

25th October 2020 10 am Trusting in the Gospel more than in our ability

Service led by Denise Coomber, Talk by Revd. Andrew Attwood, Interview with Vikki Anderson, "What the Cross Means to Me" by Jane Garsed and Kate Dickson

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Notices

[Denise:] Good morning everybody.

[Andrew:] Good morning. Good to see you. How are you doing, Vikki? Are you well?

[Vikki:] Good, thank you. Good morning.

[Andrew:] Are you well, Denise?

[Denise:] I'm fine, thanks. How are you?

[Andrew:] I'm fine. I'm absolutely taking in the joyous sunlight on the last third of leaves falling from the trees. It's absolutely beautiful out there, it is absolutely glorious at the minute. I really like autumn. Do you like autumn?

[Denise:] I do, yeah.

[Andrew:] Yeah, good. Okay, well, nice to see you. I'm going to hand over to Denise now. Okay?

[Denise:] Okay, see you later.

[Andrew:] Bye now.

[Denise:]

So this morning's theme is trusting in the Gospel more than our ability to persuade people. And so sometimes we try to big up everything but God's word is quite powerful so we don't need to do that.

So welcome everybody to St John's Kenilworth, whether you're in Kenilworth or further afield, it's lovely to have you with us.

As ever there are some notices, and the news sheet has been sent out to everybody and there's loads of stuff in there. And then the November news sheet will be printed next week, so if you've got anything to go in that, please send it to me by Wednesday lunchtime, or it won't go in there.

There have been lots of notices going across the bottom of the screen as we started.

- One is that we need techie people to help us keep this going because we're not all techie, and some of us haven't a clue what we're doing.
- And there's another one about the shoe box appeal, which is on Tuesday the third of November, they're packing up boxes, so if you want to send a shoe box out this Christmas, then please get it to the church before then.
- There's no live 6pm this evening so don't come to church, it's all on Zoom,
- and also on Wednesday is our Wednesday bible study at noon
- and a last notice from the Lathams: they met in Abbey Fields near the war memorial to pray for COVID and various other things, and they want to repeat that this Friday. So if you'd like to join in with that in a socially distanced way in Abbey Fields, then please contact Rob and Emma Latham. If you don't know their contact details then contact me in the

church office, and I will let you know what they are. So they're going to be praying for COVID. It's part of their *Let's Start at the Cross*, and it's all based on 2 Chronicles 7:14 which is:

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

So if you would like to join in with that then please do so.

Introduction to the theme

So onto today's theme. I'm just going to read a few verses from 1 Corinthians, 1:23-25,

23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

So that's a little bit about what we're going to be thinking about later. I've done some children's activities which includes ways of sharing the Good News with people, so I've done this Cross thing¹. Thank you, Michelle, for this idea. So if you'd like to look up the children's activities, that's one way of sharing, and the Good News of the Cross, I've done that a bit big but if you want to do it smaller, all the different colours represent different aspects of God, so it helps you to share the good news about God, and especially the Good News about Jesus saving us.

And [there are] also lots of other visual aids are available to us and we try and think up fancy ways of doing this every week, but God's given us loads of them, and one of them is bread and wine, so I've asked you to get some bread and wine, ready for later. It's not consecrated bread, it's not consecrated wine, just ordinary bread and wine, but it is a very good visual reminder of everything that Jesus has done for us. And as we eat it, it becomes part of our body, so there's something physical as well as something spiritual happening there, so we'll do something with that later.



Interview with Vikki Anderson

Now we do from time to time have other people come along and join us at the service and we're going to meet Vikki Anderson now, who's one of our congregation, and I'm going to interview her to find out a little bit about what she's been doing. And if you remember last week Dave and Liz Johnson were speaking to us, and they said that they always ask a particular question to people when they speak to them in their morning service. So I'm going to ask those questions to Vikki. Welcome Vikki, hello!

1 Boxes in the cross: God The Creator: Genesis 1:1; God Is Holy: 1 Peter 1:16; Our Sin: Romans 3:23; Blood Of Jesus: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Repent: Acts 17:30; Faith: Ephesians 2:8-9; New Life: 2 Corinthians 5:17

[Vikki:] Hi,

[Denise:] I'm going to start off a little bit, just introduce yourself briefly for those who don't know who you are, and tell us a little bit about yourself.

