



2
LIFT

Living Faith Today
BLOCK TWO | The Road Rises

Without pollinators food would not grow.

In most ecosystems bees are the most important pollinators.

Bumblebees are particularly good. Their wings beat 130 times per second and their large bodies vibrate flowers until they release pollen.

This 'buzz pollination' helps plants produce more fruit.

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Welcome to LiFT!

Haere mai!

We are delighted to welcome you to our *Living Faith Today* course (LiFT) Block 2.

LiFT has two aims: firstly, to help us to engage with the task of growing in the understanding of our faith, and in confidence in our discipleship; and secondly, to provide an introduction to theological study for those who might be exploring a vocation to a representative (ordained) or authorised (lay) ministry in the church. But mostly, LiFT is for anyone who wants to learn and grow in their faith!

All ministry is grounded in discipleship. Vocation (what we also describe as 'calling') is not only or even primarily about a function or office in the church. Discipleship is the primary vocation of following Jesus Christ, discovering what that means for our lives and the lives of our communities, and how we all grow and flourish together as human beings. It is our hope and prayer that through participating in LiFT, you will be inspired to continue to learn and grow in your faith, and to share that with others. This is the start of a pilgrimage, and we are thrilled that you have chosen to be part of it!

Each week there will be quite a lot of information to take in. Don't worry if you feel behind at any point, the workbook is designed so that each week you can spend time at your own pace going over material and making notes for yourself. If you have any questions, make sure to make a note and bring them to your local group for further reflection. Remember that Jesus' disciples often didn't get things quite right, so learning often happens over time in different ways.

A prayer for discipleship:

*Ka whakawhetai atu mātou ki a koe,
e te Ariki, i haere mai nei ki roto i te ao:
Meinga kia mau koe i ta mātou
tirohanga i tēnei rā.
Tohungia ō mātou whakaaro,
ō mātou kupu:
Akona mātou kia mātau,
kia mahi hoki i tāu e hiahia ai.
Noho mai, e te Ariki, i a mātou ka mahi nei
i ā mātou mahi mō te rā:
Ā, awhinatia mātou kia mōhio ki a koe
i roto i ā mātou mahi. Amine.*

*We thank you, Lord,
for coming into this world:
Keep our eyes fixed on You today.
Direct our thoughts and our words:
Teach us to know
and to do Your will.
Be with us, Lord,
as we take up our daily tasks:
Help us to recognise You in our work.
Amen.*

++Philip

LiFT | Living Faith Today was devised and written by
Right Reverend Dr Helen-Ann Hartley in 2017.
We are deeply grateful for this enduring gift
to the Diocese of Waikato and Taranaki.

2018 Schedule – Sessions 9 to 16

July 31st to September 18th

Jul-31	Session 9	Quiz The Panel
Aug-07	Session 10	Exploring Mission and Evangelism
Aug-14	Session 11	Living our Tikanga Rua Life
Aug-21	Session 12	What is theology? What is doctrine?
Aug-28	Session 13	The Triune God, Jesus Christ & the Holy Spirit
Sep-04	Session 14	The Church, Salvation and Heaven
Sep-11	Session 15	Understanding the Sacraments
Sep-18	Session 16	Christian Vision and Discipleship

Recommended format for each Tuesday evening:

7pm	arrivals, cup of tea, prayer together;
7.30pm	everyone joins the teaching session;
7.30pm-8.40pm	teaching and group work;
8.40pm-8.45pm	quick introduction to next week's session;
8.45pm-9pm	session ends with night prayer in regional groups.

(If you are unable to be at a session, please let your local tutor know!)

Each teaching centre has a local tutor/chaplain/coordinator. They are responsible for hosting the session, ensuring everyone has the materials they need, and facilitating the group discussions. They will also lead the times of prayer and keep the sessions moving along. This may mean some local conversations have to end before they have properly concluded. The important thing is to note where you still have things to discuss and come back to them on another occasion if you are able to. These are also the questions to explore in your weekly journal.

Please remember to bring your Bible, Prayer Book and any writing materials you may need with you each week!

Most people participating in LiFT will be doing so via the weekly video-conference sessions. Some will be accessing the sessions 'offline' at other times. If you are part of such a group then your sessions will more or less follow the format of the weekly gatherings. If you are doing LiFT alone, then make sure you connect with a local 'buddy', with someone whom you can discuss and reflect with over a coffee, or by phone or Skype. If you need help connecting with someone, please don't hesitate to contact the Ven Stephen Black (027 741 0949) who can help connect you.

