

Being Disciples – learning from the Master

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
January – March 2016

HOME GROUP PROGRAMME

Wed 6 th January	The Power House 7.45 in the Parish Centre
w/b Mon 11 th January	1. <i>Starting out</i>
w/b Mon 18 th January	2. <i>A different way</i>
w/b Mon 25 th January	3. <i>Good Fruit</i>
w/b Mon 1 st February	4. <i>Prayer</i>
Wed 10 th February	Ash Wednesday Informal Communion Service 7.45 in the Parish Centre
w/b Mon 15 th Feb	As it is half term week, you are free to do what you like.
w/b Mon 22 nd February	5. <i>On a mission</i>
Wed 2 nd March	The Power House 7.45 in the Parish Centre
w/b Mon 7 th March	6. <i>Don't worry</i>
w/b Mon 14 th March	7. <i>The Cross</i>
Thurs 24 th March	Passover Meal 6.30 in the Parish Centre

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word.

With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught

(Luke 1:1-4)

1. STARTING OUT

What comes into your mind when you hear the word 'disciple'? I suspect that for most people their first thought is of a group of men in Israel 2000 years ago – Jesus' 12 disciples. But Jesus' last instruction to his original disciples was that they should go and make more disciples (Matthew 28:19). It should be an ongoing process.

The Greek word *mathetes* (disciple) means a pupil or a learner. So to be a disciple is to be a learner. But in Jewish thought, learning was never just about accumulating knowledge – the aim of a disciple was to become like his teacher. Jesus' instruction to his first disciples to go and make disciples shows that becoming a Christian is just the start of a life of learning – learning to be more like Jesus.

Our vision as a church is that we should be Making Disciples, Growing Disciples, and Being Disciples. We should be introducing others to Jesus, and helping them begin the life of discipleship. We should be encouraging and nurturing those who have started that life. But all of us should be disciples. None of us has yet learned all there is to know about Jesus, and none of us is the finished product in being like him.

This term, we are studying Luke's gospel, looking for what it tells us about being disciples – how we can grow more like Jesus.

Read Luke 2:41-52

Luke records just one event from Jesus' youth. His main reason for doing this was to draw attention to who Jesus was – the Son of God (see verse 49 – *'I had to be in my Father's house'*)

But even if Jesus was the Son of God – why did he need to be in the temple?

How does Jesus' need to be in the temple find its parallel in our own lives? If we are to live as God's children, what do we need to do?

Luke seems to see a connection between Jesus' visit to the temple and his growing in wisdom and in favour with God and men.

In what ways can our growth in these areas be encouraged?

Read Luke 3:1-20.

John the Baptist was the forerunner who prepared the way for the Lord. What was the main way in which he said that his hearers could themselves be ready for him?

John tells the crowd that they must 'produce fruit in keeping with repentance.' Why is this so important?

John then pin-points key areas in the lives of three groups who ask him what they should do (verses 10-14). I suspect that none of these things he mentions are what we would necessarily think of as sin (especially the first).

So – why might these be appropriate for each group?

- The crowd

- The tax-collectors

- The soldiers.

In what areas of your own life are you most prone to sin?

Are there areas of your life where you have a blind-spot to your own sin?

Why might sin which we refuse to recognise or repent of damage our relationship with the Lord?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Jesus grew in favour with God, and with his neighbours. Of course, we are not in the business of just doing whatever will make us popular – especially as we live in a society which frequently rejects Christian values and principles.

But – are there things which you could you do, either as individuals or as a group, to win favour with your neighbours, and to make them more open to the gospel?

Similarly, are there things which we need to avoid doing because they bring a bad name to the church and thus to the Lord?

Pray about these things, then spend some time deciding what you actually will do – remember, being a disciple isn't just about learning stuff, it is about putting into practice!

2. A DIFFERENT WAY

If you have ever been walking in the opposite direction to a large crowd you'll know how difficult going against the flow can be. Everyone else is going one way down the street, and they can't understand why you would be so awkward as to want to go the opposite way.

