

making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Christ Church
Homegroups
LENT 2017

Our vision as a church is to be Making Disciples, Growing Disciples and Being Disciples. Discipleship involves activity – making disciples involves sharing the good news with those who don't yet know Jesus, because we long to see others following him. Growing Disciples involves getting alongside younger Christians – maybe the children in our Sunday Club or SOS, maybe older people who haven't been Christians for long, and nurturing them – helping them to discover the fullness of life which Jesus came to bring. And Being Disciples involves modelling our lives on Jesus – having his love and compassion, serving as he did.

All that could sound as though our vision is all about the things which we do as a church. But fundamentally discipleship isn't about what we do, it is about responding to what God has done for us in Jesus. Discipleship begins at the cross.

So as we enter Lent, and prepare for Good Friday and Easter, we are going to look together at the death of Jesus, and at the difference it makes. I'm sure that a lot of this course will be things that you have known for years. But I'm sure as well that it is all too easy to forget those basics, and to end up taking for granted what Jesus did for us on the cross. Because without a firm grasp on the cross, discipleship will become hard work – a source of frustration rather than a joy. Making, Growing and Being Disciples starts and continues with what Jesus has done for us.

HOMEGROUP PROGRAMME for Lent

w/b Mon 6th March Study 1 – The death of Jesus
w/b Mon 13th March Study 2 – Freedom from guilt
w/b Mon 20th March Study 3 – Hope for the future
w/b Mon 27th March Study 4 – Power for life
w/b Mon 3rd April Study 5 – Access to God

Thursday 13th April PASSOVER MEAL

1. The death of Jesus

WELCOME

Have you given anything up, or have you committed to something new for Lent?

WORSHIP

Philippians 2:6-11, although originally written to encourage good relationships among God's people, also reminds us of Jesus giving himself for us – even death on a cross. Use these words and ask God to help you understand something more of what it meant for Jesus to do that for you.

WORD

It has often been noticed that the death of Jesus dominates the gospels. A few years ago I read a biography of President Kennedy. It was a huge book – 700 pages, but despite the fact that he was assassinated, there were only 10 pages about Kennedy's death. If you look at most biographies, the writers want to talk about the person's life, not their death. In fact, their deaths are often glossed over. And yet, one third of each Gospel talks about the last few days of Jesus' life and his death on a cross.

Jesus taught many wonderful things – our discipleship involves learning from what he taught. Jesus did many wonderful things – our discipleship involves becoming more like him, his compassion, his service, his love. 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?

Tom Wright has written:

'Gethsemane invites us to consider, above all, what it meant for Jesus to be, in a unique sense, God's son. The very moment of greatest intimacy – the desperate prayer to 'Abba, Father' – is also the moment where, hearing the answer 'No', he is set on the course for the moment of God-forsakenness on the cross.'

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 15:1-32

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

- Jewish leaders
- Pilate
- Soldiers
- What is significant about Barabbas? How does he relate to us?

Read Mark 15:33-41

- What do you think Jesus' words 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' mean?

WORK

Read Mark 14:12-26

Jesus told his disciples that the bread and wine would represent his body and blood. How has what you have thought about in this session helped you to understand the death of Jesus and how it relates to you? How can this make the communion service more significant for you?

2. Freedom from guilt

WELCOME

Have you ever made a New Year's resolution? If so – what is the longest you have managed to keep it up?

WORSHIP

Psalm 32 is a great reminder of the wonder of forgiveness. Use it together.

WORD

I sometimes wonder what life must have been like for Jesus' first disciples just after the first Easter. On the one hand, they had seen Jesus – their friend and teacher – alive again after his crucifixion. That was so unexpected, but such good news. But there was another side to it. Because all of them had let Jesus down. They had all run away when he needed them – Peter had even denied knowing Jesus, not just once, but 3 times. So, I suspect that along with the joy they must have felt, there was another, less pleasant emotion. Guilt.

Psalm 32:3-4 describe what guilt can feel like: *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

It has been said that, next to love, guilt is the strongest, and most volatile and potentially destructive of all emotional

experience. One writer said: 'If one can find a way to lighten that load, relieve some of the nagging weight of guilt, then one will automatically find that strength remains and is gained.' But, of course, the problem is – how can you get rid of your guilt?

READ PSALM 51

- What different words for sin does this prayer use?
- What might this tell us about the nature of sin?
- If I have been a sinner from birth (v.5), sin must be something more than just doing wrong things.
- What else could it be?
- Verse 10 is the heart of the psalm.
- What does David ask God to do for him?
- In what way does this go beyond just asking for forgiveness?
- What is 'a broken and a contrite heart'? Have you ever felt like that?

Read Isaiah 53:1-12

What do each of these sections tell you about Jesus and about us:

- Isaiah 53:1-3
- Isaiah 53:4-6

➤ Isaiah 53:7-9

➤ Isaiah 53:10-12

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25

- Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross. Why did he do that?

Read 1 John 1:8-2:2

- How does Jesus' death deal with my sin?

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

WORK

I think that sometimes those who have been Christians for years forget how significant the forgiveness of our sins really is. It isn't just some abstract thing – the Bible expects that forgiven sins will lead to a new life. One element of the new life is that we no longer need to be weighed down by guilt over what we have done in the past.

That doesn't mean we should be blasé about our sin – unless we recognise the seriousness of sin we will never know the peace that comes from forgiveness. But when we have done that, there is no reason for us to feel guilty, because our sin has been paid for.

Take some time to bring to God anything from your past which you feel guilty about. Ask him to take that guilt from you. Or – if you know another Christian who is struggling with guilt, pray for them.

3. Hope for the future

WELCOME

What would you most like to do during 2017?

WORSHIP

Psalm 25 acknowledges that our hope is in the Lord. Use the psalm to ask God to guide you in that hope.

WORD

There was an article in the press last year: “Why do even atheists still believe in life after death? In an ever more irreligious age, the number of us who believe in heaven is going UP”

In one sense it is a surprise, but maybe it just highlights the fact that the thought that this life is all there is in not an attractive one. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says: *God has set eternity in the human heart.* We are hardwired to long for something beyond this life, and the majority of people believe that when we die, we will go to heaven. But in the Bible, we find that things are not as simple as that.

Read John 14:1-6

These words are used so often at funeral services. But there is a huge challenge in them, which does make using them in many funerals quite uncomfortable.

- What does it mean for Jesus to be the way, the truth and the life?
- How does Jesus say we can come to the Father?
- In what other ways do people try to come to the Father?
- Why can't those ways work?

Read Ephesians 2:1-13

In verses 1-3 Paul describes our state before we became Christians. What 3 words might you use to sum up what he said?

- a) (v.1)
- b) (v.2)
- c) (v.3)
- Do you find it easy to accept this as a description of yourself before becoming a Christian?
- Or of your non-Christian friends now?
- In verses 4-10, in contrast to the desperate fallen condition of human beings, what three things has God

done for us?

- What motivated God to do all this for us?
- When Paul says that our salvation is not from ourselves (v.8-9), does he mean that we play no role in our salvation?
- Based on these verses, how would you explain what salvation is?
- How has all this been brought about (v.13)?

Read John 3:16-21

- What makes the difference between being condemned and not being condemned?

Those without Jesus will perish / be condemned. But for those who have put their trust in Jesus, we have a future hope which is glorious.

Read Romans 8:18-25

- How does the hope we have in Jesus help us to cope with suffering?

WORK

Take some time to thank God for the great hope which we have in Jesus.

You may know some Christians who are suffering at present. Pray that they will be encouraged by that hope.

You will know people – maybe a lot of people – who don't have that hope, and who are facing a lost eternity. Pray for them, and for opportunities to tell them of the difference which this hope has made to you.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15

4. Power for life

WELCOME

What skill or ability would you most like to have?

WORSHIP

Hebrews 13:6 encourages us to say with confidence *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."* Thank God for the ways in which he has helped you.

WORD

Life Coaching is big business. Search for books on the subject on Amazon, and it will return 5,668 results (at least, that was the number on the day I was writing this – by the time you use this study it could be many more!) Everyone, it seems, wants their life to be better. It does bear out Augustine's famous statement that God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in him.

