

## **Starters or Refreshments: Week 1**

# **So what!**

Aims this week: To encourage us to think about God.  
To introduce the Old Testament as telling us about God's relationship with us.

### **What is God like?**

What first comes to mind when each of the following words is heard: Toast, Cold, Summer.

What comes to mind when you hear the word "God"?

Where do your ideas about God come from?

Read the passage from "Mister God, This is Anna" (see separate hand out).

Summary: The reading talks about letting our ideas of God change and letting God be God.

We can see different ideas about God in The Bible.

Look at the contents page of a Bible. Are there names you recognise? Any that are new to you?  
Note that there are two "Testaments"; the Old and the New.

Put simply the "Old Testament" is, among other things, the account of the relationship of God with one particular people – the Jewish people. It's better referred to as "The Jewish Scriptures"  
The New Testament is about how revealed himself to everyone in the life of one particular Jew.  
That man was a Jewish teacher, or Rabbi, called Jesus.

Look at the contents page of The Bible. The Bible isn't really a book, it's rather a collection of books – a library. It contains; History, Poetry, Hymns (Psalms), Fictional Stories, Letters etc.

So how would you answer someone who says "Do you believe in the Bible"? Instead try and think of The Bible as being different books talking in different ways about God's relationship with us.

Let's think this week about the Old Testament – the Jewish Scriptures. In the Old Testament we can see an account of how the relationship between the Jewish people and God changed and evolved.

Think of any Old Testament stories you know. Here are some for starters; Daniel in the Lions Den, Noah's Ark, Samson, Joshua and the Battle of Jericho, Joseph and his of many colours, the Creation Story. Use the timeline (see separate hand out) to put them in order.

### **What does God offer us?**

That's what we hope to find in the next few weeks. But for starters:

Abraham is promised that God will their God and they will be his people. Promise = Covenant  
Look at the time line sheet again. The rest of the Old Testament tells how that relationship changes.  
Joseph – the people pass into slavery in Egypt.

Moses – leads the people from slavery to freedom and towards the promised land. A key event.

Rebellion – People turn away from God. The reign of the Kings; Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon.

Exile – The kingdom of Israel (and Judah) collapse. Captivity in Babylon.

Promise – See especially Jeremiah 31 .31 – 34. A new Covenant.

In the Old Testament the Covenant was sealed with the blood of animals.

How is the New Covenant sealed? Next week we will see how it was sealed in the blood of Christ.

*If you have time have a look at Mark's Gospel. It's the shortest of the four accounts of Jesus' life.*

Taken from:

Mister God, This is Anna

Anna explained. "When you're little you 'understand' Mister God. He sits up there on his throne, a golden one of course; he has got whiskers and a crown...God is useful and usable. You can ask him for things...Later on you understand him to be a bit different but you are still able to grasp what he is. Even though you understand him, he doesn't seem to understand you! He doesn't seem to understand that you simply must have a new bike, so your 'understanding' of him changes a bit more. In whatever way or state you understand Mister God, so you diminish his size. He becomes an understandable entity among other understandable entities. So Mister God keeps on shedding bits all the way through your life until the time comes when you admit freely and honestly that you don't understand Mister God at all. At this point you have let Mister God be his proper size and wham, there he is laughing at you".

Some Biblical images of God to look up if you have the chance:

Genesis, Chapter 1 verse 1 – Chapter 2, verse 4	(Creator)
Exodus, Chapter 3 verses 1 – 15	(Mystery)
Isaiah, Chapter 6 verses 1 – 7	(Holy)
Exodus, Chapter 12 verses 21 – 36	(Deliverer)
Psalms 139 verses 1 – 12	(All-knowing and ever-present)
Amos, Chapter 5 verses 21 – 24	(Justice)
Luke, Chapter 15 verses 11 – 32	(Forgiveness and Love)
John, Chapter 13 verses 1 – 16	(Servant)

## Starters or Refreshments: Week 2

## Behold!

Aims this week: To look at the life of Jesus and how people reacted to him.  
To look at who Jesus is for us

### Recap on last week:

The Old Testament is the account of God calling the Israelites into a relationship (covenant).

God says to Abraham: "I will be your God and you will be my people".

The Joseph events: Israelites in slavery, God leads them out of slavery with Moses. Promised land.

Falling away from God. Kingdom(s) fall. People in Exile.

Return from Exile. Promise of a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31 .31-32) "written on your hearts".

Looking to a time when all will *know* God, not just *about* God

Someone will bring this about: a leader or anointed one; Messiah (Hebrew) or Christos (Greek).

The New Testament is the account of the New Covenant.