Sometimes being a disciple can be like that. The priorities which followers of Jesus have can be radically different from those around us, and sometimes that can cause real tensions. Sometimes even those close to us just can't understand why we do certain things, or refuse to do other things.

When that happens, it can be tempting to just go with the flow rather than against it. But that is something which Jesus didn't do, and which he clearly didn't expect his disciples to do.

Read Luke 4:1-13

3 times the devil tempts Jesus. But what would have been so wrong about doing these 3 things?

How did Jesus know that these things were wrong?

How does Jesus respond to each of the temptations?

How does Jesus' response differ from Adam & Eve's when they were tempted (see Genesis 2:16-17, 3:3-6)

(This is the significance of the long list of Jesus' family tree in Luke 3:23-38. Adam, the first son of God, failed when tempted, and so did every one of his descendants, until Jesus, the true Son of God, came and succeeded where Adam had failed.)

What does Jesus response to temptation show about his attitude to God?

Read Luke 6:17-26

In verses 20-22, Jesus turns conventional human wisdom upside down. Who could possibly think that being poor, hungry, weeping and hated could be a source of blessing? When Jesus said that his disciples who experienced these things would be blessed, do you think he was talking of blessing in this life, or just in heaven (verse 23)?

Have you had experiences where God has turned these sorts of bad experiences into good ones for you?

And what about the 'woes' in verses 24-26? Does this mean that it is wrong for a Christian to be rich, well fed, happy and popular?

Read Luke 6:27-36

I guess that usually we don't think in terms of having real enemies – that seems a bit extreme. But we all have those who we find it hard to get on with, those who we suspect of talking about us behind our backs, those who maybe deliberately seem to misunderstand us.

How might what Jesus says here about how we should treat enemies relate to how we should respond to those who we feel like this about?

Every now and again people turn up at the Rectory looking for me to give them money. Do you think that we are meant to take verse 30 literally (*Give to everyone who asks you*)?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

There is a sense in which the values of the Kingdom of God turn normal human values upside-down. We live in a world which has radically different values from those Jesus talked about.

Can you think of one specific thing you could do which would show the values of the kingdom within our community?

Pray that people will see the kingdom lived out at Christ Church, and through that be drawn to Jesus themselves.

3. GOOD FRUIT

A few years ago I grew some huckleberry plants in our garden. It wasn't a great summer for them, and we ended up with just about enough for one huckleberry pie.

However, I have since discovered that there is a risk in growing huckleberries, in that in appearance they look almost identical to Black Nightshade, which is highly poisonous. That is probably why there are now no seed companies in Britain selling huckleberry seeds – if somehow a self-set Black Nightshade plant grew up where you had planted your huckleberries, the consequences could be disastrous.

Two plants which look the same, but the good plant bears good fruit, whilst the bad plant bears bad fruit. And nothing you could do would make a Nightshade plant give you edible fruit.

Read Luke 6:37-42

Judging others is the bread and butter of the media. But Jesus says that we should not be like that.

Why should we not judge others?

Do you think that Jesus means that we should never say that someone else is wrong? (Remember, Jesus said some pretty tough things about the Pharisees being wrong!)

If not, what does Jesus mean?

What should we do if we want to truly help a brother or sister?
(v.42)

Once again, what Jesus says highlights the importance of the Bible. Often it is only as we read the Bible that we become aware of planks in our own eyes which we have never noticed before.

Read Luke 6:43-49

What sort of fruit should be seen in our lives as disciples of Jesus?

What makes this fruit grow?

The wise and foolish builders is one of Jesus' best known parables. In what ways might we be tempted to hear the word but not put it into practice?

How can we help each other be like wise builders and not foolish ones?

Read Luke 7:18-35

John the Baptist was one of the greatest characters in the Bible – Jesus says here that *I tell you, among those born of women there is no-one greater than John*. It was John who was the forerunner of Jesus; it was John who baptised Jesus.