[Vikki:] Okay. So, as Denise says, my name is Vikki, I come to St. John's, and I'm a member of a home group. I work at the University of Birmingham as a teaching fellow in the School of Education and learning support advisor for the Student Disability Service.

[Denise:] All right. Um, so I'm going to ask you the question that Dave and Liz said that we should ask everybody in our 10 o'clock service, which is what will you be doing at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning?

[Vikki:] Okay. So, I will be holding an online drop-in for students at the University who need learning support.

[Denise:] Right. And where will God be in that, you know, are you allowed to include your faith in those sorts of things or is that difficult?

[Vikki:] We have to be very neutral. But for me, I believe that God will be right there with me. So I start my day by reading the UCB *Word for Today*, and I talk to God through prayer on my journey to work, usually on the M42, and that sets me up for the day, so I know He's with me. Sometimes the work can be quite challenging and it's good to know that He's with me.

[Denise:] And do you have a sense of God leading you into perhaps anything new at this time? Andrew was saying that there's an idea that you have. So perhaps you could tell us a bit about that.

[Vikki:] So, I've been praying about using my skills to offer some effective learning sessions to students in the area. So, possibly those studying for GCSEs or A-levels, university or college students or adults returning to learning. It would be a sort of 'study skills plus', where students could develop some effective learning strategies to help them in their studies, but also find fellowship and support, and feel something of the love of Jesus.

[Denise:] All right, so is that just for Christian students or for anybody?

[Vikki:] It's for anybody who would be interested. And it's to draw, I guess to give a whole range of people that opportunity to have that fellowship, and to have that support, and to get to know a little bit more about Jesus.

[Denise:] Fantastic. So, um, so I'm just gonna eke this out a bit, so you would you like other people to help you do that? Are you going to do this all yourself, you're going to get other people?

[Vikki:] Definitely. Do you think I could do it myself? I think I have the skills to be able to do the study skills, the effective learning aspect, but I think it would be team work, I think it would be a blend of people who have the appropriate skills and appropriate approaches, to be able to welcome students, to be able to support them emotionally if they need it, to be able to tell them about the Lord.

[Denise:] Okay, fantastic. So, finally, the last question is, what can we pray for and how can we help?

[Vikki:] I think it's, pray that that God will show us if He wants to reach out to people in the community in this way. And if so, what kind of shape this might take in reality.

[Denise:] Okay, thank you, so if anybody is interested in finding out more about Vikki's idea, if you get in touch with the church office, I'll put you in touch with Vikki. So let's just pray for Vikki now before she goes.

Father God, thank You for Vikki, thank You for her idea, and Lord, I pray that You will bless what she's planned so far, and that there will be people that come alongside her to help her with this venture. Lord, I pray that You will be glorified in this and that people will come to know You through this thing that she wants to do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

[Vikki:] Amen.

[Denise:] And just before we go to another... Thank you, Vikki ... I'm going to do another video clip with people in a minute. So thank you for joining us. Just before we do the next video clip I thought we'd just open with a word of prayer, since we've done half the service already.

So Father, thank You for this opportunity of sharing Good News with other people, thank You that we can share together, albeit in different places but online on Zoom, so Lord, I pray that You will be with us and that Your Spirit will touch us wherever we are, so that we can be effective people in Your communities that You've put us in. And so that we can share Your Good News with everybody. Amen.

So, over to the video clip, and then some worship songs.

What the Cross Means to Me

[Jane Garsed:] For me, Christ's death on the Cross is about perfect exchange: an exchange for punishment that we deserved, and we receive forgiveness; an exchange for the death that Christ experienced on the Cross, in order to give us life. The wounds that He endured, in order that we might be healed. And the rejection that He received, so that we could receive full acceptance.

[Kate Dickson:] God's forgiveness for me is a demonstration of an undeserved grace. It gives me a picture of selfless act which is carried out for me. And it makes me realise my responsibility to pay back the service that God has shown me, by serving others.

