jesus, Isaiah 53 is one of the Bible's deepest descriptions of what Jesus went through for us. Use the words together, then thank Jesus for doing that for you.

WORD

Several years ago now I read a biography of President Kennedy. Despite the fact that his assassination was a huge news story, only 10 of the 700 pages were about his death. And that is what you usually find with biographies, the writers want to talk about the person's life, not their death. Yet, one third of each Gospel talks about the last few days of Jesus' life and his death on a cross.

The Apostles' Creed passes straight from Jesus' birth to his death. That doesn't mean that his life was unimportant – far

from it. In Jesus' healings we see the Kingdom of God breaking into our fallen world, in his teaching we have genuine wisdom to live by. But more important than either of these is Jesus' death.

Read Mark 14:32-42

- What was the cup which Jesus prayed so urgently about? Why did he long that God would take it from him? (see Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15, Psalm 75:8)

Many people question whether the *only* way to God is through Jesus and his death on the cross.

- How does this passage help to answer that?

Read Mark 14:43-72

- Why was it significant that all the disciples deserted Jesus?

Up till this point Jesus has regularly kept quiet about his true identity, but in verse 62 he openly confesses that he is the Messiah.

- Why do you think he does this now?

How is Judas' betrayal of Jesus different from Peter's?

What warnings and encouragements can you take from Peter's example?

Read Mark 15:33-41

- What 3 things does Mark tell us happened?
- What is the significance of each of them?

Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. The Creed then adds that 'he descended to the dead.' Even though he was the eternal Son of God, he experienced all that death means. Only in that way could he defeat death, and so give us eternal hope.

AND SO?

Mark 14:12-26 is an account of the Last Supper. Jesus told his disciples that the bread and wine would represent his body and blood. Week by week we celebrate Holy Communion at church, and there is a danger that, like the Creed, it all becomes over familiar – something we just do. How can thinking about the death of Jesus and how it relates to you make the communion service more significant for you?

4. Jesus Risen and Ascended

*On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, and is seated
at the right hand of the Father,*

WELCOME

What is your greatest achievement?

WORSHIP

Psalm 2 speaks of God's anointed one (Jesus) reigning over all things. Praise God that Jesus is Lord, and pray that his Kingdom will be seen on earth as in heaven.

WORD

Last time we saw that the gospel writers placed huge emphasis on Jesus' death. But Jesus' death was never the end of the story. When Jesus told his disciples that he was to die, he also told them that he would rise again (see, for example, Matthew 17:22-23: *When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.'* In fact the resurrection is so significant that, as Archbishop Michael Ramsey said years ago, 'No resurrection, no Christianity.'

But even Jesus' resurrection wasn't the end of the story. After 40 days, Jesus ascended into heaven, and sat down at God's right hand. His work of salvation was complete.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

- What, according to Paul, are the essential elements of the gospel (v.3-5)?
- Why is each important?
- How does Paul emphasize the reality of the resurrection?
- Why does Paul emphasize the resurrection?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

- What differences would it make if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead?
- Could the Christian faith still exist if Jesus' body was found in a tomb?

Jesus' resurrection isn't the end of the story. 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 – before he ascended he commissioned his disciples to proclaim him to the world.

Read Acts 2:22-36

Peter's great sermon on the Day of Pentecost reminded his hearers of Jesus death and resurrection, but didn't leave it there. Jesus is now 'exalted to the right hand of God' (verse 33).

What did Peter mean when he told the crowd that God had made Jesus both Lord and Messiah? (verse 36)?

AND SO?

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?

Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us that 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?

5. Jesus Returning and Judging

and he will come to judge the living and the dead

WELCOME

Would you want to be a judge in a talent show? How fair do you think you would be to all the competitors?

WORSHIP

Psalm 15 tells us what a person needs to be like in order to stand before God. We know that we aren't blameless, but what we can't do ourselves, Jesus did for us. Use the psalm as praise of Jesus, and then thank God that through Jesus we can stand before him.