And yet here, John seems uncertain about Jesus – *Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*

What things does Jesus point to in order to show John who he is?
Why are these things important?

Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me. (v.23)

Why might Jesus have led to people stumbling, or falling away?

Today, in what ways does Jesus sometimes fail to meet people's hopes?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Good and bad fruit, wise and foolish builders, standing firm or stumbling.

One of our problems as disciples is that although we have been saved, the old nature doesn't immediately go away. And that means that we tend to have a blind spot when it comes to our own failings. Left to our own devices, all too easily we start to build on sand, because it is easier, and we can convince ourselves that we are building on solid ground, whilst others can see we are heading for a crash!

One of the biggest challenges in the life of discipleship is to allow others who are disciples alongside us to point out to us where we might be going wrong. It is hard, but it is necessary. In your group, how far can you go in genuinely supporting one another – helping one another to prune out the bad fruit, to build on the solid rock, and not to be disappointed and stumble in your discipleship?

4. PRAYER

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples. Luke 11:1

Jesus first disciples were obviously aware that they needed to pray, but also that it was something they had to learn. And both things are true for us as disciples today.

We need to pray – The prophet Samuel said to the people of Israel 'Far be it from me to sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.' 1 Samuel 12:23. Not praying is not only foolish, it is sinful.

But that doesn't mean that prayer will come naturally. Many Christians struggle to pray. Many more struggle to pray with others. But both are things which as disciples we can learn, if we are willing to. So this home group session will focus on prayer – not so much talking about it as doing it.

Timothy Keller, in his book 'Prayer – Experiencing awe and intimacy with God' writes: 'Prayer is awe, intimacy, struggle – yet the way to reality. There is nothing more important, or harder, or richer, or more life-altering. There is absolutely nothing so great as prayer.'

Usually we don't have home-groups in the first week of the month, as we gather together for the Power House – our church prayer meeting. But this month each home group will have their own prayer meeting. And although Luke does record Jesus giving the Lord's Prayer, we will use the better known version from Matthew's gospel as our pattern.

Read Matthew 6:9-13

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

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.

God's kingdom is his perfect rule.

- Bring to him places and situations where you long for his rule to be seen.
- They may be places around the world.
- They might be situations in your own life.
- We do need to be praying for Moreton, and for our mission here.

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

This might be the most challenging element of the Lord's Prayer. It is fine to ask for God's will to be done in other parts of the world; it can be much more difficult to ask for his will to be done in your own life.

- 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

- What personal needs do you have at the moment. Share them with one another, then pray about them.

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

- There may be particular things you know you need to confess.
- There may be situations where someone has hurt you, and you are struggling to forgive them.
- There may be other Christians that you are keeping at arms-length because of some past hurt.
- It might help to ask the other members in your group to pray about these things with you.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Oscar Wilde once famously said that he could resist anything except temptation! I suspect that most Christians are aware of areas in their life where they are most vulnerable to temptation. Pray about these situations.

Pray as well that the Lord will shield you from temptations which are so subtle that you aren't even aware of them.

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

5. ON A MISSION

A disciple is a learner – learning to become more like Jesus. But that doesn't just mean that we try to imitate him, it has to begin with a relationship with him. And, in fact, you can't grow in your discipleship unless you are growing in that relationship. You can't serve the Lord more unless you are learning to love him more – otherwise you will end up doing the right things for the wrong motives, and in the end, that never works.

That was true for Jesus' original disciples. When they first met him, he was obviously someone quite special. They were maybe in the synagogue when he began his ministry, and realised that he was different to the other Rabbi's they'd heard. But then they saw him healing people who were ill. Obviously Jesus was more than just a great teacher. But then he did even more amazing things: calming a storm, feeding a huge crowd with a picnic. Even raising the dead.

Who was this man? In one way he seemed like a normal person – he got tired and hungry, he laughed with his friends, he cried when he was sad. But in another way – he was so different from anyone else. And before they could really be disciples, they had to know who they were following. And that is still true today.