### *Mark's Gospel. People's experience of Jesus.*

Chapter 1. What is said about Jesus? How do people react to him?

v. 1 Christ, Son of God

v. 2 Link with Old Testament

v. 10 In baptism Jesus identifies with rest of humanity and is filled by the Holy Spirit

v. 11 "You are my Son, the beloved"

v. 18 Simon and Andrew follow Jesus. What does that say about what they thought about him?

v. 21 First impressions in the synagogue?

v. 23 Reaction of the 'unclean spirit'?

v. 35 Jesus' need for space and prayer etc

**Emerging themes:** busy-ness, popularity, compassion, questioning of 'who is this?', of 'don't tell'.

### *Some more passages to look at:*

Mark 2 .1-12 Jesus heals a Paralytic

Mark 2 .13-17 Jesus calls a Tax Collector

Mark 3 .1 – 6 Jesus heals on the Sabbath

Mark 4 .35-41 Jesus calms the storm

Mark 6 .1-6 Jesus rejected in his home town synagogue

Mark 6 .30-44 The feeding of the Five Thousand

**In each:** With whom is Jesus associating? How do people react? What questions are being raised?

### **Chapter 8 : The Big Question:** "Who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8 .14 – 21 "Do you not yet understand?"

Mark 8 .22 – 26 A blind man is healed but struggles to make sense of what he sees.

Mark 8 .27 – 30 "Who do people say I am?" and "Who do you say I am?"

Mark 8 .31 – 33 But Peter still doesn't really understand.

### *Jesus often says, "Don't tell anyone". Why?*

1. Everyone expected a very different sort of Messiah. Someone militant to overthrow the Romans. The idea of a strong king like David,
2. People need to make up their mind and not just "follow the crowd". Mark wants us to read the evidence then make up our own mind about Jesus.

Pictures of Jesus. Who do you think he is? See Paul's Letter to the Ephesians Chapter 3 (overleaf)

### **Ephesians 3**

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Starters or Refreshments: Week 3

## Passion!

Aim this week: To look at the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### Recap on last week:

In the first half of Mark's Gospel we saw that Jesus was a controversial figure. He challenged established customs such as those about the Sabbath and about who was "clean and unclean". He also forgave sins and the religious powers saw that as blasphemy.

### Transfiguration – (Mark 9 .2 – 8)

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ... <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'*

God affirms who Jesus is. God's glory is revealed ahead of suffering

### Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem - Mark 10 . 32 – 34

*Jesus took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, <sup>33</sup>saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; <sup>34</sup>they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'*

Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem, although having a good idea of his likely fate. Was he going just for the Passover? Did he choose to confront the religious authorities to see if they were for him or against him?

### It comes to the crunch! Mark 11 . 15 – 18

*<sup>15</sup> Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; <sup>16</sup>and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup>He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.'*  
*<sup>18</sup>And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.*

Jesus in the Temple. "You have made it a den of robbers". Note the priests' response.

### Why now? The Passover

Major Jewish festival. Recalling the events of the Exodus – the key event of slavery to freedom.

### A meal, a question, an arrest – Mark 14

Verses 12 – 25 Jesus gathers to share the Passover Meal with his friends. It will become known as the Last Supper. The Passover Meal was eaten when the sacrificial lamb was killed in the temple. Note Jesus' meaning when he says "this is my body and this is my blood".

Verses 26 – 42 The Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prays; "Father all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want".

Verses 43 – 52 Jesus is arrested. (Note verses 51 & 52. Some think this was Mark himself)

Verses 53 – 65 Trial and Torture

### Jesus dies on the Cross and is buried – Mark 15

God is not remote from human anguish and suffering. He has entered into our life completely. Look at the indignities he suffered on the cross. The sponge he was given to drink wine from (15 .36) was what the Roman soldier used instead of toilet paper.

### **Theories of the Atonement:**

Atonement (literally the “At – one – ment”) means being made one, or put right, with God)

There are as many ways of understanding why Jesus died on the cross as there are Christians. But that's OK because, whatever we believe, he died for each of us. There are three main themes:

#### **1. Sacrifice and Debt**

Humanity has been disobedient, so we are in debt to God. Only Jesus (the God-Man) could make the payment on our behalf. Some suggest that Christ was punished instead of us, but that suggests a vengeful God. Others say that, because God gave us freedom of choice, God is responsible when we choose to sin so on the cross God bears the consequences of the freedom he gave us.

#### **2. Love inducing Repentance**

God's love is seen in the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Such a demonstration of love induces us to repent (turn away from our wrong) and so atonement is made possible.

#### **3. Victory over Evil**

In Christ God overcomes the power of evil. God has allowed free will and therefore evil also exists. We are unable to save ourselves. God acts to save us.

These three theories have influenced Christian thought for centuries. Most people's experience is probably a bit of each. Jesus' death was an inevitable consequence of his self-giving love. He put people first; ahead of regulations (which protected the interests of the powerful), he challenged prejudice (which saw people for what were instead of who they were), he asked us to see God in each other (when we are more often concerned with just ourselves).