1st Song: Cornerstone (My hope is built on nothing less)

Verse 1:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Repeat Verse 1

Chorus:

Christ alone, Cornerstone
Weak made strong, in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all

Verse 2:

When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

Chorus x 2

2nd Song: This Is Our God (Your grace is enough)

1. Your grace is enough
More than I need
At Your word I will believe
I wait for You
Draw near again
Let Your spirit make me new

Bridge:
Freely You gave it all for us
Surrendered Your life upon that cross
Great is Your love
Poured out for all
This is our God

Chorus 1:
And I will fall at Your feet
I will fall at Your feet
And I will worship You here

Lifted on high from death to life
Forever our God is glorified
Servant and King
Rescued the world
This is our God

2. Your presence in me
Jesus light the way
By the power of Your word
I am restored
I am redeemed
By Your spirit I am free

Repeat Bridge

Chorus 1

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:17-25

[Denise:]

Thank You, Father, that You were willing to send Jesus to die for us. And thank You that that's all we need.

Let's read together 1 Corinthians 1:17-25, and then I'll hand over to Andrew.

17 For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written:

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. **22** Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, **24** but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Talk

So just before Andrew speaks to us, let's just pray for him.

Father God, I pray that You will give wisdom to Andrew as he speaks Your words, and that Your Holy Spirit will flow through him and out through our screens to everybody that's watching, so that people will be touched by his words, which will be Your words. Amen.

[Andrew:]

Amen. Thank you very much, Denise, thank you for that. Thank you, too, for Vikki for sharing her idea, thank you that you're beginning to get to a place where we're sharing things and exploring what God's stirring up. Maybe God is reforming us at this time and giving us new ideas.

Anyway, good morning. It's good to see you. Once again we're going to be looking at another aspect of this wonderful Good News of Jesus Christ. One of the things that I've become quite aware of and I'm sure pretty much everybody feels it at the minute is that shared sense of people feeling weary, maybe even feeling a little frail these days because the rules keep changing, the circumstances surrounding our work possibilities or our living practices keep getting hemmed in or loosened and then tightened. It's very, very distracting and discouraging. Lindsey and I were sharing a Zoom with some old friends over in York last night, so they were just on Zoom with us while we were having tea. And you can tell across the board, all of us have been a bit knocked for six by this strange year, this odd year. And it just made me realise that frailty is kind-of a key feature of what it means to be human. I had some sad news this week - I mean it's particular to me - I'm quite keen on contemporary jazz, and one of my jazz heroes is a guy called Keith Jarrett who plays improvised piano playing. And I just saw an article this week that said that about two years ago (and it's only been just released) about two years ago he had two strokes, which means he's probably very unlikely to play the piano again. And it was like, "Oh my gosh, that's one of my heroes who used to entertain me so much. And now he can't do what he's kind-of made for!" I think, you know, there is such an element of brokenness and fracture - the older you get, every year that passes, the more you think, you know, it's just like a big tower of Jenga: just push one piece and the whole lot goes over.

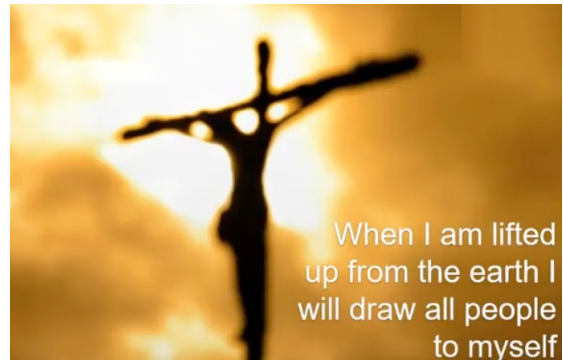
In the light of that, it's really clear that we need something to rescue us. You may wonder why we keep returning to this theme of the Gospel: the human race needs good news. And we actually need good news that's not just good words or good ideas but we need something that actually works. Another little bit of personal sharing, just to set the scene. Some of you might have heard, you might remember back in February I think I mentioned while I was doing a talk, that I was due to have an operation, just a small operation, on a cyst that was in my jaw underneath a wisdom tooth, but because of COVID it got delayed. But it turns out that I'm now going to be able to have the operation on this coming Friday. And what's going to happen? I'm going to have to put my entire trust in the surgeon who's going to do the procedure. I've already had a word with him, I've got a good encouragement to trust this guy. And I'm going to be really glad when I wake up with the matter dealt with, and that nasty cyst will be gone. You see, we need things that work, we don't just need good ideas, we need something that delivers what it promises, and I'm going to be trusting the surgeon on Friday.

