

# **Lincoln Methodist Circuit**

**Lectionary 2017/18**

## **“Holy Habits”**

**A series on discipleship**

**based on the book by Andrew Roberts**

**Quarter 1 – September-November**

## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Andrew Roberts for the inspiration and ideas in his book ("Holy Habits" 2, published by Malcolm Down Publishing Ltd 2016 ISBN 978-1910786-15-4). We have also drawn on "Discipleship" by David Watson (Hodder and Stoughton 1981 ISBN 0-340-33213-1)) as well as numerous other authors.

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A small team of local preachers drawn from across the circuit prepared the notes: Tim Hirst, Ian Lacy, Chris Marsh, David Sheehan and David Stubbs.

We hope and pray these notes will be used to excite preachers, congregations and home groups about following Jesus as much as we have been during the preparation.

## **Holy Habits - a lectionary for the Lincoln Circuit 2017/18**

### **Introduction**

There are times in our lives as Christians when it is good to go “back to basics”, checking that we are still on track. This may both reassure us and challenge us: *“I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word” (John Robinson)*. Am I as an individual, are we as a church living up to all that we could and should be so as to truly enjoy all God has for us and fully show his love and power to the world?

Becoming a new circuit is a great opportunity to look again at what being a disciple is all about: to be reminded of discipleship’s joy and challenge, not just in “theory” but in our practical walk with God. The new Circuit Leadership Team believes that it would be good for all the churches to look at the theme of discipleship across the circuit to strengthen our foundations for going on in Christ and so asked a group of Local Preachers to develop a lectionary based on Andrew Roberts book “Holy Habits”.

As you will see we have done more than prepare a list of readings. We have put together what are perhaps best described as “aids to thought and preparation” on the main aspects of what it means to be a disciple. They are not meant to be sermon notes but they do contain Bible references and other resources we hope you will find useful and which we believe cover the main aspects of each topic. Individual preachers will want to develop their own structures and use their own illustrations to make them come alive.

The separate “notes” are in different styles and formats, reflecting our different “preacher personalities” and styles. They also include ideas and suggestions for home groups so people can explore their own experiences and needs. We plan to distribute these to churches separately.

The overall plan for the year is overleaf. The first quarter’s theme could be summed up as “what is discipleship about?” We are also working on some ideas you might like to use in Advent, looking at how the main characters show aspects of being a disciple and then in January we move on to the “how do we do discipleship?”

As you can imagine working out the Plan out is going to be even more of a challenge than usual. There will be some Sundays “outside “ the main theme (e.g. Harvest Festivals and Remembrance Sunday) and it may not be possible for all churches to cover the same topic on the same Sunday.

This could give opportunities for preachers to use the material twice! We would ask that you offer as many dates as possible – and that you are ready to be challenged by some of the topics!

The individual notes were written separately and then shared for comments and editing. We have not tried to standardize the format because we want to make clear that these are indeed notes to help, not sermon outlines. For the same reason we have not included many suggestions for illustrations (other than Bible passages, especially where OT characters live out NT “Holy Habits” of discipleship) although we have suggested Bible verses and on occasion given quotations from Christian writers you might find useful.

We include material for group use as well: this will be circulated separately to churches but you may find it useful in service preparation as well

If you have any ideas, suggestions or questions please do get in touch. Ian Lacy is acting as co-ordinator of the group ([ian3105@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ian3105@yahoo.co.uk)). We would also welcome volunteers to help with the preparation of the subsequent quarters’ notes

We do hope and pray that you (and us!) will not only enjoy this approach to planned preaching but be used by God to bless the people of the churches of the Lincoln Circuit in the months ahead.

## **Lectionary Outline**

### **September – November**

Of the 13 Sundays 8 will have a lectionary topic. This will leave Sundays for Harvest Festivals, Remembrance Sunday and other special services, as well as giving space to “catch up” if for instance a church needs an “own arrangement”. The topics/themes are as follows:

#### **The nature of discipleship**

- 1) Thanksgiving and renewal of commitment.
- 2) Making all things new – new circuit, new start
- 3) The adventure of discipleship
- 4) The aims of discipleship
- 5) Suffering and discipleship
- 6) The nurture of discipleship (continued)
- 7) Disciples –of Jesus. Following a person, not a set of principles
- 8) Signs and wonders

## **December- February**

### **Advent**

During Advent preachers and churches may want to choose their own themes. However we plan to produce notes that will pick up some of the themes from the first quarter using the “proto –disciples” who feature in the Christmas story

- 1) Mary and Joseph: the risks of discipleship
- 2) The wise men: the cost of discipleship
- 3) The shepherds; celebrating discipleship
- 4) Jesus: the amazement of discipleship

### **New Year and Covenant services**

#### **The nurture of discipleship – the “holy habits” (starting January 21<sup>st</sup>)**

- 1) “Holy habitats”
- 2) Introducing the holy habits
- 3) Biblical teaching (2 Sundays)
- 4) Fellowship (2 Sundays)
- 5) Service

## **March – May**

#### **The nurture of discipleship -continued**

- 6) Breaking bread

#### **Palm Sunday and Easter**

- 7) Prayer (2 Sundays)
- 8) Worship (2 Sundays)
- 9) Service (2 Sundays, with Pentecost between)
- 10) Gladness and Generosity

Where there are 2 Sundays for a topic the idea is that the first will look at the Bible’s teaching - the second will put it into practice as a congregation. This will need imagination and involvement – start thinking and praying!

## **June –August**

- 11) Giving
- 12) Making more disciples (2 services)
- 13) Dare to dream - A summary of the series (possibly a Circuit service)

Over the rest of the summer we might want to look at NT accounts of how churches worked out the holy habits in practice.

## **Service 1 - Thanksgiving and renewal of commitment to each other**

The first two services in the series do not have an exact parallel in “Holy Habits”. However at the start not only of a new Methodist year but of the new circuit we thought it would be good to “Give thanks for all that is past / And trust for all that’s to come” so that we renew with joy our commitment to Jesus and each other.

**Aim:** To have congregations recall how God has called them together.

### **Content:**

What Jesus has done for us.

What Jesus is doing in us.

What Jesus has planned for us.

### **Potential Scriptures:**

**OT:** 1 Sam 7: 1-12; 1 Chronicles 16: 8-36 (or part thereof)

**Gospels:** Mark 1: 1-20; John 17: 6-26;

**NT:** Rom 8: 1-4 & 13-17; 1 Cor 12: 1-27; 2 Cor 5: 11-21; Eph 4: 1-16; Eph 2: 1-10

### **Additional Information for Service Lead:**

This is the start of something new and for some there will no doubt be hopes and fears, expectations and dreams as we set off, yet for others it may feel like “same old, same old” just rearranging of deckchairs. How do we fan the flames where there is already a spark and how do we lift up the heads and strengthen the legs of the weary? Things to bear in mind are:

- The God who has brought us this far, will lead us on;
- We are not on our own – firstly it is about the church as body, not just us as isolated Christians; secondly it is that the God who goes before us also walks beside us;
- The God who calls us into new things, equips us for those things and completes every good work He initiates so we have both a present confidence and a future hope (certainty);
- Change starts with me/us!