Read Luke 9:18-27

Verses 18-20 are sometimes seen as the heart of Luke's gospel. Why might this be?

Now that Jesus has been recognised as the Messiah, he goes on to teach his hearers what this implies.

In verse 22, what does Jesus say will happen to him? Why do you think the disciples were so surprised about this?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that if we want to follow him, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross?

Read Luke 9:57-62

What does Jesus say is involved in following him?

Jesus gives answers to 3 specific questions about following him. How do these answers apply to us today?

Which of the three do you find the biggest challenge?

Read Luke 10:1-20

Jesus sends his disciples to prepare the way for him by preaching the good news of God's kingdom.

In verse 4, what shows how urgent the message is?

Why, according to verse 16, is rejecting the disciple's message serious?

In verse 17-20, what are the disciples rejoicing about?

What does Jesus say they should be rejoicing about instead? What lessons does this have for you?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Jesus tells his disciples: *The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.* Luke 10:2

It can be hard to see Moreton as a place where there is a plentiful harvest – there seems to be such apathy and resistance to the gospel. So few people seem to show any interest whatsoever. But we still need to be trusting that God does have a harvest field here, and we should be praying that he will send out workers here – people equipped to share the good news relevantly with our community.

Then the next thing Jesus says is: *Go! I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.* Luke 10:3. They were to pray that the Lord would send out workers, and then be ready to be the answer to that prayer. And it wouldn't be easy – being a lamb among wolves is not a comfortable image!

So – what are you going to do about it? Are you willing to pray? Are you willing to go? How can you together, as disciples of Jesus, put what he says here into practice?

6. DON'T WORRY

If you were to compare life today with life in my granddad's time, one thing seems very strange. In those two generations there have been more labour saving devices produced than probably in the rest of recorded history. Washing machine, vacuum cleaner, electric hedge trimmer, microwave oven – the list is endless. In fact, when I first used to stay with my grandma and granddad, they still had no piped water. It had to be collected from the well on the village green!

And yet now, with all these wonderful things – we are probably more stressed than he was! Our society has been characterised as one where 'we are doing more and more, and enjoying it less and less'. Tiredness, stress, exhaustion, burn-out – all common words in our contemporary vocabulary. We have more and more, and that just seems to have given us more and more to worry about. What has gone wrong?

Read Luke 10:38-42

Do you think that Jesus meant that the practical work which Martha was doing was unimportant?

Should we, as disciples, spend all our time 'sitting at Jesus' feet,' rather than being involved in practical work for him? (Remember, this comes immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan.)

What does this incident tell us about our priorities as disciples today?

Read Luke 12:22-34

Why shouldn't we worry about things?

Do you find this to be true in your life? How much of a worrier are you?

Jesus' examples of the ravens and the lilies both specifically refer to the fact that neither "toil." Is Jesus teaching His disciples that they need not work, and that God will provide?

What does it mean to 'seek God's kingdom' (v.31)?

Read Luke 14:25-35

Jesus' language in verses 25-26 is pretty shocking. What do you think he meant?

What has been the cost of being a disciple for you?

In what ways are we in danger of losing our saltiness as disciples?

Read Luke 18:1-8

This parable seems to be about prayer. But at the end, Jesus says 'when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'(v.8)

What is the connection between the parable and faith?

What does your prayer life tell you about where your faith lies?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

First – a quick recap.

In session 1, the challenge was “Are there things which you could do, either as individuals or as a group, to win favour with your neighbours, and to make them more open to the gospel?”

In session 2, it was “Can you think of one specific thing you could do which would show the values of the kingdom within our community?”

So – have you come up with anything? Seen any results?

Second – worries. I guess that whatever we might say in our discussions, worry is a difficult thing to get away from.

In Philippians, Paul writes: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:6-7

Are there worries which you need to share with one another, and then present to God?