Today we're going to be remembering and rejoice in the fact that the Good News of Jesus is not just a helpful philosophy, it isn't just a comforting story, it's actually something that changes the real situation we are in: this is genuinely good news. Just as a recap to something I said a few weeks ago, the word that we get Gospel from is *euaggelion* [εὐαγγέλιον], and it's good news from the front line. Imagine a battle scene and imagine that a victory is won, and

some heralds come back from the front line and tell the city "Victory! In this instance, victory over sin and victory over death is won. One of the things about the Good News of Jesus, it's Good News in the past tense. It's not like a hope for the future only, it's not just trying to make us feel better in the present, it's saying something decisive has actually happened. The New Testament speaks in terms of a rightful King of the earth, who has been enthroned. It was a surprising enthronement because it was on a Cross, but something about the death of Jesus Christ has actually made things change between human beings and God. We're reconciled in a tangible way because of Jesus' death on the Cross. A problem with this particular message is that it didn't quite come across in the same way to the different hearers of the time. In that passage that Denise read out, it makes reference to Paul referring to his communication to Greeks, and his communication to Jews, and they really didn't get it.

Let me just share with you a picture, we'll have slide one now. And there's a particular phrase that Jesus shares in John 12:32-33. Jesus is in conversation with people as He heads towards Jerusalem, and He says these words.

... When I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all people to myself.' **33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.



Let me just read that again. "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself. He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die." That's John 12:32-33. Now you see, right from the beginning of His public ministry and probably before, Jesus knew He was going to be crucified, but He also knew that His lifting up would have an effect: that it would draw all kinds of people from across the wide spectrum of the globe. He knew that the act of His death had power in it to draw people to God.

You may remember famously that story in the book of Numbers 21 where the people of God had rebelled and serpents come out from the wilderness and bit people, and many of them were suffering or dying. And Moses is instructed to make a bronze serpent, and when it's lifted upon a pole, when people would look at it, they would be healed from these bites from the serpents. Jesus is clearly making a making an allusion to that same story by saying, "When I am lifted up, when I'm lifted up for all to see, and when people set their eyes on me with faith, then something powerful will change, something powerful will happen." Now, you know, in the 21st century we're familiar with how power works. I switch my car on, and the engine starts. I click the kettle, like most of us did this morning, and the water boils. On Friday, the surgeon is going to take a knife and perform an operation. And because of his training, skill and ability, it's in his power to solve problems. That's how power works. Something is needing to be addressed: power deals with it. I want to just remember and celebrate the heart of what God has done, past tense. God has solved the greatest problem of all time. God has successfully addressed the most significant matter for the human race.

You see, when we look at the death and resurrection of Jesus, he's the most qualified human representative, the divine sin-bearer, and He's actually, in history, carried away the punishment that we deserve. Jesus has won the greatest victory the world has or will ever see. Now when I remember hearing this for the first time as a new Christian (and I mean, I was raised going to church but so much of this was just going over my head) but I can remember the first time this was being explained to me after coming to a bit of faith in Jesus, I can remember, I remember crying. I remember being moved every time I saw a Cross, every time I saw a Crucifix. It stirred me very time I read the Gospel accounts

about what Jesus did on the Cross. I just thought that it was just almost beyond comparison that I could be so completely and utterly forgiven. The message of the Cross, when I heard it, had power to change me. So when I hear the message, it actually makes a difference. It kind-of confirms that passage from 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 5 where it says,

5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction...

When Paul was speaking to the Thessalonian church, something happened when the message was announced. I don't know about you but it's almost like seeing and hearing for the first time. It's like breathing more easily after a suffocating life. It's like for the first time knowing that you're loved, and that you're forgiven.

But this is where we hit a bit of a challenge. The passage that Denise read to us gives us an insight into different people who are responding in different kinds of ways. The Greeks don't hear it so straightforwardly, and the Jews don't hear it so straightforwardly. It says in verse 17, 1 Corinthians 1:17 onwards, it says,

17 For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’

20 Where is the wise person? (Paul says) Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

And then He starts to get specific at this point as to who wants what. He says,

22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

You see, Paul knew that there was a kind of foolishness in his message. He knew that it wouldn't ring true in the ears of some of his listeners, but he also saw that God was choosing to reveal Himself precisely through this strange and crazy way. It's a bit odd sharing a message and getting different responses but spotting there are some people who are responsive to it. Have a think about this: when you look historically at Christ's death, from His arrest to His moment of dying, we all know it looks like defeat. It looks foolish. It looks empty of power. And yet, the Crucifixion itself was exactly how God was rescuing people. And Paul knew that it was foolish-sounding and he was like a foolish-sounding herald. But in reality, he was representing the true King.

Okay, so what would be the different responses of these different groups? Let's think about the Jews, first of all. It's perfectly logical that the Jews would be naturally offended by the idea of a crucified Messiah. That is defeat and shame, not victory. Their scriptures would tell them that anyone who is hung on

a tree is cursed by God. And so they would think, "Well, how on earth could that fit our expectations of Messiah?" They thought that was defeat, not victory.

Likewise, the Greek world, the wider world, would consider it foolish to think that this executed man was now alive again! That's just stupid, because, you know, in those days, just like these days, they knew that dead people stay dead.

So you see within those worldviews, these responses, these incredulous responses, that make perfect sense for them to kind-of reject it. And let's face it, we may have experience these days of people rejecting the message of Jesus, because it doesn't ring true, it doesn't make sense. But Paul goes on to say this, "but for those whom God has called, the Good News actually replaces these old views, and it reveals the true reality." The real God had genuinely become King by dying and rising. I can still remember as a new Christian realising that my old ideas were just simply wrong. I can remember thinking, "Oh my goodness, Jesus is actually alive! And He's provided for me, he's provided forgiveness and rescue and not just for me, but for all who believe!" So in this sense, you see, the message of the Gospel, it destroys existing human ideas, and it exposes them as shallow and false.

I just think this is extraordinary. Because the thing that stirs me again, back to when I first became a Christian, and all the way through the following 30-something years, one of the most stirring things about it is, and I've seen it dozens of times now, when people hear this Good News and believe it, something else happens. Time and time again, people experience the presence of Jesus Christ as they hear the message of Jesus Christ. Something stirs in their hearts. I can remember people telling me that they just knew He was there, that they knew He was speaking to them, that they knew His peace was going inside of them, loving them, changing them. Somehow going on the inside of them as they hear this Good News. Now from an outside point of view, what would they say? Crazy! But again, for those who believe, true again and again and again.

I just wonder though. Christians can sometimes get caught up in a different approach to sharing faith, and consequently, a number of us get down about it when it doesn't work properly. You see many of us imagine that it's partly down to us persuading and convincing. We try to learn strong arguments for example, and there's some merit in that. We try to show the love and grace of God, and there's merit in that too, of course. But one of the things that can get us down, is that we believe all of this rests on our ability to persuade, all of this begins to rest on our shoulders, that it's our witness that is going to turn people around, until we realise that we can't, until we realise that we don't turn people around. People wonder about "let's change church to make it more attractive, let's change our attitude or the way in which we deliver the message to make people more receptive." You know, some of that is well-intended. But I think it's starting from the wrong premise. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has power inside of its own self over and above how we deliver it.

Perhaps you're a Christian who has given up on sharing the Good News at all, because you've seen it failing to persuade, failing to persuade some people. I was even talking to someone yesterday, where some people seem open but other people seem just closed and it's hard. Maybe you've given up on sharing faith, because you've even had feedback where people are saying it's crazy or offensive. Well, you know, you're in good company. This is exactly the kind of response that the apostle Paul had when he was sharing it with Jews and Gentiles of all different kinds of places, nationalities and geographic reasons, places he knew that there was some people were going to go, 'not interested', 'that doesn't make sense', 'please go away'. He knew that that was going to be how people responded, but His eye was not on those who would resist. His eye was out for those who were open. So I wonder if we might need to change our mind of a wrong attitude, change our mind, even repent of a wrong attitude. This wonderful phrase in that section that Denise read to us and it says this:

17 For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – (and listen to this bit:) not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