.WORD

The early Christians knew that Jesus had died, risen, ascended and poured out his Spirit. But was that the end of the story? Christians still died – what would happen to them? And what would happen when they stood in front of Jesus – the one whom God had appointed as Judge of all.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- Paul talks about us having 'hope.' What is this hope (v.14-17)?
- In what ways is this different from the 'hope' that most people in our society have?

Paul's main point here is that when Jesus comes again, it will be good news for those Christians who have already died, as well as for those who are still alive. All will have their place in the new heavens and new earth. Whether or not we die before Jesus comes, our destiny is to be with him forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words. (4:18)

When Paul talks about the return of Jesus, he does so not just to inform us, nor to confuse us, but to encourage us. And he expects Christians to be using these things to encourage each other.

- Do you find the prospect of Jesus' return encouraging?
- How does it influence the way you live your life now?

When Jesus comes, he will judge the living and the dead. Everyone will stand before him.

Read Matthew 25:1-46

Jesus had just been talking about what would happen at his return, and helping his disciples to be ready.

In biblical times the bridegroom would come to the bride's home after dark, and then would take her and her bridesmaids (virgins) in procession to his home for the wedding feast.

- What was the difference between the wise and foolish virgins?
- What does this parable teach us about Jesus' return?
- In the parable of the bags of gold, what is the difference between the servants?
- How does what the three servants say to the master when he returns show how they felt about him?
- What does this parable tell us about how we should be living as we wait for Jesus' return?

The third parable refers to the things that we do or don't do in this life.

- Does it mean that salvation depends on us doing the right things to earn it?

AND SO?

What difference does the hope of Jesus' return make to your life now? Jesus could come back at any time – how should knowing that shape the priorities you have in life?

6. The Holy Spirit

I believe in the Holy Spirit

WELCOME

What superpower would you most like to have?

WORSHIP

Psalm 103 is a great hymn of praise for all that God has done. Use it together, and then pick one thing from the Psalm to thank God for personally.

WORD

The Apostles' Creed began by pointing us to God the Father – because the whole universe begins with him. Only when we acknowledge that God is the Father Almighty can the world make sense. It continued by focussing our attention of Jesus Christ – the Son of God. In his life we see what God is like, through his death and resurrection we can be restored to a living relationship with God.

But even that doesn't end the gospel story. Jesus has ascended into heaven, but that doesn't mean that he has abandoned his world or his children. The next crucial part of the story is the coming of the Holy Spirit.

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 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?

Read John 16:5-15

- Why was it good for the disciples that Jesus was going away (v.7)?
- What did Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would do when he came (v.8-11)?

- How could he do this more effectively than Jesus?
- It is sometimes said that we can't be sure whether the gospels are accurate. How does what Jesus says in v.13-14 help us to be confident about what we read in the New Testament?

Read John 21:1-14

- How were the disciples affected by Jesus' resurrection?
- Did the resurrection alone transform them?
- What does that tell us about the importance of the Holy Spirit?

AND SO?

Just before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit came he would enable them to be witnesses to him. I guess that most Christians find being witnesses like that very challenging – worrying about whether they will know what to say, or fearing rejection by those they speak to. Where do you have opportunities to be a witness? Do you expect the Holy Spirit to equip you for that? How often do you pray for opportunities to play your part in spreading the good news of Jesus?

7. The Church

*the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints*

WELCOME

What do you get most excited about?

WORSHIP

Psalm 133 reminds us what a blessing unity is. The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone; we all need one another to encourage and help us. Praise God for times when he has blessed you through another Christian.

WORD

What do you think of when you hear the word church? For many people their first thought is of a building. Several years ago a friend of mine, who was then curate at a church, was approached by someone and asked 'are you the curator of this church?' That probably sums up how many people feel about church – it is to do with an old building, something like a museum.

For other people 'church' might mean what goes on inside the building – the services that take place there. The New Testament word points much more to the believers who make up the church – certainly in the New Testament 'church is something to

be, not something to go to.’ More significantly, it is the place where God lives by his Holy Spirit. We saw last time that the Holy Spirit came to equip God’s people to live as his people. But that was never to be an individualistic thing.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

- What was the position of gentiles (non-Jews) before the time of Jesus?
- What is the status of non-Jews who are ‘in Christ Jesus’?