The course-book that accompanies LiFT is +John Pritchard's *Living Faithfully*. From time to time, the sessions will ask us to engage with specific parts of this book. In-between times, you are encouraged to read the book, and make a note of what stands out for you from what +John says.

'And (Jesus) says to them, "Come here, after me, and I'll make you fish for human beings!" They immediately abandoned their nets and followed him' (Matthew 4.19-20)

(All Biblical quotations in LiFT are taken from Nicholas King's translation of the Bible, published by Kevin Mayhew)

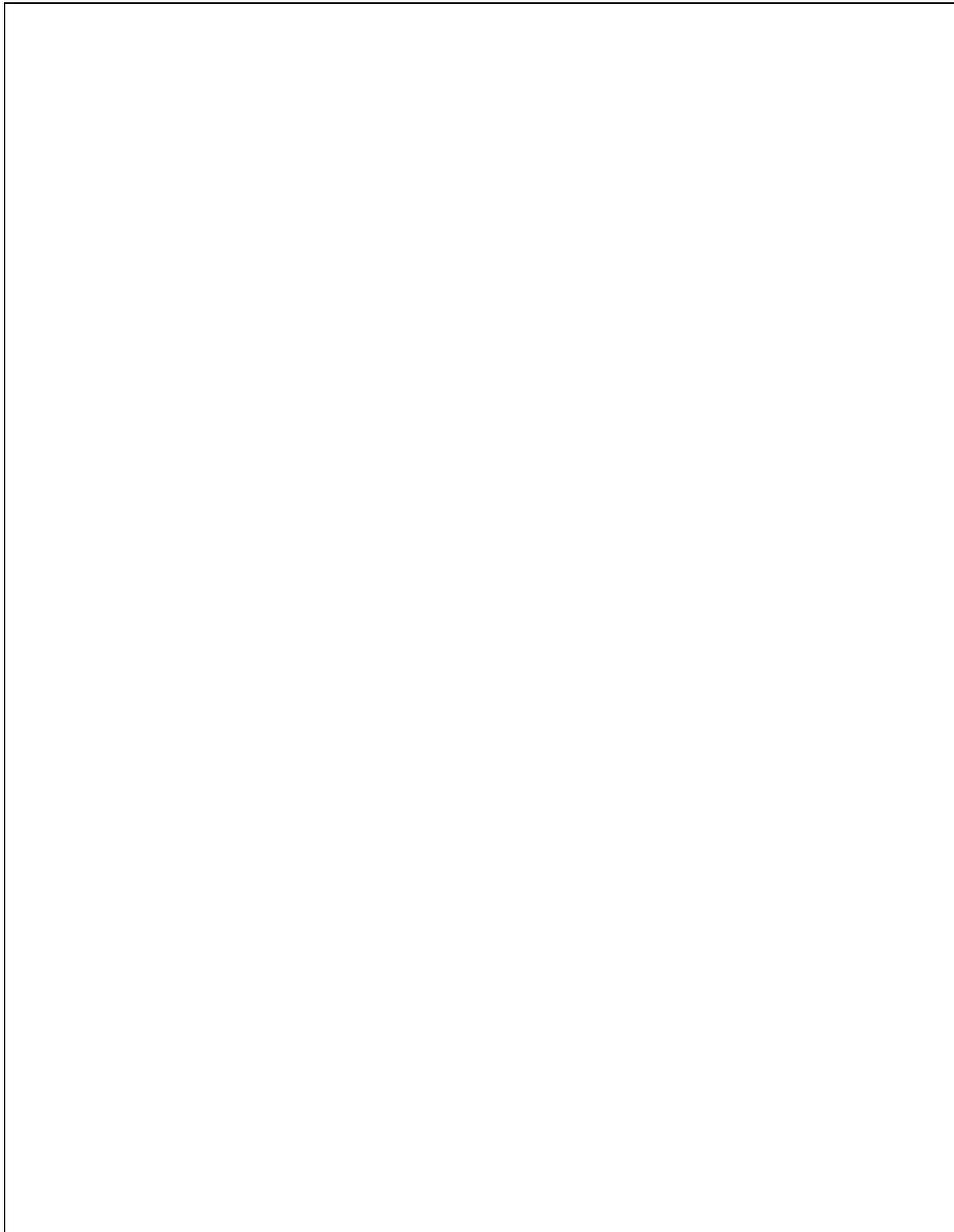
SESSION 9

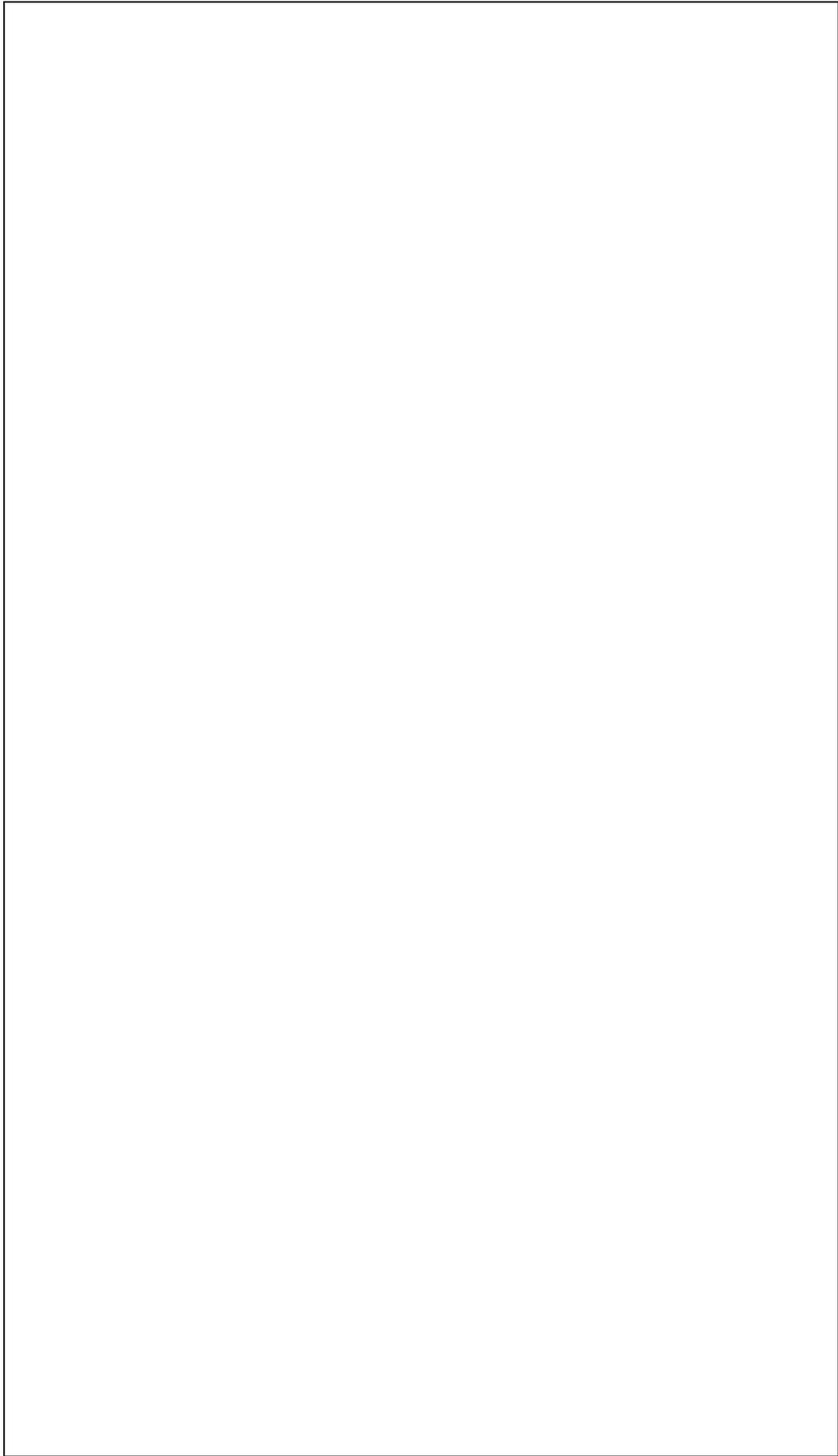
Quiz The Panel!

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

This is a different session than usual, in that the whole time will be devoted to the Panel answering questions about the content of the teaching thus far. Some discussion will be held in local groups, but the Panel will endeavour to answer as many questions as possible (and will admit when they can't answer the questions but will ponder them for further communication!).

You may wish to make some notes below (there is additional space at the end of this booklet):





OVERVIEW OF BLOCK 2 & GETTING READY FOR SESSION 10

Block 1 of LiFT focussed on getting to know the contents of the Bible more, and upon helping us to reflect on who Jesus is and how discipleship enables us to live out a life of faithfulness to our calling as children of God. We also considered the importance of prayer as a foundation for our lives, and the importance of ongoing reflection and learning. You will by now be well into keeping your journal, and that practice will continue as we move through the Block. This Block expands our horizons by asking us to think about our context, about relationships between Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pākeha, and about the intricacies of what we believe (theology and doctrine). Rather than simply taking what we believe at face value (and letting your vicar be the one who explains it all!), we are encouraged to do some of that thinking ourselves, and to give our brains a bit of a work-out! The good thing is that people have been wondering about God for hundreds of years, so we aren't alone in this voyage of discovery. Think of it as stepping on board a space-craft and beginning to explore the wonders of the universe: our vision and understanding will be expanded, and that will invariably shape and broaden our encounter with God.

Have a read of *Living Faithfully* pages 147-153. Session 10 will focus on how well we know our context. This chapter of *Living Faithfully* puts this on a massive scale by getting us to think about our whole planet! But the bigger perspective is always helpful, even when we are stuck for ideas about our own environment. You may find this meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful during the week ahead. Notice how it invites us to pay attention to the detail around us and the life that gives us, and the challenges we face through fear.

Psalm of the Dawn

As the sun climbs above the hill, to show itself in blinding

*light and warming heat; so you appear in our heart after
the long night of darkness.*

In darkness I have slept, and in the cold shivered; I know

my ignorance and fear, I am alone in the cosmos.

Before the dawn the birds were roused; calling to wake the

earth, singing hope, insisting on the coming of the day.

I heart them not; I rested long in my fear. I trembled to be alone.

The stars returned to their place, invisible beyond the

heavens; driven back by the coming of the sun.

The beasts retired to their lairs; the fear was of the dawning

day, to be exposed by the coming of the light.

Within the plants sap began to flow; the first light of dawn

touching the green to life.

With the full light of sun the green is bright; the air cleansed

by the growing.

*How happy are they who see the dawn; those for whom
night is gone.*

*How happy are they who feel the warmth of the sun; those
who know its strength will sing.*

*How happy are they who greet the day, with faith and health
restored; they will do your will.*

*Dawning God, dispel all the thoughts and fears of night, and
give us, with your creation, refreshment and renewal, that
we might this day reflect your light into the lives of others.*

Stephen Cherry *Barefoot Prayers*, SPCK, 2013, pp. 32-33.

SESSION 10

Exploring Mission and Evangelism

Ministry Today – understanding our context

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 143-153

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (20 mins). *Has anything arisen from the questions that the Panel was asked, or some of the answers that were given?*
- Examine what it means to know and understand our context (10 mins);
- Reflect on some theological writings that illumine this theme (45 mins);
- Consider the process of engaging in God's mission, and what 'evangelism' means (10mins)
- Pray together (before and after)

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF (10 mins)

Last week it was 'Quiz the Panel'! Has anything arisen from that that you are still wondering about? Anything that surprised you? Do you still have unanswered questions? What are they?

In local groups take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through the course.

KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING 'PLACE' (10 mins)

In his book *In-between God* (2011, ATF Theology pp. 134-5), Australia-based +Stephen Pickard writes:

'To talk about ecclesiology is to talk about place: about God's place; about our placement in the world; about how and why our social life operates as it does; about what engenders optimal life-enhancing community. Within the modern disciplines it is geography where such matters are particularly in focus. My concern in recent years is to see how theology might meditate upon the significance of place. In terms of Anglicanism it has seemed sensible to me to ask about our place down-under: about what it means to be Christian disciples in this place; about how our place has been constructed and how we might understand the transformation of place by the presence of Christ in the Spirit. As a result place has become the central mediating concept through which theology, ecclesiology, mission and ministry can be organised and better understood. This is more than an academic pursuit, as the deliberations of many Church Synods would testify...'

+Stephen has in a footnote to this paragraph a reference to his own (then) Diocesan Synod (Adelaide) discussions about whether parish boundaries make any sense and are helpful or not? Here in Waikato and Taranaki there was a similar debate in 2013. Do you know where your parish boundaries lie? Does this matter?

+Stephen goes on to reflect on the importance (in the Australian context) of acknowledging the colonial history of place. In our ecclesial context of course, the Anglican Church explicitly acknowledges our colonial history in the Three Tikanga structure. It would be fair to say that not all are aware or particularly interested in this. But it is important, and it is important to acknowledge that as Anglicans we hold our relationships as an intricate part of who we are and how we came to be disciples within this denomination. +Stephen talks about the importance of reconciliation: 'colonial space is subtly transformed into ecclesial space' (p. 152). This means that if we intentionally engage in reflection on place, on where we are, then we actually have the capacity with God's Spirit to transform that place into sacred space. That is a powerful image!

Take some time in local groups to reflect on the above, and share with one another your sense of 'your place'. How would you describe where you are? How well do you know your context, its demographic, its needs, its challenges and joys? What difference does it make to be in a rural setting, a setting that is perhaps isolated, an urban setting? What does it mean for us to assert that 'God is already at work in the community' and 'God has work for us to do in cooperation with others in the community?' What are the key features of where you are? You may want to make some notes below:

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME OF 'PLACE' (45 mins)

In this section, we will look at three theologians and reflect on their writing. There are questions for each section which you will explore together in your local groups. The purpose is to help our ongoing reflection on what 'place' means for us as disciples, and how we can better reflect and engage where we are so that we might encourage others to respond.

1. Louise Lawrence, 'Being 'Hefted': Reflections on Place, Stories and Contextual Bible Study' in *The Expository Times* Vol. 118, 2007, No. 11, pp. 530-35.

Louise Lawrence is an English New Testament scholar who teaches at the University of Exeter. Aspects of her work have a focus on anthropological approaches to New Testament texts, and cultural and contextual implications of reading scripture. This means that we take seriously the place in which we are located and how that impacts upon our understanding of scripture.

Point to ponder: *There is a story (which I believe to be true) about a relatively new priest working in Southland. He went along to a school to take an assembly about Jesus the Good Shepherd. He showed the children an image of Jesus carrying a sheep and asked them what they could see. Expecting them to answer quickly 'Jesus carrying a sheep,' he was confused when instead of saying that they studied the image with great concentration. Eventually the priest became quite frustrated and asked the children why they were being so slow. The response was that the children (all from farms) were trying to work out which breed of sheep Jesus was carrying!*

In her article, 'Being Hefted,' Lawrence explores attitudes surrounding people's declining attitudes and relationships to their 'place.' She defines 'a place' as somewhere involving a shared history, narrative and, most crucially, embodied interaction. A 'non-place' by contrast is bereft of such relationships. She proposes that a key 'place-making' activity for communities is Contextual Bible Study and the sharing of stories. She uses an example drawn from a pilot study in the Devon rural village of Drewsteigton (south-west England).

'...It turns out the word 'hefted' is actually used of sheep, who have inherited from their forebears a profound sense of place, an inbred, inbuilt and intimate knowledge of their land...A hefted flock would never voluntarily leave its land for to do so would be quite literally to forget who they were...From birth to burial we humans exist in 'places.' Whether breathtaking and beautiful or austere and unsightly these

places contribute something to our worldview and development. Social scientists, geographers and psychologists have all variously recorded some link between ‘who we are’ and ‘where we are.’ Theorists tell us however that ‘place’ is not a concept that should be understood solely in spatial terms – this place ‘here’ or ‘over there’ – neither should it be understood as purely ‘psychological’ – all in the ‘mind.’ Rather place is a ‘construction’ performed, reproduced and modified in practice, dialogue, shared experiences and stories...’

Lawrence goes on to cite the work of Tim Gorringer who talks about a ‘culture of good place-making’ as featuring:

‘...a body of knowledge and acquired skills. It is not bred in the bone and if it is not transmitted from one generation to the next it is lost...Second(ly)...place-making always involves the empowerment of the people in the locality. They must feel their voice is heard and listened to, for disempowerment perpetuates silence and social atomism. Third...a satisfying place ‘cannot be made without justice.’ This, related to the above point, can mean that each person, no matter how long they have lived in an area, what social level they are from, or indeed if they own or rent property or find refuge as alien or refugee, must be viewed and treated as equal stakeholders in the sense of place and community. Fourth...place-making involves either the recapturing or the creation of the charm of places, and from that the will to sustain them through specific practices. Attractive design and facilities for community interaction are essential. Finally...in Christian terms that the church should be a place-maker *par excellence*, for it must always strive for the realisation of the Kingdom on earth...’

Lawrence’s worked example of Contextual Bible Study used in the Devon village of Drewsteignton talks about the use of Luke’s parable of the prodigal son, ‘a story evocative enough to provoke a human reaction, with or without a faith background...All in all the methodology (of Contextual Bible Study) offered some interesting contextualising and reflections from the participants on the biblical narrative from the perspective of their place...The present situation in the Western world, where the distinctive, vernacular and particular are increasingly threatened, means that local community initiatives need to be developed in order to effect a recovery of a sense of place. The sharing of stories, narratives and Contextual Bible Study, has—it has been suggested—an important role to play in such endeavours.’

Questions for local group discussion:

- How can the church help shape a sense of ‘place’ for people? Discuss this with relationship to your context: urban, rural, mixed?
- Take a closer look at the cited work of Tim Gorringer above; in particular his claim that the church should be a place-maker *par excellence* for people? How can that be achieved? Are there signs of that in your context?

2. David Walker, Bishop of Manchester, President of the Rural Theology Association, U.K.

In an issue of the 'Rural Theology Association' newsletter (October 2015) +David writes:

'There's an old adage, and like all such it's a massive over-generalisation, that when a new person walks through the door of a suburban church, the first reaction of the vicar is to wonder what gifts and skills they might bring, and wish to offer, to the work of ministry and mission in the parish. By contrast, when a new person walks through the door of an inner city church, it is said that the vicar's first thought is about what needs they might have, and in what ways they will be looking to the church to help and support them. But what about the church in the countryside? What is the rural reaction to a new arrival in the congregation? My hunch is that the most helpful early reaction is to see the newcomer as somebody seeking a greater sense of belonging; belonging not just to God but to a community of others who seek to sustain their faith and practice through human fellowship...if we are serious about rural churches being missional churches, we don't need to wait for people to push tentatively at the church door one Sunday. We can be active in our villages, engaging with the people who show signs of interest in deepening their human belonging, and gently invite them to join with us, as those who not only know their need of human belonging, but are not far from discovering the link between that and our belonging to God.'

Questions for local group discussion:

- People aren't necessarily asking questions about whether or not God exists, but they are asking questions about how to live – discuss this statement as an invitation to engage in God's mission. How can we act that out where we are?
- Do you recognise the statements above about different contexts of churches and their potential responses to newcomers? What does that say about our priorities?

3. Andrew Davey 'The spirituality of everyday life' pp. 105-112 in *Spirituality in the City*, SPCK, 2005.

Andrew Davey is a London-based priest who has been an advisor on Urban and Community Affairs to the Archbishops' Council (Canterbury and York). In this article he writes about 'urban spirituality' (which he admits 'is to launch oneself into numerous debates about definition and experience').

'What is so different about prayer/spirituality in the city? How does the urban context affect the way we pray; and, in turn, how might our prayer affect the environment in which we pray? What are the strategies and tactics we might adopt? Urban settings have not always been seen as a conducive setting for 'things of the spirit.' The harsh anarchy of the industrial or commercial city has often been contrasted with the ordered serenity of the village green or cathedral close. Corruption is apparent in the smells, noise, pollution and the visual temptations. Hardly a place to pray; rather a place from which one could cry for release...The psalmist sings of a direct correlation between the pursuit of communal justice and the built environment...The vision of the heavenly city stands firm against the pagan Elysian fields – a vast habitation where one can only wonder at its extent and

inclusivity. The call to enter the new Jerusalem is one to participate in its maintenance, and to practice human freedom in the presence of God. The pursuit of the life of the spirit in the city reconnects us with that creative, communalising vision and energy; it enables us to celebrate, and engage with, the life of the city in our quest for the 'new ordering of God' on earth as it is in heaven.'

Questions for discussion in local groups:

- Davey talks later in his article about how 'we have lost our ability to comprehend the spirituality that exists in the urban environment around us.' How do you respond to that?
- Davey also describes cities as 'places of possibility and encounter.' How do you respond to that? If you aren't in a city, can you reimagine this question in your own context?
- How might we relate the image of the incarnation in John 1.1-18 with a rediscovery of the spirituality of 'place' (whether that be rural or urban, or mixed)?
- What happens if we 'cross the road' to ask our neighbours what they need? (A church community in the Diocese did this very thing recently, to a school, and this has resulted in a garden on church land being used by the school for teaching.)

MISSION AND EVANGELISM (10 mins)

It is a tall-order attempting to cover both these words in a short space of time! However, the intention here is to get us thinking...! Try and hold these words in mind throughout this Block and we will be returning to them towards the end of this section of LiFT. Perhaps you might journal how your responses to these words develop over the weeks in response to the topics we will be covering?

First up, in your local groups discuss what you think the words 'mission' and 'evangelism' mean? You may wish to make some notes below:

We can say that 'mission' (which means 'sent') refers to our calling to be God's people in our contexts, and the overall belief that God is a God of mission who is actively involved in our communities. What we have to do is to figure out where God is and join in. This means that

fundamentally it is not about Sunday worship! It is about being present in the community, and using resources wisely to meet community needs. When we do that, we engage in evangelism, telling the good news about Jesus Christ, in a way that means our whole lives witness to God's glory. So, if you don't want to talk about Jesus directly to someone you meet, you can certainly witness to how Jesus has impacted on your life and how that has made a difference to how you live your life.

In their book *How to do Mission Action Planning, a vision-centred approach* (SPCK, 2009) Mike Chew and Mark Ireland comment that: 'The mission of God is, of course, wider than evangelism. In the fullest sense, mission is about being sent. God is already at work in mission through his Spirit in every life, every culture and every community. Christians...must follow that call in all its dimensions...The 'five values for missionary churches' (are):

- A missionary church is focused on God the Trinity;
- A missionary church is incarnational;
- A missionary church is transformational;
- A missionary church makes new disciples;
- A missionary church is relational.

In local groups discuss these points above. Are they in the right order? You may wish to make some notes below:

GETTING READY FOR SESSION 11

Next week we will explore what 'Living our Tikanga Rua life' means. In preparation for that session, take a look at *Living Faithfully* pp. 87-93 on the theme of 'Making Peace.' What does it mean to live peaceably with one another? How can we work together to make our communities better places?

To begin to appreciate the Waikato story please watch the half-hour video, *The New Zealand Land Wars - Battle of Rangiaowhia* produced by Waka Huia TV and available on YouTube

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3BJLaDV4hg>); and also read Vincent O'Malley's article *Inglorious Dastards: Rangiaowhia raid and the 'great war for New Zealand'* (supplied separately).

Each time the course is run we try to alternate between Waikato and Taranaki. The content changes significantly according to which story is told. Therefore updates will be given to you as soon as they are available.

You may find this meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful in the week ahead:

Gentleness

*God of mist and dew,
of quiet and calm,
of lightness of touch:
help us to be gentle.*

Gentle with others.

Gentle with ourselves.

Gentle when anxious.

Gentle when angry.

Gentle in word.

Gentle at work.

*Give us, we pray,
the calm that makes for consideration,
the respect for others that makes us courteous.*

Give us a good pace of living.

Hold us back when we begin to rush.

Steady us when we panic.

Take from us the coarsening word, the cynical look.

*Take from our countenance any expression that could
unsettle one of your vulnerable ones.*

God of the Golden Rule.

let us be to others as we need them to be to us.

And let others be to us as we

seek to be to them.

When we fail, forgive us.

When they fail, heal us.

When we hurt each other, reconcile us.

And all by your most gentle grace.

Stephen Cherry *Barefoot Prayers*, SPCK, 2013, pp. 93-94.

SESSION 11

Living our Tikanga Rua life

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 87-93

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10mins). *Do you still have questions? What are the areas that you would like to explore and ponder more?*
- Pray together (before and after)
- Begin to understand a Māori perspective on history that shapes our understandings and perspectives
- Explore the complex nature of the relationship between "Te Haahi Mihinare" and Te Iwi Māori
- Begin to forge a way forward and share ideas for new beginnings
- (Each time the course is run we try to alternate between Taranaki and Waikato)

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF (10 mins)

Last week you had the opportunity to ask lots of questions! Has anything from that stood out? Are there still questions that you would like to reflect on? Where have your own major learning points been so far in LiFT?

In local groups take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through the course.

Context

We will begin by sharing our reflections on *The New Zealand Land Wars - Battle of Rangiaowhia* and Vincent O'Malley's article *Inglorious Dastards: Rangiaowhia raid and the 'great war for New Zealand'* (article supplied separately).

