

THEREFORE GO AND MAKE
DISCIPLES OF ALL
NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM
IN THE NAME OF THE
FATHER AND OF THE SON
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,
AND TEACHING THEM
TO OBEY EVERYTHING I
HAVE COMMANDED YOU.
AND SURELY I AM WITH
YOU ALWAYS, TO THE
END OF THE AGE.

GO & TELL

THEREFORE GO AND MAKE
DISCIPLES OF ALL
NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM
IN THE NAME OF THE
FATHER AND OF THE SON
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,
AND TEACHING THEM
TO OBEY EVERYTHING I
HAVE COMMANDED YOU.
AND SURELY I AM WITH
YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY
END OF THE AGE.

ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN
THEN JESUS CAME TO THEM AND SAID,

Contents

Session 01:	Calling the First Disciples	04
Session 02:	The Year of the Lord's Favour	08
Session 03:	Jesus Clears the Temple	12
Session 04:	The Demon-Possessed Man	16
Session 05:	Woman at the Well	20
Session 06:	Parable of the Sower	24
Session 07:	Parable of the Good Samaritan	28
Session 08:	Lost and Found	32
Session 09:	Workers in the Vineyard	36
Session 10:	If Christ is not Risen	40

For further digital resources go to - **bethbap.org/goandtell**

Welcome to the 'Go & Tell' study series

Throughout His ministry, Jesus navigated the fine line between calling people to Himself to learn to be his disciples and sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God. Jesus is the master disciple-maker. He instills faith and confidence in his disciples and builds experience and resilience within them.

The core passages we'll draw from over these next 10 weeks are all from the gospels. We will spend quality time with Jesus throughout this study. This is also where we begin our venture with Tauranga Central Baptist Church and become one church (Bethlehem Baptist Church) in two locations. This series reminds us that we, too, are on a mission.

For more info or support you can email
lifegroups@bethlehem.org.nz

Calling the First Disciples

Matthew 4: 12-22

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes (sandals) for a moment, what qualities would you be looking for when choosing your disciples?

Matthew records Jesus calling his disciples in Matthew chapter 4. Yet this story of calling Simon and Andrew, then James and John, is preceded by a description of Jesus' location. Jesus was basing his ministry in the most vulnerable region of Israel. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali. These northern tribal areas were always the most vulnerable to attack from the north (Assyrian armies) and influence (from foreign gods). So, if trouble was to come, it usually started in this region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Interestingly, Galilee was also considered the despised part of Israel. It was the farthest away from Jerusalem and the Temple. It was economically poor and filled with Gentiles coming through the area. However, the exciting thing is that the prophet Isaiah spoke 750 years earlier of how this region would be the first to experience the light of God's change.

Read: Matthew 4:12-17.

¹² *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.*

¹³ *Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*

¹⁵ *"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."¹⁷ From that time on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

Q1. What does this picture of location and proclamation tell us about Jesus' ministry? (Check out Deuteronomy 10:17-19.)

Q2. When you see Jesus fulfilling 750-year-old prophetic promises in such a clear way in the verses above, how does this encourage your faith?

Matthew's reference from Isaiah ties Jesus' arrival firmly to Israel's prophetic expectations. From the moment of Jesus' public arrival, he fulfills messianic expectations. A Light has dawned! The kingdom of God is here! Messiah has come! Now, you have to make a choice as to whether he's your messiah or not. This is the most important decision that will hang over Jesus' life throughout his ministry years and one that Israel will wrestle with even today, 2000 years later.

Read: Matthew 4:18-22.

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father, Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

In Matthew's gospel, we find Jesus approaching Simon and Andrew, as well as James and John. The brothers' response to Jesus calling them seems otherworldly, almost automaton/robot-like. This picture below hung in Craig's lounge for many years. It's compelling in its simplicity and yet probably misrepresents the process the brothers experienced before following Jesus.



Calling of the Fishermen (Christ Calling Peter and Andrew), by Harry Anderson

Q3. What are your thoughts about this picture? In what ways do you think it aligns and misaligns with Matthew's account?

Jewish society developed a very clear pathway for children to develop their understanding of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, which is called the Torah (the Law). Their education in the Torah began around the age of five or six, and depending upon how academic the children were, they were invited into higher learning.

"Beth Sefer" - House of the Book was 5-10 years old.

"Beth Midrash" - House of Study was 10-14 years old.

"Beth Talmud" was from 14 years+.

Talmid is a disciple of a specific house of learning that follows the specific teachings of one Rabbi. "Come follow me" was the invitation given to the best of these graduates. Very few were chosen.

Q4. Can you imagine yourself going through a school of learning so rigorous in its process?

What would this education system have done for the Jewish community?

Throughout our lives, we can probably count on a few fingers the times when we've been called out and identified as having skills to offer or character traits that are being affirmed by others.

Q5. Can you remember a time when someone "calling you up" was a marker of change for you?

Q6. If you could pass on some skill or knowledge to an apprentice, what would you want to pass on?

Jesus spoke about his teaching by using the language of the day. A Rabbi's teaching was called "His Yoke" (Like an oxen's yoke). We saw Jesus judge the religious leaders by saying their yoke was too hard and heavy and the Pharisees were unhelpful. But of his own yoke, Jesus said it was easy and light.

Read: Matthew 11:28-30.

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Read: Matthew 23:1-4.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Q7. We see in these passages the contrast between following Jesus and carrying the heavy yoke of the Pharisees. What captures you about these two descriptions of yoke carrying?

Q8. When Jesus calls us, the big question for each one of us is to accept that God loves us even though he knows every good and bad part of us. To forsake others and follow Jesus is founded upon his eternal and sacrificial love for us. How are you reassured by God’s love to the point that you follow Him?