Some thoughts about content and progression to act as help (not a blueprint!)

The Scriptures:

- Are shot through with certain themes; these include the importance of testimony and stories to remind ourselves of the faithfulness of God. In the OT, the Ebenezer reading from Samuel is an example, as is Passover, as are the other instituted festivals. You will be aware of many others. In the NT the classic is the celebration of the Lord's Supper
- Place emphasis on the gathered, the community of faith, the people of God/body of Christ.
- Are all about relationships restored – with God and with others (Love the Lord your God...and your neighbour).

If you wish to use the Scriptural statements for who we are in Christ, either during the sermon or as the basis for thanksgiving or reflection, the statements used in the Freedom in Christ course are attached to this document.

**Ideas for Creative activity:**

You may wish to consider the following (either planned in advance or on the day):

Invite some brief testimonies on How thus far God has helped) – could do in small groups or from the front and then use for basis of thanksgiving, or could get people to write down sentences that could then be displayed

Could have some banners, bunting or balloons as symbols of celebration.

You as preacher could share some Good News/reasons to give thanks or part of your story.

Have extended prayer and share/thanks

**Other:**

First two weeks we need to get balance between individual salvation and community of faith right.

In all weeks we need to reference back to Circuit vision as appropriate.

*"The great tragedy of modern evangelism is in calling many to belief and few to obedience" Jim Wallis*

## **Group material for “Thanksgiving and renewal of commitment”**

**Icebreaker:** What is your favourite “feel good” film/book/song (choose dependent upon make up of group) & why?

If the group know each other well enough get each person to think of one positive gift/skill or attribute about the person on their left and to write it down and give it to them – go all the way round the group – no one to be left out including the leader! Then go round the other way and do it again, then choose one for yourself. Everyone should have three items. Ask people to share any that either surprise them or encourage them (The purpose of this exercise is to affirm everyone and perhaps spark some further encouragement – ensure you prevent damning with faint praise or faults wrapped up as virtues! Or indeed people talking themselves down).

*Read 1 Cor 12: 1-27*

Explain that although this passage is about “supernatural gifts – which God does give and we should desire), it also has a wider application to all we can do and contribute as members of the body of Christ.

Ask if people find it easy to discover their gifts or abilities

Do they find it easy to exercise these gifts:

- within church ?
- beyond church ? (get some examples)

What help would people like to:

- identify gifts;
- grow in competence;
- find opportunities?

Does anyone think there are any gaps in the body (local congregation especially) and if so can/should something be done?

Ditto – too much of one attribute?

Turn this round – could an absence of something or a surfeit of something actually be speaking into our situation and vision? For example, if there was a lot of caring, pastoral, providing skills might this suggest a particular outreach/ministry to a certain group (lonely, shut in, bereaved, homeless)

How much do we rely on or appreciate the gifts others have that are different to ours?

Is there a risk that if it isn't something that "floats our boat" that we ignore or neglect it?

How can we support one another and understand one another better?

So far, all this has been about our place within the body and how we play our part. What are the implications of someone being "missing" from the body – how does it affect them, how does it affect others, how does it affect the work of God?

*Prayer and worship:*

Spend time:

- Giving thanks for all the gifts and ministries currently being exercised;
- Seeking fresh gifts to build the church and the supernatural increase of talents and abilities;
- Praying for new opportunities for the church to serve its community;
- Increased vision and understanding.

**Appendix - "Freedom in Christ" (© freedom in Christ Ministries 2005)**

**Significance, Security & Acceptance**

**Restored In Christ**

**I Am Significant:** *I am no longer worthless, inadequate, helpless or hopeless. In Christ I am deeply significant and special. God says:*

Matthew 5:13,14 I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.  
John 15:1,5 I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life.  
John 15:16 I have been chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit.  
Acts 1:8 I am a personal, Spirit-empowered witness of Christ.  
1 Cor 3:16 I am a temple of God.  
2 Cor 5:17-21 I am a minister of reconciliation for God.  
2 Cor 6:1 I am God's fellow worker.  
Ephesians 2:6 I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.  
Ephesians 2:10 I am God's workmanship, created for good works.  
Ephesians 3:12 I may approach God with freedom and confidence.  
Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!

**I Am Secure:** *I am no longer guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned. In Christ I am totally secure. God says:*

Romans 8:1,2 I am free forever from condemnation.  
Romans 8:28 I am assured that all things work together for good.  
Romans 8:31-34 I am free from any condemning charges against me.  
Romans 8:35-39 I cannot be separated from the love of God.  
2 Cor 1:21,22 I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.  
Philippians 1:6 I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.  
Philippians 3:20 I am a citizen of heaven.  
Colossians 3:3 I am hidden with Christ in God.  
2 Timothy 1:7 I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.  
Hebrews 4:16 I can find grace and mercy to help in time of need.  
1 John 5:18 I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

**I Am Accepted:** *I am no longer rejected, unloved or dirty. In Christ I am completely accepted.*  
God says:

John 1:12	I am God's child.
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Cor 6:17	I am united with the Lord and I am one spirit with Him.
1 Cor 6:19,20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
1 Cor 12:27	I am a member of Christ's Body.
Ephesians 1:1	I am a saint, a holy one.
Ephesians 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child.
Ephesians 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Colossians 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven for all my sins.
Colossians 2:10	I am complete in Christ.

## **Service 2 - Making All Things New**

**Aim:** To enable people to look forward - new circuit, new start!

### **Content:**

Commitment

Call to discipleship

Celebration

### **Potential Scriptures:**

**OT:** Ps 133; Isaiah 40

**Gospels:** Luke 5: 1-11; John 1: 44-50

**NT:** Eph 2: 11-22 (ties in well with week 1); 1 Thess 1: 1-10; 1 John 1: 1-3

### **Additional Information for Service Lead:**

In preparing this, there may be a number of strands of thought that are valid to pursue and you will need to take the one which seems right to you and for the congregation

Possible areas to explore (bearing in mind we are at this stage in week 2 of introducing and giving an overview) below:

- This would be a great opportunity to cast the vision for the new Circuit and to sow hope and ownership into people's hearts and spirit;
- It would also be a good opportunity to dwell on unity of the believers and the blessings that flow when the world sees we love and serve one another;
- It is the day after the Circuit launch Service, the brave may wish to build upon what is said on the Saturday – but it does leave you with much last minute planning and prep (if we can get a sneak peak of the material or references we will share them in advance);
- It could be a call to renewal and rededication Joshua – “choose you this day...” Joshua Ch 24) or “are you going also” (after feeding of 5,000 John 6 especially v25-69);
- There are those who love God – but don't commit to belonging and serving through the church fully – this could be a focus;

### **Ideas for Creative activity:**

Could use Sir Francis Drake prayer (p 24 Holy Habits) and build in some thoughts around ships (vessels) made to sail the seas not stay in dry dock etc

**Other:**

In these first two weeks we need to get the balance between individual salvation and the community of faith right.

In all weeks we need to reference back to Circuit vision as appropriate.

*"The church which rediscovers something of the God-given quality of a (genuine) sharing community will speak with great relevance, credibility and spiritual power to the world of today... Jesus called his disciples into a living, loving, community. He saw this as top priority as he began the task of building his church"*  
David Watson

**Group material for "Making all things new"**

There are two parts to this – one is to show we need to be in company and fellowship (it picks up where week 1 ended which was that our absence from the body is detrimental to not just ourselves, but others and it leaves a gap in God's plan and provision. The second is to remind ourselves of how God strengthens and builds up.

**Icebreaker:** Think of a person who helped you significantly at some point in your Christian walk (ideally not someone who is in the room – that can get embarrassing). In what way were they a help (note for leaders – it is good to look out for phrases such as they got alongside me, they had time, they understood, they didn't give up, they showed me love, they were honest with me etc)

NB The point of this exercise is to show that although our brothers and sisters can be difficult or frustrating at times they do help us in our growth and we are better together rather than isolated.

**Possible illustrations**

1. Proverbs 27:17 – don't get distracted to the preceding verses! Just read out the relevant line rather than turning to it. Ask for examples.
2. Rough pebbles becoming smooth by being bashed together in the sea – you might want to have some to hold and as a later focus for prayer (could use this on the Sunday as an alternate activity);

Look at the David Watson quote on the previous page and discuss. Do you agree?

Have you had any experience of living closely alongside other Christians – did this have an impact upon you if so in what way. Examples could range from full-blown shared living to a shared time away at a conference or event or to working closely on a project or mission.

What would encourage you to do it again (or for the first time), what might prevent you or reduce your desire to do so.

Have a look at John 17 – prayer for the disciples (especially vv 20-23) & Acts 2: 42-47. Is Acts 2 a partial answer to that prayer – why was the impact of their lifestyle so profound?

Could the fellowship group be that place of close, honest, open sharing for you?

Look at Isaiah 40 (read to yourselves verses 1-26). Ask each person to pick out 1 or 2 verses or passages that particularly speak to them and why? As leader you may wish to go through and highlight or mark the key items in advance (there are many)!

Having discussed some of the responses and brought out anything of significance that has been passed over; return to the final few verses.

Read out vv 27-31 and then return to v 31 (nb some versions say wait, others hope as in trust/depend/rely – both are important) and lead this into a time to recognize our needs and deficiencies (as individuals and together) and then to wait upon the Lord – thanking Him for all the things we have seen in the preceding verses and our time together and seeking His renewal, encouragement and empowering.

## Service 3 - The Adventure of Discipleship

These notes are closely based on c1 and c2 of Holy Habits. The chapters and this service are a sort of “keynote” to the whole series – *this* is what following Jesus is all about.

There are few things that will be completely new to most of the congregation unless they are new Christians: the need is for us all to recover the excitement and joy that goes with following Jesus.

As with most of the notes for services you will probably find there are more ideas than can be fitted in – what follows are ideas to start you off, to be used in the context of the church where you are preaching.

### Aims

- 1) To reawaken us to our call – challenge, struggle, joy, adventure – “life in all its fullness” (John 10 v10)
- 2) To get us excited (again!) about following Jesus!

### Main Messages (from ‘Holy Habits’ c1)

- 1) We are following a person. Rock star Bono sums it up by saying “We don’t know where we’re going but we know who we are going with”
- 2) It is a life of action – yes, there is “theory” but it is best learned as we follow. Discipleship with Jesus is not so much about being educated by him as it is about developing a relationship with him. The literal meaning of disciple is “one who learns as they follow.”
- 3) Jesus moved things on from the Jewish tradition of following rules set down in the past to following his example of the way life should be lived here and now. He taught that the Kingdom of God is something that is current as well as a prospect for the future.
- 4) “Active” goes beyond the physical into areas of spirituality and prayer
- 5) All adventures have their highs and lows, this is an inherent part of being human and so it is an inherent part of the journey of discipleship.

The Prayer of Sir Francis Drake (p24) – uncomfortable but exciting!

### Starting Out (from “Holy Habits” c2)

- 1) Discipleship Starts with a call to follow: Luke 5:10b-11 (HH c2)
  - a) We can gain insight into the Christian journey by looking at where it all began (Mark 1 v9- 20)
- 2) The original disciples of Jesus were ordinary people who were suddenly called from their everyday lives to a dramatically different lifestyle.

- 3) The original disciples had their call to follow, not while at prayer, but while at work. Our own relationship with Jesus should not be limited to the context of church but should extend into all aspects of our life.
- 4) These gospels show that discipleship was taken on with a sense of urgency. Discipleship does not need prior experience or formal qualifications.
- 5) There was a call to join together into community. “the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion” (John Wesley)

### **Keeping On – challenges**

- 1) Simon was challenged to put aside this experience and instincts in order to fish where Jesus told him. Discipleship may require us to take on challenges and approach things in ways that are new to us.
- 2) The experience of Simon to some extent parallels that of the call of Isaiah.
- 3) We are all in need of redemption and may find the holiness of God overwhelming. Jesus welcomes sinners and through our relationship with him his holiness can be reflected in our lives.
- 4) The phrase “don’t be afraid” occurs 366 times in the Bible (implies on one hand that “living against the current” may be frightening at times but also that we can and should trust God to carry us through)
- 5) The call to discipleship is not simply the call to a 1 to 1 relationship with Jesus. This is a call to carry his message out into the world, which may well come at some cost to ourselves.
- 6) It means working and sharing with others
- 7) John emphasises this spiritual connection between Jesus and his disciples starting with their calling being in the presence of John the Baptist.
- 8) John outlines the deepening of insight amongst the disciples leading to the recognition of his status as Messiah. The practical activities of discipleship can also lead us into greater spiritual insight.

### **Destination**

- 1) John’s gospel is full of revelations of the glory of God the Father and God the son. We can be blessed with similar glimpses of glory to inspire and encourage and draw us forward through the adventure of discipleship.
- 2) John’s characterisations of the disciples are of ordinary flawed people who, like us, have been transformed as we follow Jesus on a journey that will only be complete in heaven.