Divisions between people is all too common – in fact John Stott says that “divisiveness is a constant characteristic of every community without Christ.” This was certainly the case between the Jews and Gentiles in Paul’s time – they hated each other! And yet in the church at Ephesus Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds worshipped together.

- Why is the bond that we have in the blood (death) of Jesus (v.13) more important than anything that might divide us?

In v.19-20, Paul talks about us being part of God’s household – God’s new society. This is built *on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* – whose words we now have in the New Testament and Old Testament. And the corner stone – the stone from which the whole building takes its shape, is *Christ Jesus himself*.

- What does it mean practically for Christ Church to be *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief corner-stone*?

The Apostles’ Creed doesn’t just talk about the local church. It tells us that there is one worldwide church. (When it says that the church is ‘catholic’ it isn’t talking about the Roman Catholic church. The word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal’. The church includes people from every nation. No ethnic or social group is left out.

- What is it that unites everyone who is in Christ Jesus?

Believing in ‘the communion of the saints’ reminds us again that in Christ we are united with all other believers – not only those alive now, but all who have lived throughout history. One day we will all be together around the throne of God.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

The Creed reminds us that the church is ‘holy’. That doesn’t mean that it is perfect, but that God has set the church apart for himself. We are his people.

Paul is so concerned for these Christians that he ‘urges them’ (the word could be translated **begs them**) to live a life worthy of their calling.

- Why is unity so important? What part does it play in living lives worthy of our calling?
- What does Paul say are the characteristics of a life worthy of our calling (v.2-3)?
- Why are these virtues so important? How would they help to maintain the unity of the church?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

- How does what Paul says here help us to understand God's purpose for the church?
- How can this passage encourage those who find it hard to belong within a church?

The church is 'the communion of the saints' but it is also 'a fellowship of sinners'! The church is the fellowship of forgiven sinners who are in the process of becoming saints.

AND SO?

In Christ Church we *are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Holy Spirit*. How should realising this affect our relationships within the church?

In Hebrews 10:24-25, the writer of Hebrews says that one of the main reasons for us meeting together is to encourage one another, and that we should 'consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.' (v.24) What could you do within your group to spur one another on in this way? And what about people within Christ Church who you don't know so well – maybe members of a different congregation. How can you encourage them?

8. Forgiveness

the forgiveness of sins

WELCOME

What is the best present you have ever been given?

WORSHIP

1 John 1:8-10 reminds us that we are never entirely free from sin. But it also reminds us that through faith in Jesus, forgiveness is guaranteed. Thanks God for his great forgiveness, and for the sacrifice which made it possible.

WORD

After the great statements about who God is, what he has done for us in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, and about his glorious purposes for the church, the next clause of the Apostles' Creed sounds almost insignificant. 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins.' Certainly in our society today most people would think it is irrelevant, because by and large the whole idea of sin has disappeared from people's thinking.

But the forgiveness of sins is at the heart of the gospel. Isaiah 59:2 tells us *your iniquities have separated you from your God*. Sin is a barrier which we have built between ourselves and God, and nothing we do can remove it. But the Creed affirms the glorious truth that that barrier can be broken down.

Read Isaiah 53:1-12

What does each of these sections tell you about what Jesus has done for us?

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

Read Titus 3:3-8

- What does Paul mean in verse 3 when he says that we were *enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures*?
- What are some of the ways in which we are deceived by sin (v3)?
- Paul describes what we were 'at one time' (v3). What has happened to Christians to change this?
- Paul says that Christians have been *washed, reborn* and *renewed* by the Holy Spirit. How do these things overcome the problem of sin?
 - Washed (see also Matthew 15:18-20)
 - Reborn (see also Romans 5:12)
 - Renewed (see also Ephesians 2:1)

Paul teaches that without the Holy Spirit, we could not change.

- But what does Paul expect believers **to do** as a result of this teaching (v8)?

AND SO?

In 1 Peter 2:21-25, Peter tells us that Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross. The great result of this is that we have '*returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.*' But Peter also expects receiving that forgiveness to change our lives now – as a result of it we should '*die to sins and live for righteousness.*'

Yet many, if not most Christians still struggle with particular sins. The power of addiction is not easily broken, whether it is the obvious addictions of drink / drugs / gambling, or the less obvious ones of gossiping, unforgiveness, bitterness and so many others.

Where in your life are you struggling to allow the forgiveness you have received through Jesus' death to change your thoughts, words or actions?

9. Eternal Life

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

WELCOME

Christmas (yes – it's not far off now). Do you look forward to it eagerly, or dread it?

WORSHIP

Romans 8:31-39 assure us that once we have put our trust in Jesus, nothing will ever separate us from God's love. Praise God for his endless mercy and grace.

WORD

About 300 years ago the Puritan Thomas Goodwin was president of Magdalen College in Oxford. One afternoon one of his students went to see him for a tutorial – he went into Goodwin's dark study, and Goodwin opened the conversation by asking the student, 'Are you ready to die?' The student jumped up and fled!

And I guess we can understand why. Apart from sounding like something from a rather stereotyped horror film – it's just not the sort of subject you would normally want to think about. Most of us would probably go along with Woody Allen, who said 'It's not that I'm afraid of death – I just don't want to be around when it happens.'

But despite that, all that we have seen in the Creed would come to nothing if death was the end. But having assured us that the forgiveness of sins is possible through the death of Jesus, the Creed ends by reminding us why this is so important. It isn't just give a relationship with God now, it is the key to the hope which the gospel holds out to all who have repented and put their trust in Jesus.

Read Romans 8:18-27

- What has happened to the created world as a result of humanity's rejection of God?

Paul tells us that the whole creation is waiting for a time in the future when the children of God to be revealed. In other words, God will make a new humanity.

- What will happen to the created world as a result of this?
- What does Paul say Christians are waiting for? (see also v11)
- What do we learn about the life of eternity from these verses?
- What does Paul mean when he says that Christians have 'the firstfruits of the Spirit'?
- How does the Spirit help us as we wait for all this?

Read Romans 8:28-39

- Why can Christians be confident about the future?

v.23

v.28-30

v.31-34

v.35-39

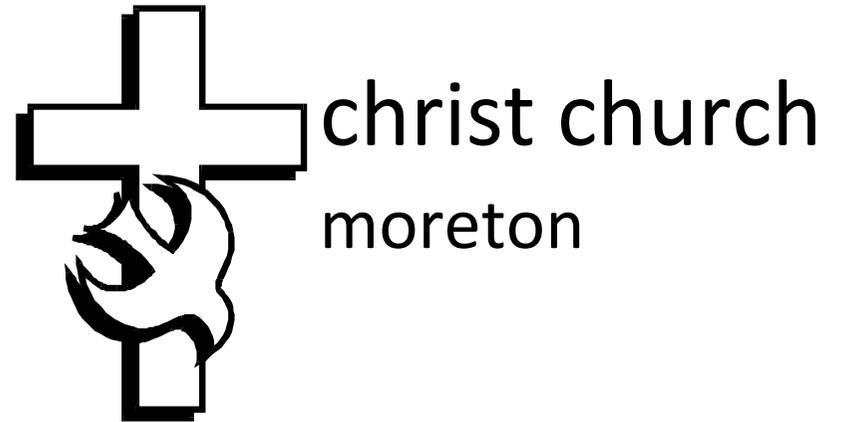
- How should Romans 8 help Christians who are suffering?

Read Revelation 21:1-5

- What will be the characteristics of the renewed heaven and earth (v.3,4)?
- What do you most look forward to when Jesus comes again and all that Revelation 21 points to is fulfilled?

AND SO?

Although we still live in this fallen world, as Christians we are already 'citizens of heaven.' How can you make sure that over the next few weeks you live in a way which is faithful to that citizenship, rather than being carried along by the world.



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