“Not with wisdom and eloquence lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Now Paul was raised in Tarsus, he was very familiar with the ways of rhetoric, with the ways in which people would speak publicly to win an argument or win a debate, and he's pretty good at it: I mean he can do that. You see evidence in the book of Romans, of Paul using rhetoric and rhetorical devices. But when it comes to preaching the Gospel, he held back from being clever with words. “Not with wisdom and eloquence,” he says, “lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” You see, I believe that God has given us a simpler task. I think we're simpler creatures, deep down. I think we are called to simply receive the Gospel for ourselves and absolutely revel in it and enjoy it because it's such good news to us. And then we're to simply carry it and share this message, as it is, and let its inherent power do what it does. In other words, just as Christ was lifted upon the Cross, and that that would draw all people to Him, we are to lift up Christ crucified. That's the key phrase you get in this passage, we are to lift up Christ crucified, and just wait and see who God is drawing to Himself. You see, the drawing power of Jesus is far, far, far superior to all our efforts at eloquence.

Let me just show you this final slide of Jesus on the Cross again. And I just want to kind-of remind you, whether you're a believer or you're watching this for the first time, I want you to kind-of stare at this and get a picture of what it is that we're celebrating here. Let me lift up Christ in front of you so that you can remember why you believe. Remember, God made humanity to know Him, and serve Him, but according to the Bible and according to our experience, all have turned away. All of us have brokenness in there, all of us have that weariness. And we're unable to fix ourselves. We can't fix this problem. So God set into motion a plan of rescue which included the story of Israel, even Israel trying and failing to live with and for God. Even the chosen nation couldn't do it. And so the Good News of the Gospel comes alive, just at the right time. The Messiah came, bringing the Kingdom with wisdom *and great power*.



The thing that's extraordinary about this Good News is, at the height of Jesus ministry, He chooses to give up power, and submits to the Cross, He submits to God and submits to the issue in an even higher way. As the soldiers tortured Him and nailed into the Cross, no-one at the time was understanding. But what was He saying? “Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them.” And as they lifted Him up for all to see, for all to stare at and mock, Jesus was actually absorbing all the sin, all the brokenness, and He was even breaking the power of evil up high on the Cross. After hours of agony and separation, Jesus does this cry, His cry of dereliction it's called, Jesus cries out, “It is finished!” ending the old order of brokenness and rebellion and initiating the new order of grace upon grace upon grace. Denise mentioned having a glass of wine and some bread to hand. We remember, we remember His blood flowing down, and His blood washing away all the guilt of human beings.

Just let me finish with a personal story. Just this last week, I was in the middle of a number of meetings, and you know how meetings can kind-of make you a little weary or even stressed. I remember going for a walk around the streets near here. I was just wanting to clear my head and just to pray, and perhaps to get to give the things to God that I'd started to carry – you know how we all have things on our shoulders that shouldn't be there. And I can remember walking

down the streets and praying. And in my mind picturing, again, the Cross of Jesus in front of me: it was almost like I was embracing it. It was almost like I was at the foot of the Cross, and almost tilting my head up and seeing and imagining - I mean it sounds crazy but it's almost like imagining what Christ did for me, covering me and washing me clean again, and giving me another fresh start. That's the power of the Gospel. The power of the Gospel actually changes us. It puts us in a new position with God, and on a daily basis renews and revives. So I just want to spend some time now praying that we would receive it again, and lay down the inclination to carry the responsibility for persuading others. So let's just pray for a moment. Let's pray.

Father God, would You reveal to us again personally the power of the Good News of Jesus for us.

Come Holy Spirit, open our hearts again to see that this washes us clean. Come Holy Spirit.

I pray, Lord, that the benefits of the Good News of Jesus would go deep into our souls. That we would say 'yes' to it all the way through, even down into the basement of our souls. Come Holy Spirit.

And I want to pray, Lord, for those who are already Christians, that you would set us free from trying to add or make eloquent our take on the Good News for Jesus. Lord, would you help us to lay down the responsibility of trying to persuade people to believe. That's not our job.

I want to pray, Lord, that we would receive the Good News ourselves. And that we would simply share it as it is, that we wouldn't make it fancy, that we wouldn't preach ourselves, but Holy Spirit, would you help us simply to share the message of Christ crucified.

Holy Spirit, I want to pray that in this coming week we Christians will trust in the power of this message, as we find opportunities to share it simply. I pray that we would trust in its power, as we lift up Jesus Christ in front of people. Lord, help us not to preach ourselves. Help us to not preach about Church. Help us just to lift up Christ crucified.