Jesus crucifixion can therefore be seen as humanity's final rejection of God. That could be it! All over! People have rejected God and chaos will therefore result (note the darkness in 15 .33).

However his self-sacrificial love has made an impression and, having watched him die, a Roman centurion says, “Truly this man was God's son” (Mark 15 .39).

### **The Empty Tomb - Mark 16**

*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

The oldest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel actually finish with that. Some other manuscripts go on to describe some resurrection appearances of Jesus. Why might Mark finish so suddenly? Does he want us to make up our own minds here as well? He doesn't want us to rely on second hand evidence. he wants us to experience the Risen Christ in our own lives.

### **Our response to the risen Christ.**

**Jesus as Lord** – There is no higher authority to which we owe allegiance.

**Jesus as Saviour** – A Saviour brings Salvation. The love, acceptance and forgiveness that Jesus offers frees (rescues, saves) us from guilt and fear. We are offered new life, life in all it's fullness.

Through Christ the broken relationship with God is restored, a new covenant established. God accepts us and loves us without condition. He waits for our response. We are called to respond to love with love. We are unfinished and God is bringing us to completeness (wholeness).

## Starters or Refreshments: Week 4

## Spirit Filled

Aim this week: To look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of disciples

### From Frightened Disciples to Enthusiastic Preachers

We finished last week's session with a empty tomb and confused, frightened disciples. Look at some of the early descriptions of disciples after the Resurrection.

"(The women fled) .... for terror and amazement had seized them...they were afraid" (*Mark 16 .8*)

"The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews" (*John 20 .19*)

"They stood still looking sad" (*Luke 24 .17*)

"Jesus met them and said, ...'Do not be afraid'" (*Matthew 28 .10*)

"When they saw Jesus they worshipped him; but some doubted" (*Matthew 28 .17*)

Hardly images of confidence! Yet within weeks the tide had turned...

"Those who welcomed (Peter's) message were baptised...about three thousand persons" (*Acts 2 .41*)

"(Peter and John were arrested) but many who heard the Word believed, about 5000 of them" (*Acts 4 .4*)

"When (the crowd) saw the boldness of Peter and John and realised that they were uneducated and ordinary men they were amazed" (*Acts 4 .13*)

### What had happened in between?

#### *The Power of the Holy Spirit*

In Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke who also wrote a Gospel, the following is described:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' <sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

#### *The Intimacy of the Holy Spirit*

In John's Gospel the writer records the Holy Spirit given in another way; intimate and gentle.

John 20 .19 -22 – The frightened disciples behind locked doors and then...

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

John's account echoes the story of Creation.

“The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2 .7)

In breathing on them Jesus gives his disciples his very life. They are a new creation. As St Paul said:

“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5 .17)

Paul had more reason to know this than others did as we shall now see.

### **The Holy Spirit changes lives – as a man named Saul found out!**

The Resurrection didn't bring an end to the conflict between God's will and that of sinful people. Those who preached about Jesus were often opposed and even killed. The first report in the New Testament of a disciple being killed because of his faith is about a man named Stephen. Stephen was dragged out of the city and stoned to death. Those who threw the stones laid their coats at the feet of a man named Saul. In Acts we are told:

“Saul approved of their killing him. . . . . Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison” (Acts 8 .2, 3)

Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ <sup>5</sup>He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup>But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ <sup>7</sup>The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9 .1 – 9)

*In Damascus lived a man called Ananias who had heard about Saul's frightening reputation. God told Ananias that Saul, an unlikely choice, would be God's messenger: We rejoin the account in Acts:*

<sup>17</sup>So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>18</sup>And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9 .17 – 19)

Saul's sight was obviously restored in more ways than one! From this point on he becomes as keen to spread the message about Jesus as he used to be to stop it being spread. Shortly afterwards Saul changes his name to Paul, no doubt as a sign of his new purpose in life (Acts 13 .9).

The followers of The Way (as the church was first called) spread their message rapidly. the followers of Jesus Christ were soon a distinct group attracting new believers from both Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) people. In the city of Antioch these believers in Jesus Christ were given a nickname – either by themselves or others – and were called “Christians”. Paul's ministry became one of travelling around the Mediterranean visiting the newly established churches as thousands of people came to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new life that they found in that faith. Paul also wrote a large number of letters to the new churches. Some of this correspondence survives and letters to churches in the cities of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae form a large part of the New Testament.

**Paul had his life changed and was strengthened for his task. What about us today?**



“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5 .22)

Where do we see the Holy Spirit at work today?

In the Church – serving others, worshipping, courage to speak out

In us as individuals – turning away from wrong, using our gifts for others, part of the Body of Christ.