## **Ideas/illustrations you might find useful**

- 1) Using the life story of your Christian hero/heroine as an example of “adventure in discipleship”
- 2) Using the example of an OT character (e.g. Ruth as in the notes for groups, or Abraham who was ‘called to adventure’ at the age of 75: see Genesis 12)
- 3) Developing the story of Peter -or perhaps Paul – as a “life of adventure”.
- 4) Using examples from your own life.
- 5) Although “discipleship” (quite rightly) has connotations of toughness and discipline it can also be defined in the words of Jo Bailey Wells, the Bishop of Dorking at an ordination service (Radio 4 Morning Service 2/7/17)\_ “The Christian life is saying “yes” to Jesus: -“yes” to hope,” yes” to joy”, “yes” to peace, “yes” to challenge”. Are you ready to live a “yes” life” for Jesus?’

## **Group material for “The Adventure of Discipleship”**

As Christians we are not following an idea or a religion we are following a person; Jesus, Son of God. In discipleship we are called to follow even though we don’t know exactly where we’re going. As the rock star Bono once put it “We don’t know where we’re going but we know who we are going with”

The gift of Jesus takes us beyond the limits of the old Jewish laws and we each gain the opportunity of a personal relationship with God the Father through God the Son. This relationship begins the moment we respond to the call from Jesus to follow his example and teaching. When we do this we become a disciple of Jesus. “Disciple” literally means “one who learns as they follow”

Discipleship of Jesus is not so much about being educated by him as it is about developing a relationship with him. It is a relationship that can last through all the highs and lows that life inevitably brings.

The gospel stories tell us how the first disciples of Jesus were suddenly called from their everyday lives.

Read:

Matthew 4:18-22

Mark 1:16-20

Luke 5 1-11

John 1:35-51

*How prepared do you think these people were to be called by Jesus? Do you feel you were prepared in any way for your own call?*

*The reaction of the disciples to Jesus seems to have been immediate – why do you think that was? In some ways they seem to be an odd group of people for Jesus to call, with no obvious skills in “building the Kingdom” Does this reassure you that you may have your own part to play in God’s plans?*

We can also find evidence in God’s Word of the value of being a faithful follower in the Old Testament Book of Ruth.

Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi. Because of the local famine Naomi had moved with her husband and sons away from Bethlehem to the country of Moab where her two sons had married local girls, Orpah and Ruth. Within 10 years the three men had died and the women were left to take care of themselves. On hearing that the famine in the area around Bethlehem was over Naomi prepared to return and told her daughters-in-law that it will be best for them to return to their families. Orpah reluctantly agreed but Ruth insisted on sharing her future life with Naomi, despite the difficulties they might have.

Jewish tradition required that grain dropped in the field as it was being harvested was left there for the poor to pick up. This was known as “gleaning”. As women living alone Ruth and Naomi would have been among the very poorest people in the community.

*Read: Ruth 2 1:20*

A “guardian-redeemer” was a legal term for a person with the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty. The remainder of the book of Ruth explains how Boaz comes to marry Ruth, returning her and Naomi to prosperity.

*Ruth did not just speak about her loyalty to Naomi but put it into action, following her back to Bethlehem and working in the fields there so that they would have something to eat. How can followers of Jesus put their own discipleship into action in their lives? It might be a long list!*

Ruth’s actions in remaining faithful to Naomi also had important implications for the history of the Jewish people. Ruth’s first child with Boaz, a boy named Obed, was to be the grandfather of the great King David!

Following Jesus, bringing him into our everyday lives, may also have effects for the world that are widespread and last long into the future – effects that are greater and more important than we can possibly imagine.

## **Service 4 - The Aims of Discipleship - Why follow Jesus?**

### **Introduction**

If the last session was a (partial) answer to the question of *what* discipleship is, this week asks the question “what is discipleship *for*? Why does Jesus call his followers to “learn by doing” rather than simply voting in favour of him and cheering “the professionals” on to do the job. And what is the end result of being disciples together in community supposed to be?”

Again, these notes are pointers and ideas, not an outline sermon. Like c3 of Holy Habits on which they are based they do not encompass all that is involved.

The aim of practising holy habits is (quoting Andrew Roberts) “.... to nurture adventurous followers of Jesus who, as they share in his mission and live out their discipleship in their day-to-day lives, are being transformed into his holy, down-to-earth likeness.”

### **Possible aims to for your preaching (and the group material)**

- 1) To help people understand they have been called by Jesus into a community
- 2) To help people understand that this community is God’s method of transforming the world – of being the beginning of the answer to the prayer –“your Kingdom come” because we are now “Kingdom people”
- 3) To help people understand that God transforms people –starting with us’
- 4) To enable people to commit to following Jesus out of love for who he is and what he has done and is doing for and in us.

### **Why ‘discipleship’?**

- 1) We are chosen to be disciples (*John 17v9*) Jesus knew what he was doing!
  - a) Unlike the disciples of contemporary teachers who chose their master.
  - b) Chosen to be disciples of a person – not a teaching, or a religion or a cause.
  - c) This was Jesus’ mission strategy!

“He drew round him a band of dedicated disciples. For the best part of 3 years he lived with them, shared with them, cared for them, taught them, corrected them, trusted them forgave them and loved them to the end. They, on their part sometimes failed him, hurt him, disappointed him and sinned against him. Yet never once did he withdraw his love from them. And later, empowered by the Holy Spirit this group of trained disciples turned the world of their day upside down “ (David Watson- “Discipleship”)

- 2) The mission of Jesus was to tell people about the nature of God and God's kingdom.
  - a) In order to transform individuals and the world. "I am come that they may have life and have it to the full ("life as I intended it to be") (*John 10v10*)

### **The purpose of discipleship**

- 1) Passing on this "Good News" with the purpose of transforming the world into the infinitely loving and peaceful image of heaven. (*Matthew 28:19-20*)
  - a) This means challenging what is wrong (especially injustice: Jesus illustrated the depth of God's love and particular regard for the poor and needy and oppressed.
  - b) It is a message for now "The innovative and surprising message of Jesus was that these spiritual blessings and guidance could be experienced in the here and now, making God's Kingdom a current reality as well as a future hope. (*Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18, Matthew 4:17*)
- 2) To learn to live and grow as a community whose purpose is "that God's will be done on earth"
  - a) *1 Peter 2 v 9* shows we are God's people whose purpose is to declare his praises – because we are a "royal priesthood" we act as "go betweens" to declare his praises to the world as well as to God and each other.
- 3) To be transformed as individuals.
  - a) The call to discipleship comes to us within the context of our everyday lives and is lived out within our relationships and our communities. (*Luke 19:1-10*)
  - b) The transformation of the whole world (*Acts 1:8*) starts with the transformation by Jesus of each disciple's character into closer alignment with his own. (*2 Corinthians 5:17*)
  - c) Discipleship is a calling from God that should make its mark in all aspects of our lives. (*Ephesians 4:1-6*)
  - d) This extends to a reflection within an individual's character of Christ's holiness as well as his humanity.

To quote Andrew Roberts "True holiness is not just personal. It is social, relational and communal. It is evidenced in equality, justice and peace."

### **The importance of community**

- 1) The process of developing discipleship takes place within individual lives but from the very start Jesus gathered people into a mutually supporting community, which has continued to grow. In his book "Discipleship" David Watson suggests "the goal of evangelism is the formation of the Christian community" is not an end in itself but the mechanism by which "God's plan for the healing of creation can all be fulfilled"

- 2) Personal transformation does not involve setting ourselves apart but, like Jesus, we should live out our holiness in the context of our community. (*Leviticus 11:44, 1 Peter 1:13-16*)
- 3) The church is “God’s New Society” (the title of John Stott’s commentary on Ephesians): it is to be a loving community that foreshadows the reality of heaven and gives a model to the world.

### **Other considerations**

- 1) It will not always be easy! (see next week). The journey of Christian discipleship is about joy and peace (*Psalm 65:8-13, Luke 12:22-31, 1 Thessalonians 1:6*). But it will also reflect Christ’s struggle, sacrifice and suffering (*Luke 9:23-24*)
- 2) Discipleship is lived out in the here and now but heaven is the ultimate destination of the adventure. (*Luke 23:39-43*) Jesus came to show that if we pray for, work for, and look out for the signs the “heavenly realms” can be experienced and enjoyed “on earth as it is in heaven”. (*Ephesians 2:4-10*)
- 3) “Holiness” and “discipleship” are linked concepts. “Holy” basically means “set apart” but being set apart implies patterns of life, mind and behaviour that will be different to what we are set apart from and will increasingly reflect God’s love and glory to those around. So in a sense we cannot be “holy” without living in the world.

### **Group material for “The Aims of Discipleship - Why follow Jesus?”**

The adventure of Christian discipleship starts with the call of Jesus to follow him. But where is he leading? What is he calling us to do? What are the purposes and aims of these “Holy Habits” studies?

As usual the best place to start is to look at what Jesus himself said and did.

*Read Luke 4:14-21*

For the people in the synagogue it would have been quite clear that by proclaiming, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” Jesus was identifying himself as the long awaited Messiah. At the same time he set out what his role in the world was to be. In the modern terms we might see this as his job description!

If this is taken as a job description who does Jesus say he will be working with?

At the end of that chapter (verse 43) Jesus goes on to say “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also, because that is why I was sent”

When Jesus says that he must proclaim “the good news of the kingdom of God”, what do you understand those words to mean? Do you think it was news about how people might gain a place in heaven or how they should live their lives here on Earth?

We can take from these words of Jesus that ultimate objective of discipleship is to change the world through proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. We can play our part in this by being open to change ourselves and by doing what we can to influence change in those around us.

The mission of Jesus is for the whole world but it is put into effect one person at a time. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 4:22-24) How do you react to the idea of being “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”?

Like me, you may be daunted by the concept that you can become holy! This might become easier to accept when we remember that our personal aim in discipleship is to become more like Jesus who was completely human but also completely divine.

We should also follow the lead of Jesus by not allowing this change in our character to separate us from society. Jesus did not hide away from the world but took his mission out into the community. It was part of his everyday life and the everyday lives those around him, especially those least regarded by the rest of society. Are there ways that you can proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God in your everyday life? How does being a member of a church help you to do this?

The example of Jesus shows us that we can play our part to achieve his aim of bringing the kingdom of God into our troubled world. This is not a duty, which is set by the church, or our superintendent minister (!), or even one that we set ourselves; it comes to us directly from God.

*Read Ephesians 2:4-10*

Were there points in your life where it was clear that God had prepared you for work that needed to be done?

Where does the passage from Ephesians tell us is the ultimate destination of our Christian adventure!

Finally, to answer the question that was set at the start: The aim of practising holy habits (quoting Andrew Roberts) is “.... to nurture adventurous followers of Jesus who, as they share in his mission and live out their discipleship in their day-to-day lives, are being transformed into his holy, down-to-earth likeness.

## Service 5 - Suffering as a follower of Jesus

This is based on chapter 4 of “Holy Habits”. It probably includes a lot more than could be used in one service but we felt it was important to take a wide view as it is perhaps the single biggest issue we face: “Why does a loving God allow it to happen?” So the ideas and references (possible “key” underlined) are intended to set off ideas and provide “source material” rather than being a definitive “sermon plan”. You might want to consider including:

- 1) Why we suffer
  - a) Because we live in a fallen world – suffering is common to all people.
  - b) Because we as Christians are called to “go against the tide” as Jesus did.  
Matt. 16 v24-26, John 15 v18-21
    - i) Persuasion – the environment that tempts us and causes inner pressure, especially to put ourselves first. Matt c19 v16-22, Philippians 2 v1-8
    - ii) Pressure to conform – 1 Kings c19 v1-3, 2 Kings c2v23, Daniel c1 v8-10
    - iii) Persecution –active opposition 1 Kings c22 v24. Jeremiah c20v2, c37 v15-16, c38 v6, Daniel c6 v6-16
  
- 2) Why God allows his people to suffer
  - a) as “proof” we are heading in the right direction Matt c5 v10
  - b) to train us Hebrews c12 v10-11 James c1v24
  - c) as an example and encouragement
  - d) Because sometimes there is no way to both avoid it and stay loyal to Jesus –we are in conflict.  
Matt c10v16-25, Acts c6 v8- c8 v1 (the story of Stephen),
  - e) to enable us to understand and identify with the sufferings of others
  
- 3) How we can face suffering 2 Cor c12 v 7-9
  - a) Realism – it hurts  
it has been the experience of the people of God Matt c5 v11-12  
it was Christ’s experience – 1 Peter c2 v21-23,  
it is inevitable- Jesus assumed it. Luke c11 v50-51, 2 Tim c3 v12
  - b) Honesty – talking to God
  - c) Listening to God
  - d) Graciousness when pressured or persecuted – 1 Peter c3 v 15- 16
  - e) Not giving others a reason to make us suffer! 1 Peter 3 v13-14
  - f) Perspective and hope 2 Cor c4 v16-18

## Quotes on suffering

Only one who has borne the wounds of suffering and has emerged battered but regenerated can offer much practical help to the person seeking liberation (Martin Israel)

There is no Easter without Good Friday (Matthew Fox)

In sorrow and suffering, go straight to God with confidence and you will be strengthened, enlightened and instructed (St John of the Cross)

The chief pang of most trials is not so much the actual suffering itself as our own spirit of resistance to it (Jean Nicolas Grou)

Our immersion in the world's suffering is like tickling our toes in the ocean of sorrow and need, in comparison with that Calvary-life which plunges into the whole food, (Thomas Kelly)

My little experience has taught me that suffering is a very disturbing thing, and requires more grace than most of us possess (Edward King)

Suffering is the very best gift he has to give us; He gives it only to His chosen friends, (Therese of Lisieux)

Suffering passes: having suffered never passes (Charles Peguy)

There will always be unhappiness in our lives, and it is right that there should be unhappiness for the sake of the love we bear. But right as these sufferings are, they should not last as long as our souls. They should be transitory. What should endure is our normal state –the state to which we should constantly return – is joy in the glory of God, joy at seeing that Jesus is suffering no longer and will suffer no more, but is in bliss forever at the right hand of God. (Charles de Foucauld)

A Christian is someone who shares the sufferings of God in the world (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

## **Group material on “Suffering as a follower of Jesus”**

Select and adapt what you think will work for your group.

### **Introduction**

We live in a world that is not as God planned and as a result everyone is at risk of pain and suffering and nearly everyone has experienced it. Think about the news stories you have heard in the last 3 days. What sort of sufferings and pain have you come across?

However as Christians we are at risk of suffering not only because we are human but also because we are disciples. Paul warned Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus –who wants to follow him and live in a way that honours him – will be persecuted (2 Timothy c3 v12) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that “when Christ calls a person he bids them come and die.” Which is a challenge but should make us ask “So just how important is Jesus to me?” Do we have to choose between being happy and being holy?

We are going to look at the lives of a group of friends in the Old Testament who wanted to live godly lives in a world that wasn’t and suffered as a result

### **Suffering by missing out**

Daniel and his friends had been seized from their homes by a besieging army and forcibly enrolled in the Babylonian leadership academy for training for the imperial civil service. Better than the salt mines, but there were juicy strings attached !

*Read Daniel c1 v8*

- 1) Have you ever felt you should say “no” to something that everyone else thought was just fine? Why did you decide you had to say no?
- 2) How did other people react? Did they put pressure on you to fit in? (v10)
- 3) How did it work out?
- 4) Do you ever think that you are losing out on Life because you are a disciple of Jesus? If so, how do you cope with it? Is Mark 10 v28-30 any help?

### **Sharing in the suffering of being human**

- 1) What suffering did Daniel and his friends have in common with the other exiles? (Daniel c1 v3). Do you know anyone who is suffering through no fault of their own?
- 2) Nebuchadnezzar had a bad dream. He knew it had huge significance. But he couldn’t remember it (or said he couldn’t). The dream doctors were called in –but no history, no diagnosis! So – what use are experts?

*Read Daniel c2 v10-13*

- 3) What do you think of Nebuchadnezzar's approach? How would you have responded if you had been an astrologer?
- 4) How did Daniel and his friends react (v13-18)?
- 5) What effect do you think their reaction had on those around them?
- 6) How might your being a disciple make a difference if for example, your street had to be evacuated because of a gas leak?

### **Suffering because you have no choice**

*Read Daniel 3 v1, 4-7, 12-14, 16-18*

- 1) Why do you think the three friends chose to stand out? Were they being unnecessarily provocative? What if they had simply obeyed the king while holding onto their belief in God in their hearts?
- 2) What modern equivalents of the "burning fiery furnace" have disciples of Jesus faced?
- 3) What do you make of the friends' answer to the king?
- 4) Where did their courage come from? Does Luke c21 v12-17 give any clues?

It would be good to spend some time praying for our brothers and sisters in Jesus who are actually facing the choice between denying Jesus and death right now.

### **Suffering because you choose to be consistent**

It is not likely that we will face the "crisis choice" that the 3 friends had. (But remember that Christians in England have had to face it in the past and only God knows the future). However that does not mean it is easy to be a Christian in a society that holds different values.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death Daniel was sidelined for 23 years (being ignored can be a form of suffering). As Babylon was besieged he was called out of retirement to interpret the 'writing on the wall' (c5), survived the fall of the city and became a lead administrator to the conquering Persian, Darius. His colleagues were not exactly happy (c6 v4) but could not find anything to use against him. So they conned the king into making an arbitrary law they knew Daniel would break.

*Read Daniel c6 v10-12a.*

- 1) Have you had any experience of "official difficulties" in being a disciple? What problems have fellow disciples had in this country that you have heard about? (Try looking at the "Christian Concern" website)
- 2) Was Daniel being deliberately provocative? (After all the windows don't need to be open for God to hear). How do we draw the line between faithful witness and "being difficult"?

- 3) How should we support fellow disciples who face suffering because they have shared their faith?
- 4) How far would you “dare to be a Daniel”?

### **Conclusion**

Parts of this study may have made you feel uncomfortable (they did me as I prepared it !). Just how important is Jesus to us compared to everything else? Would I be prepared to stand firm? Could I if it came to the crunch? (but remember Jesus' promise in Matthew 28v20). If I was hauled up before the courts and accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict me?

And is it –is being a disciple - really worth it? Can I really do what James says (c1v2) and count it 'pure joy' when I face various trials?

Read Hebrews 12 v2 -3 and turn it into a prayer for yourself and for your fellow disciples who are suffering as disciples of Jesus.

And then come along on Sunday and next week to learn about the reverse of the medal!

## **Service 6 - The joy of discipleship**

There is no direct counterpart to this in “Holy Habits” but after last week we felt we should “accentuate the positive” After all if we are destined for a life of joy with God for ever we had better start getting used to it !

In preparing we were struck by how much joy is intended by God to be part of life as a whole, not “just’ a special sense of holy happiness!

### **Possible readings: Nehemiah 8 v9-18; Psalm 98; John 16 v19-24**

These readings are ‘sustained passages” where joy is the key theme. They do not cover all aspects of joy but show it in creation and worship (Ps98), in the life of the people of God (Nehemiah 8) and in our relationship with Jesus (John 16)

### **Possible themes:**

There are a huge number of references to joy in the Bible – over 240 according to the NIV concordance. Some are to be found in parts of the Bible where we might not expect there to be much joy! The following headings are an attempt to roughly categorise a small selection of them to give you some ideas that might be helpful as you prepare.

**God is full of joy** and is the source of the joy that is a mark of his kingdom.

1 Chronicles 16v27; Matthew 13v44; Rom 14v7; Hebrews 1v9

### **God intends for his creation to be full of joy**

That’s the way he made it and although sin has marred it, the basic truth is still there.

Deut 16v15; 1 Chronicles 16v 31-33; Job 38v7; Ps 51v12; Ps 65 v13;

Ps 66v1; Luke 2v10; John 16v19- 24, 17v37; Acts 14v21

### **Our joy as God’s people comes from a restored relationship with God**

Luke 10v21; Acts 16v34; 1Peter 1v8; Philippians 1v25; 1 Peter 1v8

We are redeemed Job 33 v23-26

We are accepted Leviticus 9v24

### **Joy is a result of God’s generosity and care:**

Nehemiah 8 v9-18; Esther 8v16, 9v22; Luke 1v58

### **Joy as a fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5v22**

### **Joy as a keynote of our lives**

In our relationship with God: Ps 16v8-11:Ps21 v6

In worship: 1 Chronicles 29v17; 2 Chronicles 30v26; Ezra 3v11-13; Ps 43v7;  
Luke 24v52

In prayer: Phil 1v4; Nehemiah 8v19-18

In reading: God's word Ps 19v8

In our work for God: Ecclesiastes 8v13; Luke 10v17; Romans 15v32; 2 Cor 1v24  
(and a warning of what happens when we are not joyful! Deut 28v47)

In all circumstances: 2 Cor 8v2; Phil 4v4-6

Co-existing with other emotions: Ezra 3v11-13; Matt 28v8; Luke 24v41

In suffering: Luke 6v23; Acts 13v52 2 Cor 7v4-7: 1 Thess 1v6; James 1 v2; Hebrews 12 v2.

### **Joy in our relationships with others**

Rejoicing in their blessings Philemon 1 v7; Phil 4v1; 1 Thess 2v19-20

Joy as we share fellowship 1 Chronicles 29v22 John 1 v4, 1v14; 2 Tim 1v4

Joy results in unselfishness 2Cor 1v24 Phil 1v4; 2v2, 4v1; 1 Thess 2 v20;  
2John 1v14

Joy overflows into generosity 1 Chronicles 12v40; 2 Cor 8v2

### **Joy is forever**

Job 8v21 (Bildad's overall understanding was faulty –but in this verse he was right!);

Ps 30v5; Ps 132 v11; Jude 1v24

**Quotes on joy** (All of these except the last 3 are from “The Lion Handbook of Christian Quotations”)

- 1) What is more suitable and appropriate to true blessedness than an eternity of peace and joy? (John Calvin)
- 2) The church is failing in her mission if her dual concepts of sin and joy are defective (Martyn Lloyd Jones)
- 3) When I see you (God) I shall be filled with joy and you will give me rest (Bishop Simeon bar Sabba'e. (fourth century) facing martyrdom)
- 4) What should endure and be our normal state –the state to which we should constantly return – is joy in the glory of God (Charles de Foucauld)
- 5) Joy is the serious business of heaven (C.S. Lewis)
- 6) Sorrow is one of the things that are lent, not given. A thing that is lent may be taken away....Joy is given, sorrow is lent (Amy Carmichael)
- 7) Joy of heaven to earth come down (Charles Wesley)
- 8) A man who is filled with joy speaks and sings about happiness quite differently from one who is in the grip of fear (Martin Luther)
- 9) To rejoice at another person's joy is like being in heaven (Meister Eckhart)
- 10) Sheer joy is God's and this demands companionship (Thomas Aquinas)
- 11) True joy is that earnest wish we have of heaven, it is a treasure of the soul, and therefore should be laid in a safe place, and nothing in this world is a safe place to place it in. (John Donne)
- 12) To be a joy-bearer and a joy-giver says everything, for in our life, if one is joyful, it means one is faithfully living for God, and that *nothing else counts*; and if one gives joy to others one is doing God's work; with joy without and within, all is well (Janet Erskine Stuart)

13) Choose joy because happiness is not enough” (Kay Warren)

14) (Joy is) the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright and the determined choice to praise God in every situation (Kay Warren)

15) We know of no joy higher than being loved and loving in return, but a three in one God would know that love and joy in unimaginable, infinite dimensions. God is, therefore, infinitely, profoundly *happy*, filled with perfect joy – not some abstract tranquillity but the fierce happiness of dynamic loving relationships. Knowing this God is not to get beyond emotions or thoughts but to be filled with glorious love and joy. (Tim Keller)

### **Group material for “The joy of discipleship”**

Last time we looked at the suffering that can accompany discipleship. But the fact that there may be elements of discipleship that we would rather avoid should not put us off completely. Many aspects of our lives are a balance of pleasures and difficulties. Most parents with adult children will agree that their offspring have been the source of a great deal of worry over the years and yet the joy that has come from them more than compensates for the hard times. It can be the same as we discover that the joys of discipleship outweigh the hardships.

In fact there is a great deal more spoken of joy in the Bible than of suffering. A word count of the NIV version came up with 72 instances of the word “suffering” but 241 mentions of the word “joy” - almost 4 times more!

*Read Psalm 16:8-11*

This psalm talks of “eternal pleasures” which highlights something important: The suffering (great or small) that we might have to endure as we follow Jesus is limited to our time in this world. The joy gained from our discipleship can be experienced immediately but can also be extended into a limitless future.

Jesus spoke about this everlasting benefit of discipleship.

*Read Matthew 19:27-30*

Following Jesus brings with it the promise of eternal life but we should also recognise what our faith in Jesus can do for us in the here and now.

There seems to be a common tendency for people to both worry about mistakes they've made in the past and to worry about what the future holds. Through his sacrifice Jesus allows us to put behind us all our failings and guides and guards us throughout our lives.

*Read John 10:7-16*

We should not overlook the joys and benefits that comes from discipleship itself:

There is the privilege and the delight of knowing God and to be able to worship our creator.

There is the honour of being God's temples

There is the opportunity of being able to direct our prayers though the power of God's only son

There is the satisfaction that we can gain from following the example of Jesus and helping others

There is the pleasure of exploring God's word for ourselves through scripture

There is the enjoyment of fellowship with fellow Christians.

There are the gifts that the Holy Spirit has placed on each of us **Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11**

In the secular world happiness and joy seems to be surprisingly hard to find. Like good health it is something that cannot be bought. No amount of possessions seem to provide true satisfaction, it does not matter how shiny and expensive they are or how up-to-date the technology is. Contentment always seems to be one step further, just out of reach, "if only I had a" ..... whatever it might be?

In contrast a disciple of Jesus gets everything in one go: Limitless forgiveness, limitless love, and limitless life. That is certainly reason to be joyful! As Janet Erskine Stuart puts it "To be a joy-bearer and a joy-giver says everything, for in our life, if one is joyful, it means one is faithfully living for God, and that nothing else counts; and if one gives joy to others one is doing God's work; with joy without and within, all is well."

1. What have been the most joyful moments in your life?
2. In Matthew 19:27-30 Jesus says that though discipleship can make many difficult demands the result is worth the effort. Do you find verse 30 reassuring or even more challenging?

3. A number of joys and benefits that come from discipleship are listed in the introduction to this section. Can you think of any others?
4. Are there any that you have found particularly important?
5. Jesus makes it clear in John 10:7-16 that he is the shepherd and the “gate” to a full and joyful life but who do you think is the thief?
6. Who do you think might be the “other sheep that are not of this sheepfold” that Jesus talks about?
7. Do you feel that you have any gifts of the spirit? (Some are given in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 but yours might be different!) Can you see these gifts in others?

*Look again at Psalm 16:8-11.*

8. What benefits does the psalmist say they get from their faith?
9. Do you feel any of these in your life?
10. How can we be more joyful Christians?

## Service 7 – Disciples of Jesus

**Aim:** To emphasise we are following a person, not just a set of principles! Again there is no equivalent chapter in “Holy Habits” but the theme runs all through the book and we thought it was important to re-emphasise the message as we come to the end of the first section

**Content:**

Relationship not religion

**Scriptures:**

**OT:**

**Gospels:** John 6: 25-68

**NT:** Hebrews 12: 1-3

**Additional Information for Service Lead:**

You could use any of the “call” narratives e.g. Simon & Andrew, James & John, Matthew, Zacchaeus

Consider characteristics of Jesus that demonstrate His personhood and humanity:

He got: Hungry – Matt 21:18 Tired – John 4:6 Angry – Mark 3:5  
Frustrated – Luke 9:41 Sad – Matt 23:37

He: Enjoyed a party – Luke 7:34 Changed His mind – Matt 15:27-28  
Cared – Mark 8:2 Could be surprised – Luke 7:9  
Could be afraid – Luke 22:44 Experienced temptation – Matt 4:1

These all help us to see Jesus the man and help us to see He understands the full range of our human experience. They also help us to see something of His personality. He calls us to follow Him, in every aspect of our human condition.

Until Jesus came, the Jewish religion was all about following Rules and Laws and trying to be good enough for God. He came to show that true religion is more to do with a restored **RELATIONSHIP** with God.

Consider why Jesus is the One to follow, rather than any other. Perhaps draw a contrast with King David, who was not always right in the choices he made and the things he did.

Consider also, the difference between following the *person* Jesus, and contrast that with trying to follow the *principles* of Buddhism or the *teachings* of Mohammed, whilst Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith was “tempted in every way just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Heb.4 v.15)

## **Ideas for Creative activity**

### **Active Worship**

Organise a Conga. First try to get a group of people to read a set of instructions (make them quite complicated and obscure) that will tell them to organize a Conga and go round the church. Then, get someone who has been primed up beforehand to lead them.

Which was best? Which was easiest? This could illustrate how we can literally follow the PATH that Jesus took.

Play Simon Says or Follow my leader.

### **Young children or creative**

Cut a figure out of a piece of folded paper, so that you have a chain of people following a leader, and colour it in.

### **Other:**

In all weeks we need to reference back to Circuit vision as appropriate.

## **Group material for “Disciples of Jesus”**

1. The gospel passage for this week comes just after the account of Jesus feeding of the 5000.
  - a. Jesus told the people who had come looking for Him that they had their hearts set on the wrong priorities, and they responded that they wanted to perform God’s works, like Jesus was doing. But they didn’t know what to do or how to do it, and asked, “What should we do?”
  - b. What did Jesus say? (vv.25-29.)
  
2. What did He mean by that?

3. The people showed that they had misunderstood what had happened in the Old Testament account of How the Israelites were fed in the wilderness. What had they got wrong?
4. It is an interesting point to note that the meaning of the name Bethlehem is “House of Bread.” What is the true bread of God?
5. The people in the reading wanted the bread of God every day, but they didn’t understand what they were saying. How did Jesus answer them?
6. What promises did Jesus give to them (and us) in vv.37 & 39?
7. The people began to argue and complain about what Jesus was saying. They know Him, and knew his earthly parents. They found it hard to accept what He was saying to them.
  - a. Jesus told them “No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” and went on to say “They will all be taught by God.”
  - b. What do you think He meant by that?
8. In v.48 Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” and went on to say that “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” He also said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” This upset and confused many of those who were listening to Him. It sounded like Jesus was encouraging cannibalism. Also, the Old Testament Law forbade the drinking of blood as it represented the life of the creature that had shed it, and the life belonged to God.
  - a. What did Jesus mean when He told them they had to partake of His flesh and blood?
9. Many of Jesus’ disciples turned away from Jesus and stopped following Him, when they realized how fully His true followers would need to be committed to Him, and when they came across things they found hard to understand.
  - a. Have you made your own personal commitment to follow Jesus?
  - b. What gets in the way of deepening your own relationship with Him?
10. When Jesus asked the Twelve if they wanted to leave too, what was their reply?
  - a. When things get tough in your life and walk with Him, what is your response to that question?

## Service 8- Signs and wonders

This is based on c5 of “Holy Habits”. It is a phrase with “connotations” and may make some people feel a bit uneasy. But as you read the chapter you will have found that the message is the same as that of the “founder” of the modern missionary movement, William Carey: “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God” because he is the same God as in Acts.

**Aim:** To encourage us to expect God to do great things as we seriously follow him

**Key Verse:** Acts 2:43 NIV (Anglicised, 2011)

<sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

### Content:

The power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- 1) How God works: Yesterday, Today and Forever. He doesn't change. If he has done great things in the past (or in our past) then he can do them now, and in the future.
- 2) How might he work through us/our church? We need to acknowledge this may be through events that are clearly Miraculous in the sense of being beyond the expected, and surprising.
- 3) Andrew Roberts says on p80 of Holy Habits. Signs and Wonders have several purposes. They:
  - a) Bestow benefits on those blessed by them
  - b) Authenticate the identity of Jesus when done in his name
  - c) Provide evidence of the closeness (“immanence”) of the Kingdom
  - d) Form part of Christian Witness and produce faith.
- 4) We seek to encourage openness to what God wants to do and to the gifts and ministries He bestows.

### Scriptures:

**OT:** 1 Kings 17:7-16 (Widow of Zarephath), 2 Kings 5 (Naaman)

**Gospels:** Matthew 4:24 (Jesus' miracles summary) Luke 7:14–15 (Jesus raising the dead) Many more...

**NT:** Acts 2: 14- 24 (Peter's sermon); Acts 2: 42-47 (the Holy Habits passage); Rom 15: 17-19 (Paul's account of signs and wonders); 1 Cor 12:3-17(Gifts of the Spirit)

**Additional Information for Service Lead:**

*"God's power is for God's people, not just for individual believers." David Watson*

**Ideas for Creative activity:**

Very easy to use the "what might God do here" as a discussion piece with small groups and to encourage the stirring up of hopes and dreams

**Group material for "Signs and wonders".**

It is especially important with this topic to be sensitive to each other's beliefs and experiences, and it may be wise to state this explicitly at the start of the session.

Read Acts 3:1-10

- 1) What do you know about different Christian perspectives on whether signs and wonders continue today?
  
- 2) Do any group members have testimony of signs and wonders in their life or experience?
  
- 3) Are there any limits to what God can do? Can you think of things God chooses not to do?
  
- 4) In what way do signs and wonders
  - a. Bestow benefits on those blessed by them?
  - b. Authenticate the identity of Jesus when done in his name
  - c. Provide evidence of the closeness ("immanence") of the Kingdom
  - d. Form part of Christian Witness and produce faith.