In this context, Jesus' statement that *I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10) is very good news.

Read John 10:1-18.

- Jesus starts by saying that he is the gate for the sheep. What does it mean to 'enter through him' (verse 9)?

- What is the connection between Jesus giving life to the full (verse 10), and laying down his life for the sheep (verse 11)?
- Why do you think that Jesus stresses that he lays down his own life (verse 18)?
- What do you think that Jesus means by 'life to the full'? How does this compare with what most people in our society think life to the full would be like?

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

It's not the easiest passage in the Bible to understand! In the Greek in which this was originally written it is one long sentence. It seems that in his excitement about what God has done, Paul burst out in praise, and wanted his readers to share that praise as well.

- What are the blessings which Paul says we have received from the Father?
- Which of these seems most significant to you personally?
- How is your life now affected by all the spiritual blessings you have received in Christ Jesus?
- What do you think it means to live 'to the praise of his glory'?
- What might it mean in practice for you?

In v.14, Paul talks about those *who are God's possession*.

- What difference does it make to your life knowing that you are God's possession?

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25

- What does Peter highlight about the example that Christ left for us?
- How should this example shape the way we behave to when we are mistreated?
- We probably usually think of Jesus' death bringing us forgiveness for our sins. But what other result does Peter see flowing from Jesus bearing our sins (verse 24)?
- What does it mean to 'live for righteousness' (verse 24)?
- How does Jesus' death not only give us an example of how to live, but actually enables us to do it?

WORK

Through the death of Jesus we have been given strength to live as God's children, but that doesn't mean it will always come easily. Pray about any particular situation in which you need to know the transforming power of the cross in your life.

5. Access to God

WELCOME

Where in the world would you most like to visit (somewhere you have never been before)?

WORSHIP

In Psalm 63 David expresses his devotion to the Lord – he is the one David desired above everything else. Ask God to help you to use these words and to mean them.

WORD

Almost everybody prays at some time. But for most people, prayer is restricted to times of trouble – when all else fails, people pray that God will help them!

But whilst the Bible tells us that God does hear when people cry out to him, it also tells us that we don't have an automatic right to pray and expect God to respond. Isaiah 59:1-2 says: *Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

That is the natural state of people. We are alienated from God, and have no right to come to him in prayer. Our only hope is if someone could deal with our sin.

Read Romans 5:6-11

- Why did we need reconciliation with God?
- What reconciled us to God?

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

- On what basis can we bring our prayers to God?

Read Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus says that his disciples can call God their Father. But that is only possible because of what Jesus was to do on the cross:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father.' Galatians 4:4-6

WORK

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 as we finish our Lent series on the Power of the Cross, each home group will have their own prayer meeting. And we will use the Lord's Prayer as our pattern.

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.

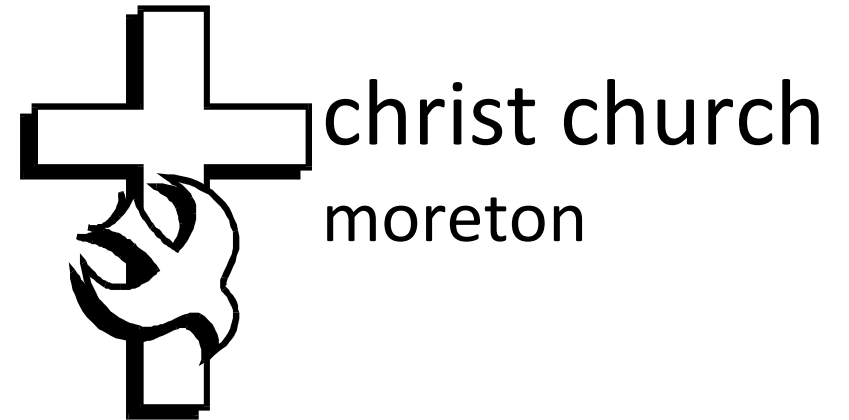
Although these words aren't part of the original prayer Jesus gave, they do form a fitting way to end our prayer.

- 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



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