**To Conclude: Imaginative Prayer based on John, Chapter 20, verses 19 – 22**

**Notes for Imaginative Prayer:**

Suggest that everyone in the group sits comfortably. They may want to close eyes or alternatively to focus on the candle in the centre.

Music may be played.

The passage is read:

It was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

*Silence*

(Read the following quietly pausing between each section)

Imagine....

Jesus has entered the room and is standing in front of you.

What is he wearing?

What does he look like?

Hear him say “Peace be with you”

Feel the warmth of the peace he offers.

Feel his acceptance of you

Feel his breath as he says “Receive the Holy Spirit”

Be aware of it as you breath.

Breath in the Holy Spirit as God’s new life.

Breath out what you want to leave behind or change.

*Silence or Music*

Soon we must end this prayer. But be aware that you can return at any time, for Jesus is there for us.

But for now focus on the candle

Become aware of your surroundings

Become aware of each other.

## Starters or Refreshments: Week 5

## Keep Going!

Aim this week: To look at what it means to be a disciple  
To examine the importance of prayer and bible study in discipleship

### What is a Disciple?

A disciple is one who learns. For those who followed Jesus as he toured Galilee teaching and preaching it was like serving a three year apprenticeship.

Look at some of the things they were called to do:

#### Follow Jesus. Did they hesitate?

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. *Mark 1 .16-18*

#### Associate with undesirables

15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup>When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?’ <sup>17</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’ *Mark 2 .15-17*

#### Do what Jesus does.

<sup>7</sup>He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup>He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup>He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup>If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’ <sup>12</sup>So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup>They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. *Mark 6 .7-13*

Even at the end of the three years they were still learning because, as we saw last week, the Holy Spirit was there to guide, strengthen and inspire them.

### Being a Disciple Today!

Jesus, in John's Gospel, gives us advice about being a disciple:

15 <sup>1</sup> ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup> I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. <sup>18</sup> ‘If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, “Servants are not greater than their master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. *John 15 .1-20*

**Key Points:**

verse 4 – What does it mean to feel at home?	verse 12 – love as I love. How?
verse 5 – what use is a branch unless it is joined?	verse 13 – sacrificial love
verse 6 – 7 – how do we avoid withering?	verse 14 – Do you you think of yourself as a friend of Jesus? What makes a friend of Jesus?
verse 9 – I'll do anything for one who loves me?	Verse 16 – chosen to bear fruit – what fruit?
verse 10 – obedience?	Verse 18 – 20 – expect to be treated like Jesus.
verse 11 – Joy! After cost comes the gain.	

Some people think that being a Christian is all about duty and responsibility. While Jesus does talk about obedience, keeping his law of love, he also talks about his living in us and we in him – experiencing his joy and love (vv 9,11). These are some of the rewards of discipleship.

A description of what it means to serve Christ is on the membership ticket of the Methodist Church

**Worship** within the local church, including regular sharing in Holy Communion, and through personal prayer.

**Learning and Caring**, through Bible Study and meeting for fellowship, so that I may grow in faith and support others in their discipleship.

**Service**, by being a good neighbour in the community, challenging injustice and using my resources to support the church in it's mission in the world.

**Evangelism**, through working out my faith in daily life and sharing Christ with others.

Discipleship affects the whole of our lives. Not just what we do on Sundays! Examples?

**Avoiding Withering (John 15 .6-7) - Keeping Going: Bible Study, Prayer and Breaking Bread**

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”  
*Acts 2 .42*

**Bible**

“If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free” *John 8 .31-32 (Jerusalem Bible)*

“Let the message of Christ in all its richness, find a home with you” *Colossians 3 .16 (Jerusalem Bible)*

What does the image of “being at home” with the word bring to mind?

Words of Jesus – nourish us, challenge us, help us grow, inspire, guide, comfort.

Finding time to “be at home”. Find a place for the Bible in your life.

**Prayer**

What is prayer? Different people have different ideas, experiences, ways of prayer.

“The goal of prayer is to enter into the condition of being unrestrainedly in love with God”

*Martin Smith, The Word is very near you, DLT 1990*

“Real prayer is not so much talking to God as just sharing God’s presence”

*Malcolm Boyd, quoted from The Fire of Stillness and Silence, ed. Paul Harris, DLT, 1995*

“Pray as you can and do not pray as you can’t. Take yourself as you can find yourself; start from that”

*Dom John Chapman, quoted from The Fire of Stillness and Silence, (as above)*

**Breaking Bread**

Time and time again the disciples met with Jesus and shared a meal. Often the words breaking bread are specifically used. The word “companion” comes from “com” = together and “panos” bread.

It is a time of fellowship and sharing. But Jesus also used it in a specific way. In sharing the sacrament of Communion we are companions of Jesus in a special way. “This is my Body”