And so, Holy Spirit, I want to commend this Good News to your people. And I pray that it would do a work in them that nothing else can do. Amen.

I'm going to hand back over to Denise now.

Bread and Wine

[Denise:]

Thank you, Andrew. Just going to move on to a short time of sharing bread and wine together. I said at the beginning, please have some bread and wine with you, and there's nothing special about this bread and wine but I'd just like to read to you a little bit from 1 Corinthians 11, which says,

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

It was just ordinary bread, it was a Passover celebration so it was reminding people that the Passover lamb was going to be sacrificed, but it was just bread. We have bread at virtually every meal. We have wine at meals as well. So I think what He's saying here is that we should remember Him every time we eat, whatever we're doing, when we're in our houses, when we're with our friends, maybe share bread and wine with them, then we don't have to think up a wonderful way of

sharing it. It's just there, bread and wine, use the things that you have to share the message of Jesus. So He broke it and said, "This is my body which is shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And as we eat bread, it goes into our bodies, and it goes to every cell of our bodies. So that's reminding us that Jesus is part of who we are, part of the body of Christ.

25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; (This is something new) do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

There are also warnings in the book of Corinthians, not to do this lightly and to come to Him in prayer asking for forgiveness. So we're going to go into a time of prayer now, just thanking Him for what He's done, and for the fact that He will forgive us if we ask Him to. It says in 1 John 1,

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

So let's take a while just to bring the things that we're not proud of, that we've done this week, or haven't done this week, before the Lord.

[pause]

So, Father, thank You for Your Good News. Thank You, that victory over sin and death is won. Thank You, that we can be in a relationship with You, the enthroned King, because of what You did for us. And thank You that You've drawn us to Yourself because of Your death on the Cross, and that we can be completely and utterly forgiven if we put our trust in You. Thank You that victory came through defeat and shame. Thank You that You rose again and have broken the power of death. Thank You that You called us to be Your people, and have provided forgiveness and rescue for us. And thank You that we know You are with us, loving and changing us. Give us Your courage to share Your Good News, and to lift up Christ crucified with others in our own way, and to introduce people to You so that You can change them too, so that they can experience grace upon grace upon grace and have a fresh start.

Intercessions

We pray for those who are broken, we pray for those who are frail, we pray for those who are hurting, that they will look, and live at the Cross of Jesus.

And Father, we bring before You some of the concerns that we have in our own community. We pray for Andrew, that the surgeons will operate on his tooth well, we pray for wisdom for them, that this cyst will be removed, and we pray that Andrew will cope with being locked up in isolation, before and after it happens. We pray for Karen and her family. We pray for COVID and its effects on the wider community, for the people locked down in the north of England, and for the loneliness that that causes.

We pray for people who've lost loved ones.

And we pray for the school meals problem, that we won't abdicate our own responsibility to the government but that we will do what we see needs doing.

Thank You for those further afield. We pray for the Stokers in Peru, especially as Kay does this *Nueva Esperanza* bereavement counselling online

with 17 countries in Latin America. Lord, I pray that You'll give her wisdom, and that You'll help her to work well with those that are leading the course with her.

And I know that there are far more things that I could bring to the Lord now so I'm just going to leave a time of quiet so that You can bring the people and the problems that You know about before the Lord. And then we'll finish with a blessing.

[pause]

Holy Spirit would You fill us. Would You help us to know that You are with us.

2 Corinthians 3 says

16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

and I know some of us have been wearing masks out in public but this made me think about the Lord is Spirit and

17 ...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18** And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So, Lord, I pray that even though we're masked up, that our faces and our demeanour and the way we behave in public will shine Your light on to our community and that people will ask why we behave like that and we can share that it's because we know You.

So finally, from Jude 24,

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – **25** to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

Let's just worship God as we sing this closing song together.

3rd Song: This I Believe

1. Our Father everlasting
The all-creating one
God Almighty
Through Your Holy Spirit
Conceiving Christ the Son
Jesus our Saviour

Chorus:

I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in One
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe In the Name of Jesus

2. Our Judge and our Defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in You
Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious life
Forever seated high

Chorus

Bridge:

I believe in You
I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord

Repeat bridge

Chorus x 2

For I believe In the Name of Jesus
For I believe In the Name of Jesus

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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