Reflection:

Q9. If you are a follower of Jesus, do you really believe Jesus has chosen you?

Q10. How would you act differently if you walked every day of your life with a full sense of God’s choosing you?

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Q11. What if Jesus chooses you in your weakness and wound rather than your strength?

The year of the Lord's Favour

Luke 4: 14-28

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What is the most significant way you've changed since you were a child? In what way are you still the same?

Jesus' ministry had many beginnings: his celebration by John the Baptist, his baptism, and his temptation by the devil. But today, we'll look at his self-proclamation: that he was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy about a God-affirmed leader setting free the oppressed and ensuring Israel was a land of God-given freedom. Let's look at Luke 4 to pick up the story in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

Read: Luke 4:14-22.

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Prophecy has an extended reach within scripture. It can apply to an immediate situation, as in Isaiah's day, when he acknowledged that even though Israel would be taken into captivity, there would be a day of liberty once again. However, prophecy has an ultimate fulfilment as well, which we see when Jesus claims Isaiah's words for himself.

Q1. Let's say that you're a local in Nazareth. Maybe you've seen Jesus grow up. How do you think you would respond if a youngster from your town announced himself in the way Jesus did?

The imagery of being anointed comes to us from the stories of Israel's first kings. Both Saul and David were anointed with oil to set them apart and acknowledge the Holy Spirit's empowerment upon their lives. Jesus had the Holy Spirit come upon him like a dove when he's baptised by John in the Jordan River. (You'll remember that recently King Charles was anointed with oil during his coronation as King of England.)

Q2. Today, depending on your church tradition, we speak of anointing differently. How would you explain the term "anointed" to someone curious? Clearly, we see in Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus was anointed for a purpose. To help the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed.

Q3. Do you see that the role of the Church today is to help those in similar situations? In what ways have you seen this happening?

Q4. How can you relate these physical attributes (poverty, blindness, oppression) to spiritual issues? For example, a person can be physically blind but also spiritually blind. What does that mean, and how can Christ - through you - help bring sight and freedom to others? Do you see it as your personal responsibility to help these same people?

We begin to see that the ministry of the Kingdom is a grassroots ministry—a bottom-up ministry that doesn't seek the power or privilege of political power or wealth. Jesus appears to race straight to the bottom end of society to proclaim and build his Kingdom.

Q5. How challenging do you find it to remain focused on the poor when the fruit of Christian living invariably raises your lifestyle to a more middle-class level? How can we manage this tension?

The final part of Isaiah's prophecy says, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". This is a reference to the year of Jubilee. It was an event that happened in Israel every 50 years. You can read about this in Leviticus 25:1-13. It's a remarkable piece of Israel's social and economic cohesion. Jesus claims this event as being similar to what he will bring to Israel and to the nations of the world. A time when debts of all sorts are forgiven.

In the nation of Israel, scholars tell us that the Jubilee was lost when the tribes went into captivity to Assyria around 722BC. Jesus is reframing an ancient tradition within his Kingdom vision. As we can testify ourselves, we who accept Jesus, Jubilee will experience his perpetual forgiveness of our debts.

Q6. How does the concept of a permanent Jubilee inform you about Jesus' Kingdom and his hopes for our Christian communities?

Jesus appears to have won the confidence of his hometown people with his bold claim to be the anointed one that Isaiah's prophecy foretold. However, Jesus flips the mood of the audience when he starts to tell them that they were no better than their ancestors who rejected God's prophets (in this case Elijah and Elisha) causing the prophets to bring miracles to people of other nations. Read below how this happens.

Read: Luke 4:23-28.

²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

The end result being the people of his hometown immediately tried to kill Jesus. But once again, we see Jesus' heart for mission by pointing to the nations and citing how God healed people from Sidon and Syria. People whom God loves have been blessed by Jesus because of Israel's rejection of Jesus. Paul will write to the Romans, "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root," Romans 11:17

Q7. What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate in Luke 4:25-27, referencing Elijah and the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17), and Elisha and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5)?

Jesus' own parables speak of Israel rejecting his ministry and Jesus then inviting people from everywhere to feast at his table. "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'" Luke 14:23.

Once again, we can see that even at the outset of Jesus' ministry, he presents himself as someone who is here for the nations as well as the house of Israel, whom he knows will reject him as they did the prophets.

Q8. Have you ever experienced going back to a place where you had either been brought up or where you put down deep roots? Was it a joyous return or difficult?

Q9. What expectations do you think people have of Jesus today that make them sceptical about accepting him as the Messiah? Why is God's word often met with rejection?

Reflection:

Q10. How can we apply the lessons from Jesus' rejection at Nazareth in our personal contexts when we face rejection for our faith?

Q11. Who are 'the poor', 'the prisoners', 'the blind', and 'the oppressed' in your community or neighbourhood? What are some practical ways you or your group can engage with and serve those in need around you?

Jesus Clears the Temple

Mark 11:15-25

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What is a pet peeve of yours?

Today, we will look at how and why Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip. We're in for an interesting time. But what has this got to do with Jesus being on mission? The motive behind Jesus' aggressive actions will intrigue us and inspire us in our mission.

Read: Mark 11:15-18.

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" ¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

When we read a passage like the one above, we quickly realise that context is important. Without context, this looks like a random act of sabotage, which is hard to justify. Without context, we'd say that Jesus is a bully.

Q1. Have you ever jumped to conclusions about other people's actions or motives because you didn't understand the history or the context? What happened? Israel's Temple was the centre of the nation's faith and practice. So, one would immediately assume that the Temple was for Jews only. But this wasn't the case at all. The Temple's purpose was included in the design. See the picture below.