7. THE CROSS

The cross casts its shadow over the whole of Luke’s gospel – right from the words which Simeon spoke to Mary when Jesus was just a few weeks old – *This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.* (Luke 2:34-35)

It is there when Peter finally recognises who Jesus is – God’s Messiah. Immediately after that, Jesus told them: *The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day raised to life.* (Luke 9:22)

And it is there as Jesus finally approaches Jerusalem: *Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”* (Luke 18:31-33)

Read Luke 19:28-48

At last the king rides into his city – Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. It is a scene full of excitement and joy – but then we find Jesus weeping.

Why did Jesus weep as he looked at Jerusalem (v.41)?

The crowds were cheering Jesus as their king, so why did Jesus say that they had failed to recognise the time of God’s coming to them (v.44)?

Are there ways in which our assumptions about God might blind us to the truth?

Read Luke 21:1-4

Jesus journey to the cross is almost over. From here on he will speak to his disciples about the future – preparing them for his death but also for his return in glory. And then Luke moves on to the Last Supper. So this little incident of the people putting their offerings into the treasury is the last time Luke records Jesus talking to the crowd.

What is the contrast which Jesus draws between the rich people and the widow?

What does it say to us about the response we make to Jesus?

Read Luke 22:7-30

How would the bread and the wine help the disciples to understand Jesus' death?

How can they help us today to remember Jesus?

How does the argument about which disciple is most important (v.24) show that they still hadn't understood what Jesus was about to do on the cross?

Read Luke 22:47-62

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

In what circumstances are you most tempted to be ashamed of Jesus, or to deny him?

Read Luke 22:63-23:25

Four groups or individuals are involved in Jesus' death – the soldiers, the Jewish leaders, Pilate, and Herod. How would you describe each one's attitude to Jesus?

- Soldiers
- Jewish leaders
- Pilate
- Herod

In what way do their attitudes parallel those of people today?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

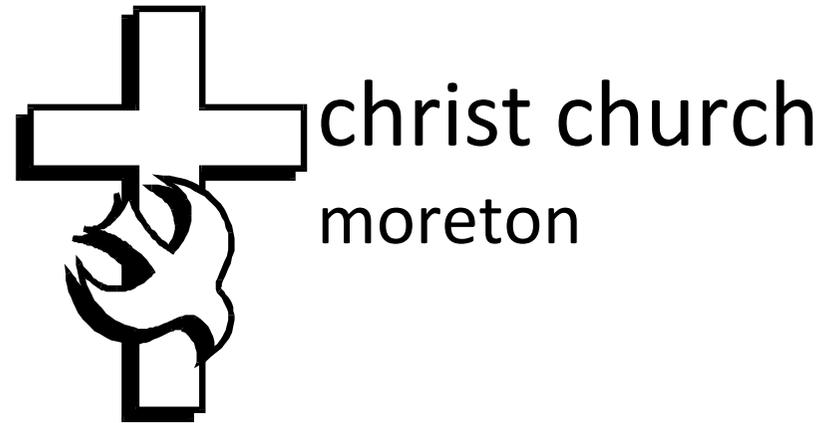
1. The Communion Service, where we remember the death of Jesus for us, should be a time when we examine ourselves and our relationships, so that we can come as one body to the Lord's Table. In the Book of Common Prayer the invitation to communion contains the words: *Ye that are in love and charity with your neighbours draw near with faith.*

So – before the next communion service you attend, is there anyone with whom you need to be reconciled?

2. As well as being the greatest demonstration of love ever seen, the Cross also marks the greatest division in the world. Throughout Luke's gospel we see the importance of recognising who Jesus is, and of responding rightly to him. It is brought out most graphically in Luke 13, where Jesus says *unless you repent, you too will perish.*

It is a serious warning. Praise God that those of us who are doing this study have heeded that warning and turned in repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus. But we will all know people – family, friends, neighbours, who have never made that response. Maybe they have heard about Jesus, but have rejected him, or maybe they never even heard that they need to respond to him.

Back in session 5, our challenge was to ask the Lord to send out workers into the harvest field – and then to be ready for him to send us. Have you done anything to put that into practice? As we approach Easter, is there anything more you can do?



making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples