

Read: Psalm 29 and Isaiah 6:1-8

For reflection and discussion:

5. What do these two passages of scripture tell us about God?
6. We believe that, because of Jesus, we can approach God with confidence (see Heb. 4:14-16). Might it be, however, that this has led us to lose sight of God's holiness? If so, as individual Christians as a church community, how might we take steps to restore the balance?

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:3 – 5:1

For reflection and discussion:

There is so much in this passage that almost every verse could be the basis for a sermon! However, since we are focusing on the theme of the Trinity this week, look at the passage in terms of what it tells us about (i) God (see vv. 6, 7, 14, 5:1), (ii) Jesus (vv. 4, 5, 6, 10-11, 14), and (iii) the Holy Spirit (see 13, and – although the Spirit is not directly named – vv. 6, 10b, 12).

Prayer theme: that we may grow in understanding, wonder, and praise for the mystery and glory of the triune God, who has revealed himself to us.



*St Peter's Anglican Church
Wanneroo*

BIBLE STUDY NOTES FOR HOME GROUPS

TERM 2, 2021

(Part 1: 25th April – 30th May)

The readings for the Sunday services this term are, with a few minor differences, the readings set out in the Lectionary.

Each week there will be a focus passage and three supplementary passages. The focus passage is the one used for the sermon for the following Sunday. In your individual or group study you may wish to concentrate on this passage alone; or make it the first part of your individual reflection or group discussion, and then look at the three supplementary passages.

At the end of each weekly section there is a theme for prayer arising from the Bible passages just discussed.

¹ Wright, T (2012). *Twelve Months of Sundays: Years A, B and C*. London: SPCK.

² Franklin, E. (1975). *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts*. London: SPCK.

³ Thiselton, A. C. (2015). *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

STUDY 1

Dates: Week of April 19th (sermon on Sunday 25th April, ANZAC Day)

Sermon topic/theme: Laying down one's life

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **John 10:11-18**

Supplementary Passages: Psalm 116:1-10
1 John 3:11-18
Ezekiel 34:11-16

Read: John 10:11-18

For reflection and discussion:

1. What similarities and what differences do you see between Jesus' description of himself as 'the good shepherd' and God's prophecy spoken through Ezekiel (34:11-16)?
2. The metaphor of 'the shepherd' is one we are familiar with from the Bible. But – what does the term 'shepherd' actually mean for us, today, in a modern suburban setting? How is Jesus our 'good shepherd'? How do we expect a minister in a contemporary congregation be a shepherd to that congregation?
3. Jesus considers the role of the shepherd (or pastor) to be very important. Look up John 21:15-17. Is "looking after the sheep" the essential task of all Christians or just the work of ministers/pastors?

Christians. "The layout of the room, though, prevents anyone seeing more than part of it at any one moment. We never have it in our power. 'Born of water and the Spirit': ah, says someone in one corner, then I share this room with all the baptised. No, says another, I share it with those who experience the Spirit the same way I do. Nicodemus would like to have explained the new room in terms of the old, but he couldn't. Isaiah was overcome with guilt, individual and corporate, at seeing the unseeable thrice-holy God." ¹(p.73). The whole room is there, but at any one moment we can only see part of it.

Read: John 3:1-17

The story of Nicodemus is well known – not least because his questioning of Jesus produced Jesus' statement about being 'born again' (vv.5-6). But as always, familiarity can sometimes get in the way of really hearing what the scripture is saying to us.

For reflection and discussion:

1. Why do you think Nicodemus took the risk (v.1-2a), of seeking Jesus out and talking with him?
2. Try to imagine that you are Nicodemus. What would this meeting with Jesus have been like? What do you think he was expecting as he went to the meeting? What do you imagine Nicodemus was left with after his talk with Jesus – were his expectations met, and what questions might he have gone away with?
3. v.2 tells us how Nicodemus started his conversation with Jesus – with a statement, not with a question. What does this tell us about Nicodemus?
4. What are we told in these verses about (i) God, the Father, (ii) Jesus, the Son, and (iii) the Holy Spirit?

STUDY 6

Dates: Week of May 24th (sermon on Sunday 30th May)

Sermon topic/theme: Trinity: Three-in-One

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **John 3:1-17**

Supplementary passages: Psalm 29

Isaiah 6:1-8

2 Corinthians 4:3 – 5:1



The Trinity – three persons, one God – is an aspect of Christian truth many find difficult. As Tom Wright puts it “God’s love, Jesus’ death, new life in the Spirit. The irreducible minimum Christian story . . .”. Thiselton, giving the baptism of Jesus as an example, notes that “at every critical point in the narrative of Jesus all three persons of the Trinity are involved”, and that “all persons of the Trinity work together in every act of creation, redemption and salvation, even if one appears the most prominent in different events”. ³(p.820)

As a mystery the Trinity reminds us that our understanding of God is always limited – which is important if we are to retain our humility as Christians: as Paul so eloquently reminds us, “*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Tom Wright’s metaphor of living in an irregularly shaped room, where you can’t see the whole of the room at any one moment, may be helpful here. This room, he suggests, is where we live as

Read: Ezekiel 34:11-16 and Psalm 116:1-10

The readings from Ezekiel and from Psalm 116 tell us some important things about God – in the case of Ezekiel, God makes known through the prophet how he sees his people, and the Psalmist tells us how he experiences God.

For reflection and discussion:

In the Ezekiel passage:

4. What do we learn about what God is like?
5. What do we learn about how God treats his people?
6. Are there some experiences you have of God caring for you ‘like a shepherd looking after his sheep’ brought to mind for you by Ezekiel’s words?
7. What similarities can you see between Jesus’ description of a ‘good shepherd’ (John 15:11-18) and that of God’s prophecy spoken through Ezekiel (34:11-16)?

In vv.1-4 of Psalm 116 the Psalmist describes how God’s care for him when he was anguished and in trouble enables him to say (v.1) *I love the Lord, for he heard my voice*. Then, in vv.5-10 he reflects on his experience of God’s help and mercy.

8. Do you have any experiences you could share of how God’s mercy towards you lead you to reflect on what God is like, and then led you to praise him?

Read: 1 John 3:11-18

Wright states that the name of Jesus conveys a unique message: “The entire New Testament speaks of a saving act which stands out from all others. No other name speaks of innocent life laid down for others, generating spontaneous love for the outsider and the needy. One of the reasons Christianity spread in the Roman world was that nobody had ever looked after the sick and friendless with the self-sacrificial love that Christians showed. The name speaks of love with skin on, then and now.” ¹(p.61)

For reflection and discussion:

9. In v.16b, John states that we also are to ‘lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters’ (v.16b). Some Christians who live in places where there is a real cost, even persecution, involved for admitting to being a Christian, might be called on to do this literally, facing rejection from their community, imprisonment, or even death. But what does this mean for us in our comfortable world in Australia? How do we show love to that extent?
10. In vv. 17-18 John appears to give some hints as to what this might involve. Are there other ways can we love ‘with actions and in truth’ (v.18)?

Prayer theme: pray for all who seek to be shepherds to God’s people, especially those who are shepherds in our own church fellowship.

event? Did the disciples speak in a dozen or more different languages, or were the crowds able to ‘interpret’ the ‘other tongues’ the disciples spoke in?

7. In v.12 people who heard the disciples asked the question: ‘what does this mean?’. How would you answer that question?

Read: Psalm 104:26-36

For discussion and reflection:

8. When you read these verses of this psalm in light of Pentecost, what thoughts come to mind?

Prayer theme: for the Holy Spirit to renew in us our love for God.

For reflection and discussion:

1. What do you understand Jesus to mean when he states, v.26, that the Spirit 'will testify about me'? Do any examples come to mind, from scripture or from your own experience, that illustrate your understanding of the Spirit testifying to Jesus?
2. How, v.13, does the Spirit guide the Christian disciple 'into all the truth'?
3. In vv.8-11 Jesus refers to a number of ways in which the Spirit will prove the world to be wrong. How does the Spirit do this?

Read: Ezekiel 37:1-14

For discussion and reflection:

4. Reading this well-known passage from Ezekiel in the light of Pentecost, what do you see as its significance?

Read: Acts 2:1-21

For reflection and discussion:

5. Read Genesis 11:1-9. Do you see a link between the story of the Tower of Babel and the events described in Acts 2? What message might the events described in Acts 2 be giving if viewed in light of Genesis 11:1-9?
6. v.4 describes the disciples speaking in 'other tongues' and v.8-11 describes the amazement of people as they hear the disciples 'declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues'. How do you understand and make sense of this

STUDY 2

Dates: Week of April 26th (sermon on Sunday 2nd May)

Sermon topic/theme: We love because God loved us first

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **1 John 4:7-21**

Supplementary passages: Acts 8:26-40
Psalm 22:23-32
John 15:1-8

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

This is a passage that contains many memorable statements – for example, vv.10, 11, 16b, 18b, 20.

For reflection and discussion:

1. What are we told in this passage about the origins of our love – for God, and for one another? Consider vv.13-15, and then v.12.
2. We live in a culture where the word 'love' is widely used and can have a variety of meanings. How would you describe the love that is referred to in v.1? What makes this love different? How does this love influence the way we relate to others (v.11)?
3. The central role of the Spirit in the experience of the Christian is referred to in v.13. How do you understand this verse, and does it bring to mind any personal experiences

for you? You might like to share those experiences if you feel comfortable doing so.

4. Verses 20-21 seem to make a statement that we could all agree with – but the more we think about them, the more challenging they become! What do these verses mean to you in practical terms?

Read: Psalm 22:23-32

The first verse of Psalm 22 is very familiar: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* But the rest of the Psalm? Despite his anguish, the Psalmist reflects on God's goodness and love towards his people, and calls on them (v.23) to *praise*, to *honour*, and to *revere* God.

For reflection and discussion:

5. In Psalm 22:23-32, what reasons are given for God's people praising, honouring and revering him? How might these reasons be expressed in the language and circumstances of our world today?
6. Why was the Lord's Messiah forsaken? What does this say about the seriousness of sin?

Read: John 15:1-8

Jesus describes himself (v.1) as 'the true vine'. This is a lovely image, especially in a country such as ours where vines and grapes are valued and enjoyed, but we need to look beyond the beautiful words. The vine was a common image in the Old Testament for God's people Israel – read Isaiah 5:1-7. Jesus is

STUDY 5

Dates: Week of May 17th (sermon on Sunday 23rd May)

Sermon topic/theme: Pentecost: the gift of 'another counsellor'

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **John 15:26 – 16:15**

Supplementary passages: Psalm 104:26-37
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Acts 2:1-21

Read: John 15:26 – 16:15

Tom Wright observes: "It is one of the striking features of the New Testament that Luke, Paul and John, so very different as writers and theologians, sing in rich harmony when it comes to the Spirit. At the heart of the music is the sense of uncontainable newness. The sneering reaction on the day of Pentecost wasn't so silly: in a sense the disciples *were* filled with new wine, and the old wineskins were showing signs of splitting." (p.68)¹

He goes on to remind us that the festival of Pentecost is the (Jewish) festival "of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, 50 days after the Exodus, marking out Israel as God's peculiar people", and that the Spirit is "the same Spirit that brooded over creation, that spoke through the prophets." Now, "John has Jesus breathe the Spirit into the disciples precisely at the resurrection (John 20:22), the moment when the old world is brought to new life after death."

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

For reflection and discussion:

4. In vv.15-19a Paul is describing his prayer for the Ephesians. Make a list to summarise – in your own, everyday language – what Paul is asking for in his prayers for the Ephesians?
5. In vv.19b-23, Paul switches his focus God and makes a series of statements about God and about what God has done. Again, make a list of the points Paul makes about God.
6. Do you see any ways in which the Ascension of Jesus is relevant to what Paul is saying in his prayer for the Ephesians in vv.15-19a, and about God in vv.19b-23?

Read: Psalm 93 – and (time permitting) read Philippians 2:5-11

For reflection and discussion:

7. In what way is this Psalm appropriate as an act of praise when we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus? How does it help us to appreciate the importance of the Ascension?

Prayer theme: give thanks and praise for Jesus, who left the Father's side to live as one of us, who rose from the dead, and who ascended back to the Father's glory.

saying that God's people are now to be found in him, not in the nation of Israel.

For reflection and discussion:

7. What do you understand vv.1-2 to mean? How do they apply in the experience of the Christian?
8. What are the practical implications of vv.4-5 for our life as disciples of Jesus?
9. How do you think we should understand v.7 (see also John 6:56 and Matthew 7:7)? How does the idea of 'remaining' in Jesus influence the way we should understand the words *ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*?

Read: Acts 8:26-40

10. Are there ways in which this story from the earliest days of the church illustrates points we have been discussing from the other passages?

Prayer theme: Growing in our experience of God's love for us.

STUDY 3

Dates: Week of May 3rd (sermon on Sunday 9th May)

Sermon topic/theme: Believing in Jesus

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **1 John 5:1-12**

Supplementary passages: Acts 10:44-48
Psalm 98
John 16:16-24

Read: 1 John 5:1-12

A theme in these verses is the divinity of Jesus – that is, that whilst fully human Jesus was also the Son of God – see vv.1, 5, 9-10. Another theme is the linking of obedience with love – vv.1, 2-3. Both themes are central to Christian belief, but they are also contrary to the assumptions of our culture. Jesus as a wise teacher, yes – but *divine*, the Son of God? And *obedience*?

“His commandments are not burdensome’. Hard to take, that, in a world where *all* commandments are burdensome, where anybody telling someone else what to do – even God telling his creatures what to do – is felt as an imposition, a belittling, or patronising attempt to keep people down.”¹ (p.64).

A third theme is testimony about Jesus as God’s Son, testimony given by water (baptism), blood (the Lord’s Supper), and the Spirit, with the Spirit being the most important source of this testimony – vv. 6b-9.

For reflection and discussion:

1. There was a delay between the Resurrection of Jesus and his Ascension – what purpose do you think that delay might have served?
2. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples ‘not to leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised’?

Read: Luke 24:49-53.

Luke (who wrote the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Gospel that bears his name) described the Ascension twice – in Luke 24 and in Acts 1. One theologian (Franklin) has suggested that this shows how important the Ascension was for Luke – he states that “Luke’s Gospel has described the life of Jesus, and the Ascension is the event which gives meaning to that life: likewise the Ascension sets the theological tone for the book of Acts”².

For reflection and discussion:

1. What do you see as the importance of the Ascension? In what ways could it be of help to us to pay more attention to the Ascension?
2. Why do *you* think Luke described the Ascension of Jesus twice – was it just convenience, to link his Gospel (Volume 1 of his story of Jesus) and Acts (Volume 2), or might there have been a deeper purpose?
3. (*optional*) What do you think Franklin, in the quote above, might have meant when he stated that the Ascension ‘gives meaning’ to Jesus’ life as Luke described it in his Gospel, and that it ‘sets the theological tone for the book of Acts’?

STUDY 4

Dates: Week of May 10th (sermon on Sunday 16th May)

Sermon topic/theme: Jesus ascends his throne in heaven

Bible Readings: (sermon passage in bold)

Focus passage: **Acts 1:1-11**

Supplementary passages: Psalm 93
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:44-53



Read: Acts 1:1-11

The feast of the Ascension always occurs on the 40th day after Easter Day – a Thursday – not on a Sunday. As a result it can sometimes seem a bit of an ‘also ran’ amongst the great celebrations in the Christian year. There is, however, much to celebrate about the Ascension of Jesus. Jesus took on human form (the incarnation); he grew up, lived, worked, taught about God, and performed miracles of healing; he died; he rose from the dead; and he returned to glory at the Father’s side (the Ascension). In 10 days’ time we come to the Feast of Pentecost (which *is* on a Sunday!), when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples “*very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*” (John 16:7).

For discussion and reflection:

1. How would you explain, in your own words, why obedience is important in the Christian life – and to what or to whom are we to be obedient?
2. Are belief and obedience inseparable, as vv.2-3 seem to suggest?
3. Is there a danger of the Christian faith being seen as legalistic, full of ‘do’s and don’t’s’, if we stress the importance of obedience? What, in this passage, works against the Christian faith being seen in this way?

Read: Acts 10:44-48

It is perhaps hard for us to understand how extraordinary it was that Peter, at that time a Christian but still immersed in Jewish tradition, would go into the house of a Gentile like Cornelius. But, as he was obedient and told Cornelius about the Gospel, the Holy Spirit broke down the wall between Jew and Gentile. The conversion of Cornelius, along with his relatives and his close friends, was a work of the Holy Spirit – they heard the Gospel, but it was the Holy Spirit ‘coming on’ them that was the decisive moment (v.44).

For discussion and reflection:

4. What contemporary situations can you think of where there is an apparently impenetrable ‘wall’ between Christians and others in the community?
5. From your own experience and the experiences of other Christians that have been shared with you, what part do you understand the Holy Spirit to play in a person

becoming a Christian (see: Act 8:15-16; 11:15; 15:8; 19:6; and Luke 1:15)?

6. Are there other scripture passages you can recall that speak of the role of the Holy Spirit in the re-birth of a person as a Christian?

Read: Psalm 98

This is a wonderful and much-loved psalm of praise. Although Jewish, it is a song of praise that Cornelius and his friends would have been able to sing after the Holy Spirit convinced them of the truth of the Gospel they heard from Peter.

For reflection and discussion:

7. As you read this Psalm, which of its statements of praise resonate most strongly for you, and why?

Read: John 16:16-24

In this passage we read that sadness will be turned to joy. Jesus uses the metaphor of a mother giving birth to a child to denote the joy of the resurrection swallowing the grief of the cross. He then explains that God the Father will grant their requests because they will now pray in the name of Jesus.

For discussion and reflection:

8. What does it mean to make requests “in the name of Jesus”? We often add such a phrase to the end of our prayers – but is there a danger of treating this as a magic formula that will guarantee a positive response?

Prayer theme: for God’s people to be able to give a clear testimony to Jesus as the Son of God, and to understand more fully what it means to be obedient to him.