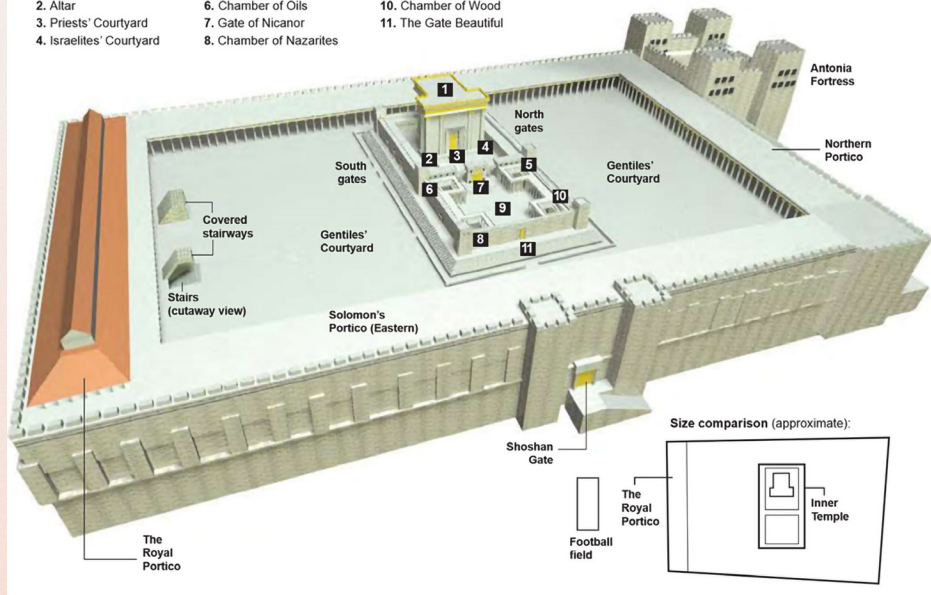
What we're focusing on is the Courts of the Gentiles. It's easy to overlook this detail of the story. We read the headline where it says, "Jesus clears the Temple Courts". But in fact, Jesus clears the Courts of the Gentiles. That's a more accurate and helpful title for this event.

What was it that upset Jesus to the point where he became violent? There were a couple of things going on that were deeply disturbing for Jesus. The Courts of the Gentiles had become a trading place for religious activity. As people approached the Temple to make sacrifices, they had to go through a preparation process.

Herod's Temple on the Temple Mount

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Temple in approximately 20–19 BC. The entire temple expansion, including the massive Temple Mount, was not complete until approximately AD 62–64, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Holy Place | 5. Chamber of Lepers | 9. Womens' Courtyard |
| 2. Altar | 6. Chamber of Oils | 10. Chamber of Wood |
| 3. Priests' Courtyard | 7. Gate of Nicanor | 11. The Gate Beautiful |
| 4. Israelites' Courtyard | 8. Chamber of Nazarites | |



Graphic by Karbel Multimedia

Firstly, they had to bring in an animal to be sacrificed. Usually, a lamb for a dove. These animals had to be inspected to ensure they didn't have a blemish on them. It had to be a perfect sacrifice. However, the priests who judged these animals were tough. They would quickly say that an animal was not good enough for sacrifice. They would then sell the worshipper one of their own stock at highly inflated prices.

Furthermore, the only currency allowed in the Jewish Temple was Jewish. But Roman currency was the regular currency in trade. The Priests again took advantage of this by offering a miserable exchange rate.

We are now getting a clearer picture of what Jesus was confronting. A religious system that was extortionate. They were making money from worshippers who were taken advantage of at their most vulnerable and sacred moments. Jesus took a whip to them and overturned their tables.

Q2. What are your thoughts about Jesus' behavior in this moment?

What feelings do you think were aroused in him?

Jesus addressed the Pharisees on a different occasion to again reveal the motives of greed that these men had.

Read: Mark 7:9-13

⁹ And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

The Pharisees were hiding behind seemingly sacred or righteous actions to serve themselves. Thus, negating their duty to their own parents. That's brutal, isn't it?

Q3. How do you feel about this ruse that was played out by the Pharisees to stop them helping their own family? Can you relate in any way to the temptation that the Pharisees fell victim to?

Q4. Again, it was greed masquerading as righteousness that upset Jesus. How do we ensure that we or our institutions don't fail in this way? Do you think greed is subtle or overt in its manifestations?

The overriding story is one where the leaders of the Jewish religion had set up shop and were making money from the worshipers. This ultimately reflects upon God himself and makes God look bad or at least look greedy. We see this in Jesus' words, which he says in John's gospel recording of a similar incident. "*Get out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!*" John 2:16.

In his comments, Jesus makes it clear that this is personal for him. This is his Father's house. The Pharisees are making Jesus' father look bad.

Q5. When you personalise it like this, can you understand Jesus's emotional response? Imagine someone totally misrepresenting your parents or a family member. Have you ever experienced this, or do you know someone who has?

Ultimately, this story is about God's mission and heart for the nations. In spite of their fierce nationalism and pride the Jewish religious community was set up to receive people from all nations. We see this in the Temple structure, which has a Court for the Gentiles. A place where people from other nations can draw near to God. Which is a remarkable statement about the nature of God and His ultimate purpose. Others are not excluded. True, the Gentiles can't get as close to the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwells. The Jews could because they were a covenant people. But the Gentiles were not disregarded by God.

We see this heart attitude for the nations with Jesus; own words. *"And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"* The mission arm of God's Temple had been turned into a marketplace. One that is controlled and profited from by the religious leaders. A place where strangers to the faith could draw near and enquire about the faith. Now, they had nowhere to go.

Q6. Read Isaiah 56:3-8. What's so wrong and tragic about the fact that all the events in the Temple in this passage take place within the Court of the Gentiles?

Reflection:

Q7. Read the verses that precede the events in the Temple in Mark 11:12-14. What connection, if any, can you see between the story of the fig tree and the clearing of the Temple?

Q8. What kind of fruit do you think Jesus hoped to see in Jerusalem? What message(s) do you think Jesus was sending through the "parable" of the fig tree?

Q9. How might we be in danger of being all leaves but no fruit?

Q10. Are there things we do, either as individuals or as a Body, that can prevent those who do not know Jesus from hearing about him?

The Demon-Possessed Man

Mark 5:1-20 - 6:53-56

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What trip or experience had a significant spiritual impact on you and why?

Mission is not the sole domain of the educated or the wealthy. Mission is about those who want to tell others what Jesus did for them. In the story of the Gerasenes demoniac, we enter into a very chaotic scene. We see a deeply disturbed man whose life is completely changed by his encounter with Jesus.

Read: Mark 5:1-20.

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" ⁸ For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." ¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹² The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³ He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Q1. Describe this man before Jesus encounters him. What do you think he looked like? What does he do all day? What do the people in town think about him?

Q2. Have you ever met someone you thought was "too far gone?" Have you ever been confronted by someone evil?

Q3. What does this story teach us about the demonic realm? What are the insights we can learn?

The side of the lake where Jesus took his disciples was a gentile region where Roman legions lived. This encounter with the demoniac was something Jesus would have expected. We live in a very spiritual world, and there are times when we meet people with a spirituality contrary to the Christian faith. During these encounters, we should rest in what John tells us in 1 John 4:4: “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Read: 1 John 4:1-3. This scripture is contained in a broader context:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Jesus’ response to the demoniac was to cast the legion of demons into the pigs. The pigs were considered unclean animals by the Jews and were being herded by Gentile farmers. Tough for the pigs! But this story highlights Jesus’ authority over spiritual powers and principalities.

Q4. Do you feel confident when confronting or praying against spiritual powers and principalities?

The people of the region gathered to witness for themselves the dead pigs and the healed demoniac. Strangely, their response was the opposite of what we could have expected.

Read: Mark 5:14-17.

¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

Q5. Why did the people of the Gerasenes plead with Jesus to leave their region? What were they afraid of?

Q6. Have you ever experienced the irony of wanting God to show up in your life but not liking how He chose to do so?

The demoniac's response to being delivered of this evil burden is understandable. I'm sure we'd all feel the same way.

Read: Mark 5:18-20

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Q7. What did Jesus tell this man to do? And how did he respond?

Please excuse the cliché, but this man's former misery was about to become his future ministry. By retelling his dramatic story to his friends and neighbours, he glorified Jesus.

Q8. Do you think evangelism is as simple as telling others your Christian story? Do you sometimes feel your story needs to be bigger to influence others?

Our greatest influence will be upon those who are closest to us. In the story of the demoniac, Jesus knew that he would be a living miracle amongst his own people. This man's neighbourhood was known as the Decapolis (10 cities). Here, the demoniac's story will undoubtedly reach the ears of his people before he gets to see them. "And all the people were amazed."

Reflection:

Q9. You've got to read Mark 6:53-56.

What an incredible picture of the powerful ripple effects our God story can have when we live out our faith back home. "Home" means those who know us best, including family, close friends, and co-workers. God is giving us the opportunity to have an impact on those around us. That can be encouraging, but it can also be humbling. Humbling because, if we're honest, we're our "real" selves at home, and sometimes that can be messy. Fortunately, Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, lays out a number of "checkpoints" to help them (and us) be affirmed and see what authentic faith in Jesus looks like.

Q10. Read Ephesians 4:4:2, 4:3, 4:14, 4:19, 4:25, 4:26, 4:27, 4:31, 4:32. How are you doing with the checkpoints?

Q11. Your testimony is your truth. It's your experience that cannot be refuted by others. As you're the one who experienced it, how can you best share your story with one other person this week?

Woman at the Well

John 4:1-26

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

Would you rather have a fast forward, pause, or rewind button in your life?

Peppered throughout the gospels, we see Jesus have personal encounters with people—and sometimes the most unlikely of people. In John 4, Jesus has a conversation with a woman at a well and, in doing so, flips the cultural norms of the day on their heads. This scandalous conversation is the longest recorded conversation in the New Testament. Jesus is on mission, and this conversation with this woman never should have happened. Why? Let's read John 4 to find out.

Read: John 4:4-9.

⁴ Now he (Jesus) had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews, do not associate with Samaritans.)

It is important to understand that the Samaritans and the Jews had a long and difficult relationship as people for hundreds of years. Though both traced their ancestry and religion back to Moses, the Samaritans and Jews thought different mountains were the sacred places of worship (Mt. Gerizim versus Mt. Zion), used slightly different Scriptures (The Torah – the first five books of the Bible only – versus the entire Old Testament), and had a great dislike for one another culturally. They avoided social contact with each other whenever possible. It is also important to know that Jewish men did not relate much publicly with women, whether Jewish or otherwise. Husbands didn't even talk to their wives in public.

Q1. Considering the above commentary, what do you learn about Jesus in verses 4-9? Who initiates the conversation first?

Q2. John 4:4 says that Jesus had to go through Samaria, which Jews usually avoided. Jews even travelled a longer route just to avoid the area because the animosity between both cultures was so great. What are some versions of this in our everyday lives? What situations or people do you tend to avoid? What or who is your Samaria?

The very fact that we have a Samaritan woman drawing water by herself at noon, the hottest part of the day, tells us that something is very wrong with this picture.

Typically, women would draw water in the cool of the morning or evening, together, so they could help one another carry their water jars. You see, this is a communal culture. In this culture, you don't do things by yourself. You always do it together. Everything is measured in the "we" and not in the "me" or the singular. This Samaritan woman shows up at noon alone, perhaps because she has no friends. Or because she did not want to be seen or judged by others.

Q3. Have you ever felt shame about something? What led you to feel that way? What are some default behaviours people may have when they are experiencing rejection or shame? What do you typically turn to when you are feeling rejected, down, or ashamed?

Read: John 4:10-15.

¹⁰ *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

¹¹ *"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"* ¹² *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"*

¹³ *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,"* ¹⁴ *but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

¹⁵ *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

Q4. Jesus talks quite a bit about "living water". Living water is literally a description of running water as opposed to still water, as would be found in a well. What do you think that Jesus is trying to get at in verses 10-15 by talking about "living water"? You may also want to read John 7:37-39.

Read: John 4:16-24.

¹⁶ *He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”*

¹⁷ *“I have no husband,” she replied.*

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

¹⁹ *“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”*

²¹ *“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

The conversation between Jesus and the woman pivots when he tells her what he knows about her life. There are any number of reasons why the Samaritan woman might have the past she has. Perhaps she was married off as a teen bride, then widowed and passed along among her dead husband’s brothers, as per the “Levirate marriage” practice of the day. Maybe her various husbands abandon her because she’s infertile. Maybe she’s a victim of abuse. Maybe she has a disability. Whatever the case, we know for sure that in the first century, women didn’t have the legal power to end their own marriages — the authority to file for divorce rested with men alone.

This woman has tried marriage five times and for whatever reason it hasn’t worked out. So, she decided to go a different route: cohabitation. What we can infer, though, is that she prefers to be invisible. But then Jesus comes along and sees her. He sees the whole of her. Her past. Her present. Her future. Who she has been. What she yearns for. How she hurts. All that she might become. And he names it all. But he names it all without shaming or condemning her.

Q5. What negative events from your past do you tend to hide from others and allow to define your story?

Q6. Jesus points out that the geographical centre of worship is no longer important with His coming, whether Mt. Gerizim or Mt. Zion. Instead, according to Jesus, God is looking for something else. What is it, as seen in verses 21-24? What do you think this means? (Try reading those verses in the NLT version)

Read: John 4:25-30.

²⁵ *The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”*

²⁶ *Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”*

²⁷ *Just then, his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”*

²⁸ *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,* ²⁹ *“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”* ³⁰ *They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

Q7. How would you describe the life of the Samaritan woman after her conversation with Jesus? What did she do? How had she changed? The woman’s reaction in verse 29 gives us a glimpse into her transformation. Why is it significant for that to be her first public comments about Jesus?

Q8. The woman at the well needed water, but instead of giving her what she came for, Jesus gave her the only thing that truly satisfied her. Have you ever had a need met in a way that was unexpected or different from what you asked for?

Read: John 4:39-42.

³⁹ *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”* ⁴⁰ *So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.* ⁴¹ *And because of his words, many more became believers.*

⁴² *They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”*

We see in this story that God takes unqualified people and makes them qualified to spread the good news of Jesus. This woman did not have an education, resources, a good reputation or even a Bible. But what she did have was a testimony.

Reflection:

Q9. How have you seen God working in your brokenness?

Q10. Where do you struggle to find satisfaction in Jesus? How might we find satisfaction in Jesus when it’s harder to find?

Q11. Can you recall a time when relying on Jesus brought you freedom or quenched your thirst? What did that freedom entail? How does relying on Jesus differ from trying to satisfy your own needs?

Parable of the Sower

Mark 4:1-20 & Matthew 13:24-30

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What would be your favourite thing to grow if you have (or had) a garden?

In the gospels, the parables that Jesus told were ultimately about the kingdom of God and what it is like. Parables were delivered, like someone delivering a piece of spoken word poetry, as a word picture structured to evoke a response. Not only were parables meant to challenge you, push your buttons, and cause you to think and act, but they were also an invitation to step into God's kingdom. Jesus' Parable of the Sower is a remarkable insight into human nature. As Jesus describes the different types of soil the seed falls upon, he exposes the frailties each of us can have.

One scholar said it's a bit like being given a map to the maze's heart. The point of the map is to help people see where they are in the maze and then to help them see how to get where they ought to be. However, for some of us, the reverse is also true. Although we have a map and a picture of where we ought to be - we must first discover where we are.

Read: Mark 4:1-9

Again, Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Q1. What types of people do you think are in the crowd? What do you think they came seeking Jesus for?

Q2. Why do you think Jesus used this style of teaching? Why didn't Jesus speak plainly? What does the wide distribution of the seed tell us about the nature of God?

Q3. To whom are the secrets of the kingdom given? How are the disciples different from the crowds who come to Jesus?

Read: Mark 4:10-20.

Q4. Identify the 4 types of soil in this parable and what each represents about a person's response to God's Word.

Q5. How have you seen these four types of soil (either in your life or in the lives of others)? Is there a type of soil you identify with the most in your current season? Why? What will you do in response to where you are at right now?

The third soil Jesus talked about was the thorny soil where the Word of God was sown, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness and lure of wealth, and the desire for other things crowd and choke out the Word.

Q6. What are some potential signs of a person becoming distracted by worry, wealth or the desire for 'other things'?

Q7. Is there a time in your life when you struggled with any of the three distractions listed above? What has helped you deal with these types of distractions then and now

Reflection:

Read: Matthew 13:24-30.

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

In Jesus’ day, “tares” were noxious little weeds, also known as “darnel” or false weed. The seed looked so similar to the wheat seed, especially in the early stages, that it made it hard to weed and often got mixed with the wheat accidentally. This meant waiting until the crop matured to do the weeding. It’s tempting to want to weed the world of “tares.” The problem is that it’s hard to distinguish between them and the good stuff, especially in a church context. This means we must leave the weeding to God.

Q8. When have you ever pre-judged someone or something, only to find out you were wrong? What happened? What did you do after discovering you were wrong?

Q9. How, according to Jesus, are we to act toward those whom we perceive as “weeds” in our lives? What dangers lie in labelling people as either “weeds” or “wheat”?

Q10. In what way are we terrible judges? In what way is God the safest and best Judge? What is our responsibility on the farm of God?

Q11. How does Jesus help us to see that God’s delay in justice is merciful toward his people?

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What is one of your best memories of someone showing kindness to you?

The opening question in this story is one asked by every human being. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question is insightful. Using the word "inherit" the "expert in the law" presupposes that eternal life cannot be earned by our good works but is inherited as a gift.

Read: Luke 10:25-26

²⁵ *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

²⁶ *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

Jesus answers the question about how to inherit eternal life by asking another question. "What's written in the Law?" More specifically Jesus asked, "How do you read it". Within Judaism there are many schools of thought (literal schools) that interpreted their scripture with subtle differences. Jesus is teasing out this particular expert by looking for his interpretation of the Jewish law.

So, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 the lawyer says:

²⁷ *He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.*

²⁸ *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

The lawyer answered correctly within the framework of the Old Testament law. Jesus affirms Deuteronomy 6:5 as the best summary of the law. Eternal life is found by loving God with all that you have and your neighbour as much as yourself.

The question that always followed the Deuteronomy answer was about neighbourhood. Who is my neighbour, and how far do my obligations extend? At what boundary point does God hold me responsible?

Q1. With communication making our world so much smaller, we get to see the plight of the poor and the persecuted worldwide. What's your answer to this question about neighbourhood boundaries? How do you determine who your neighbour is?

Israel concluded that neighbours were fellow Jews. Be that family, village, tribe and nation. The Old Testament law gave space for foreigners to glean their crops once the harvest was complete. This showed a level of compassion for Gentiles and foreigners but not much more than that. (Leviticus 19:9-10). Neighbours were essentially family ties.

We get the impression that the expert in the law has already tried to answer this question of neighbourhood boundaries. But maybe he wasn't satisfied with the answer or knew any answer would be less than satisfactory. So, he asked this compelling question of Jesus:

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Verse 29 tells us that the lawyer wanted to justify himself. Perhaps he wanted to show that he was worthy of eternal life by his own value or efforts.

Q2. What are some ways that we try to justify ourselves? Can you receive the gift of eternal life wholeheartedly as a work of grace provided for you? Or do you still have nagging convictions that you need to somehow earn eternal life?

Read: Mark 4:30-37

³⁰ *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.*

'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

³⁷ *The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Q3. The Good Samaritan's choice was risky and inconvenient, but he still stopped. Who have you stopped for? Was there a time you walked by?

Q4. What does the lawyer see now that he did not see at the beginning of his exchange with Jesus (v.37)? Sometimes, we tend to judge others by external factors and ourselves by intentions, effort, and heart. We tend to think better of ourselves than others. Is this true of you? How can we see others differently?

Q5. Which would have been hardest for you of all the sacrificial actions that the Samaritan expressed? Why?

Staying with the expert in the law for a moment longer, we see that Jesus names a Levite and a Priest in his parable, of whom the lawyer was neither. Jesus isn't confronting the lawyer with his parable, which shows that this discussion between Jesus and the lawyer was not adversarial. The lawyer also addresses Jesus as a teacher in verse 25. So, there appears to be some mutual respect between them.

However, the parable is confrontational in that the Levite and the priest represent Israel's religious order. They both ignore the beaten traveller by crossing to the other side of the road. The question of "Who's my neighbour?" is still in play throughout the parable, so every part of it must be interpreted through this lens.

The apparent observation (but not raised) is that this man was naked, having had his clothes stolen. The priest and Levites, walking over the other side of the road, try to avoid his nakedness and thereby not answer the question as to whether he is Jewish or not. To see that he was circumcised would have obligated them to his care.

Q6. Do you think that within human nature, we tend to see what we want to see? Therefore, we only respond to what we want to see?

"Who is my neighbour?" is still in play. Yet the parable helps answer the question. Maybe the story is too simple, but a helpful hint is found in it: "A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man...."

Q7. Could it be that our neighbour (our obligation) is to whomever we happen across when "going down the same road?" Could it be as simple as this?

Showing mercy is not the sole reserve of Christians. It has defined Christian faith throughout the millennia and is a remarkable witness to the surrounding community.

Q8. Have there been times this week when you have felt God calling you to mercy in a relationship or situation? What went through your mind, and what did you do?

Let's finish by returning to Jesus's earlier conclusion in Luke 10:26-28.

²⁶ *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

²⁷ *He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

²⁸ *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

"Do this, and you will live." Before we enter into eternal life, we have a life to live. To truly live, we must follow the 'Way of the Samaritan.' How can we make this sacrificial love a part of our witness?

Reflection

Q9. The Good Samaritan parable challenges us to view 'neighbouring' not as a mission to accomplish but as relationships to cultivate. How does this shift affect our view of neighbouring? What are some practical ways you can cultivate neighbouring relationships?

Q10. Pick a community you are a part of:

- Geographical – Where you LIVE – neighbour, landlord, roommate, etc.
- Marketplace – Where you WORK – coworker, supervisor, janitor, etc.
- Social – Where you PLAY – barista, gym buddy, bus driver, etc.

Write down everyone's name that comes to mind. If someone whose name you don't know comes to mind, write a descriptor instead (ex., lady from the gym).

Q11. Out of the three communities (e.g. geographical, marketplace, social), which neighbours do you know the most? Which neighbours do you still need to get to know? Choose someone you do not know so well from your list and commit to engaging with them differently this week. What will the next steps look like? How can you break the barriers to building authentic relationships?

Lost and Found

Luke 15

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What are you most prone to losing?

One of the most beloved discoveries in scripture is found in Luke 15. Jesus tells three parables about being lost and concludes each one with a party that celebrates being found. In fact, the weight of each story is centered on the celebration more than how badly lost the sheep, the coin, and the son were.

These three stories are Jesus' response to mutterings! The Pharisees and teachers muttered about how Jesus welcomed sinners to eat with him. Without any prompting, Jesus launches into this trio of parables about the lost being found and then celebrated.

Read: Luke 15:1-7. The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Q1. Do you question the shepherd's sense of responsibility when he leaves the 99 to find the one? Aren't the 99 now vulnerable?

Q2. Is the story's emphasis more about how the shepherd holds in high value the one who has wandered off? Does this encourage you to pray for others who have wandered, knowing that the Great Shepherd sees them as a priority?

Read: Luke 15:8-10. The Parable of the Lost Coin

⁸ *“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coin and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?”* ⁹ *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’* ¹⁰ *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Jesus takes us into a less-than-spiritual discussion when he talks about one coin out of ten that gets lost. Jesus is making a point of comparison—one of celebration. We may value things differently from what the angels do, but Jesus is drawing a parallel here to illustrate the angels’ response in heaven to a sinner repenting.

Q3. Can you recall a time when you lost something valuable or important to you? (Like car keys, wallet, passport, etc.) How did you feel when it turned up? Can you ascribe these feelings to what heaven now feels about sinners repenting? What recollection of emotions is Jesus wanting to stir for us?

There’s a certain irony building within the parable of the lost sheep and coin. In both cases, the shepherd and the woman throw a party to celebrate what they’ve recovered. The irony is that the cost of the party probably exceeds the value of what was found! A party would mean food and drink. Maybe a sheep is eaten. Food must be purchased, etc.

Q4. Does this irony create tension for you? Or does it challenge your worldview about the value of celebration? What would these first two parables say to Jesus’ audience, who were struggling with Jesus eating with sinners?

Read: Luke 15: 11-32. The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ *Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.* ¹² *The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

¹³ *“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.* ¹⁴ *After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.* ¹⁵ *So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.* ¹⁶ *He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

¹⁷ *“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*

¹⁹ *I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.* ²⁰ *So he got up and went to his father.*

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ *“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

²² *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

²⁵ *“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

²⁸ *“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

³¹ *“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”*

Jesus reiterates the theme of celebrating the lost being found over and over within these three parables. The most pointed parable is the lost son story. When the lost son returns home, the father celebrates. But the older son throws shade upon the whole idea, probably believing that the younger son needed punishing, not celebrating.

Q5. Grace is getting what we don’t deserve. Surely, this younger son got what he didn’t deserve when fully reinstated within the family. How does it feel to be given more than you feel you deserve? What examples of this beautiful grace can you remember in your own life?

Q6. The older son’s response is understandable. Maybe he’s been solid, reliable, and someone the father could lean upon. But there’s something missing. What do you think is at the heart of the older son’s anger?

Q7. Jesus pushes back upon the muttering Pharisees by describing an environment of celebration rather than a pious self-righteousness. Why do you think faith in God can end up being so sour and dour?

Reflection

Richard Foster wrote, “The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is not something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships, and the inevitable result will be joy.”

Q8. Have you ever thought of celebration as a discipline? What are some ways you can build this into your rhythm?

Q9. How can you as a Life Group begin to bring more celebration to your life together? What about the wider church community? Spend a few moments thinking through and discussing ways to incorporate celebration into your gatherings.

Q10. What small things do you enjoy? Infuse those with celebration, like drinking a flat white while sitting in the sun, walking through a park with hints of changing foliage, etc. How many more can you add to the list?

Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What was the first job you ever had?

In a world where workers' rights and employment conditions are understandably in the headlines, we come across a parable that seems to transcend time. Within this parable is a picture of generosity that cannot be criticized—yet some do, of course!

Read: Matthew 20:1-16

"For the Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷ "Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

⁹ "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

The landowner represents God in this parable. But we don’t know that as we begin reading this story. Jesus has been discussing with the disciples how those who leave everything behind to follow him will receive 100 times more and inherit eternal life. Jesus concludes by saying, “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” (Matthew 19:30.) As we’ve just read, this is the same conclusion our parable ends with. So, contained within these parallel statements is the parable of the field workers.

Q1. What does the idea of the “first being last and the last being first” tell us about the Kingdom of God? Do you see this statement as a value or a warning?

Q2. Do you think the landowner was unfair to the men hired first? What do you think about his answer? Do you think they were satisfied with it? How do you think these first-hour workers responded to the landowner?

Q3. Why do you think it can be difficult for us to see others receive blessings from God? How can we change our mindset to rejoice with them instead?

The parable stretches this point of a great reversal. The Kingdom is not based upon worldly values. It has its own values, which are more about inclusion than sweat! This is hard for us to relate to, just as it was for the workers who were employed first, early in the morning. If inclusion is the value, then we can better understand the landowners’ actions.

The landowner wasn’t looking at his fields through a cost-benefit analysis that sought to maximize crop return for labour costs. Instead, he was looking to get as many people working in his fields as possible. (The accountants amongst us will be weeping by now. The trade unionists, not so much!)

The challenge for all of us is to rearrange our values. Clearly, inclusion is of higher value than performance.

Q4. How do you relate to this idea? Is it a stretch for you to incorporate this value of inclusion rather than performance into your worldview? What would it mean for you to be more like the landowner?

We can relate to the workers who put in a huge day's work only to be paid the same as the ones who only worked an hour. Simple justice would agree that from a worker's perspective, they would feel they were now entitled to more. But here's a principle in play that relates to Jesus' earlier discussions (Matthew 19:27-30) with his disciples about leaving home and family to serve the Lord.

Q5. The enormous question for the disciples and us is this: Are you willing to spend a lifetime working in the Master's fields and then receive the same reward as one who just began working in their last hour? The value of inclusion, therefore, has a price for those who toil long and hard. Or is this price insignificant in light of eternity?

The landowner challenges the all-day workers who grumble about their pay. A pay that was acceptable to them when they began the day's work. But now the pay appears stingy because they have worked longer than others. The landowner concludes, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money". Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Q6. The Lordship of Christ in our lives means we must adjust our ways to reflect the Kingdom's values. How would this picture of grace and inclusion affect your everyday life? How could we change as a Christian community to better reflect this value of inclusion and generosity?

Q7. What does this say to you if you were or are an employer? Or should this parable apply at all? Is this a parable solely about the outrageous grace of God, and should it be left there?

Q8. If this landowner were your boss who frequently committed outrageous acts of generosity, how do you think you'd feel about working for him or her? Would you rejoice at their generosity to others, or would you roll your eyes, bewildered by their mismanagement of money?

Reflection

Q9. How did the resentful spirit of the first-hour workers impact their view of the other workers? How do you think the other groups might have felt when they heard the complaints of the first group?

Q10. Thinking of a church context, who would be the people in the first group? How are we tempted to overlook God's blessings because we are focused on what we think we deserve? Or, because we are focused on others? When have you seen a grumbling, complaining spirit hurt the health and life of a congregation?

Q11. Describe a time when you experienced or were deeply aware of God's lavish grace in your life. Why do you think it is so easy to forget that we have all been equally shown grace? What can we do to remind ourselves of God's grace and provision in our lives? Name 3 or 4 gifts God has given you in the last week for which you are grateful.

If Christ is Not Risen

1 Corinthians 1:18-25,

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Opener: What jumped out, surprised, challenged or resonated with you from this week's sermon?

What is your favourite Easter memory or tradition?

Paul speaks to his audience about the centrepiece of the gospel. He's not distracted by lofty conversations about philosophy as was popular in the day. Paul knows what his message is all about and he's not distracted from it. Read how Paul challenges the thinking of the day when he describes the crucifixion to the people of his culture.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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.

Q1. Paul's preaching is centred on the crucifixion and resurrection—like two parts to the same story. How challenging is it for each of us to stay on task with the core of Jesus' message? When we think about our own faith and our understanding of its foundations, do we speak about Jesus' death and resurrection? Or are we drawn away to other conversations to describe what faith in Christ consists of?

Q2. The point Paul makes is that the crucifixion sounds like foolishness to others. But within this crucifixion message contains the power of the gospel. Have you always seen it this way, or do you share your faith from different angles?

Q3. What are some examples of “wisdom” that the world values today? In what ways does the message of the cross challenge or contradict these worldly values?

Q4. In what ways has trusting the “wisdom of this world” led to trouble in your life? How have you seen your foolishness or weakness made strong in God?

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-2

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Q5. Why does Paul seem eager to reject human eloquence and wisdom when preaching Christ? How do you understand Paul’s statement in verse 2? Paul knew and taught far more than that in his teaching ministry. (See Acts 20:20, 27)

In the above passage, Paul anchors his gospel message upon the crucifixion. Below, we see the other side of Paul’s argument - the resurrection. Paul yokes his whole identity to the resurrection.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The apostle Paul pinned his mission and his integrity to the fact of Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. For Paul, it’s resurrection or nothing. Without the resurrection, there’s no resurrected Jesus, no sacrifice for sin, and no believer who’s died has eternal life. We are all dead in our sins. Faith is futile, and we are to be pitied as hopeless and foolish!

Q6. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is Good News! When did the reality of the resurrection of Christ first impact you?

Q7. What does the death and resurrection of Jesus teach us about God and his way of working in the world?

Reflection

Q8. Consider the future of our resurrected bodies and the new creation. What excites you most? What about these truths gives you hope in the midst of difficult trials?

Q9. What difference does Jesus' resurrection make to your life and how you respond to your circumstances?

Q10. Read Philippians 3:8-12. How does the power of the resurrection work in you today?

Read Colossians 3:1-17

How should the resurrection impact your thoughts? How does the resurrection affect your day-to-day life?

This 10-week preaching series has brought us close to the mission of God as described by Jesus. What is it that you've been encouraged by? What is it about mission that you've learned or rediscovered?

Final Word

As we conclude our journey through the “Go & Tell” study series, we reflect on the richness of the scriptures we’ve explored together. From the calling of the first disciples to the parables of the kingdom, from acts of compassion to the radical inclusivity of God’s grace, each passage has offered profound insights into the heart of our mission as followers of Christ.

As we leave this study series, let us carry these truths in our hearts and put them into action in our lives and communities. Let us be bold in proclaiming the good news, compassionate in our care for the marginalised, and faithful in our commitment to follow Jesus wherever He leads.



where new hope is born

Bethlehem
BAPTIST CHURCH

contact us

P | 07 576 2344

E | bbc@bethlehem.org.nz

A | 90 Bethlehem Rd, Bethlehem, Tauranga

bethlehem.org.nz
Follow us on **[bethbapchurch](#)**