Spend some time talking about what was new for you in what you've seen and read?

Waikato/Taranaki relationships with the Church (25 mins)

- Waikato/Taranaki relationships with the Church before the wars, during and after.
- An identity shaped by war.
- How crucial it is for Pakeha and non-Maori to understand what happened.

Break (5 mins)

Being Tikanga Rua (15 mins)

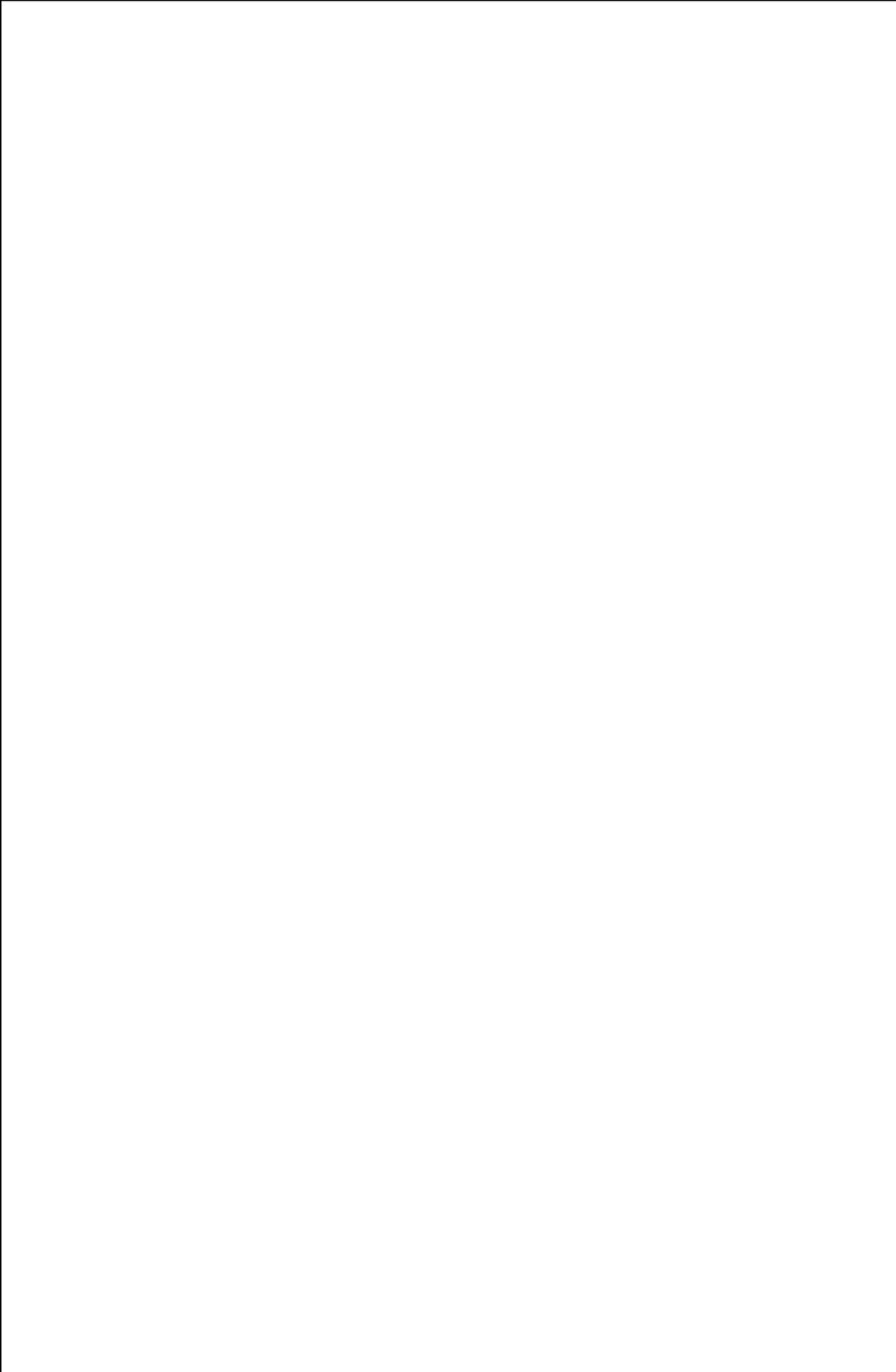
- Being Tikanga Rua in 2017 and beyond: how understanding the past informs the future.

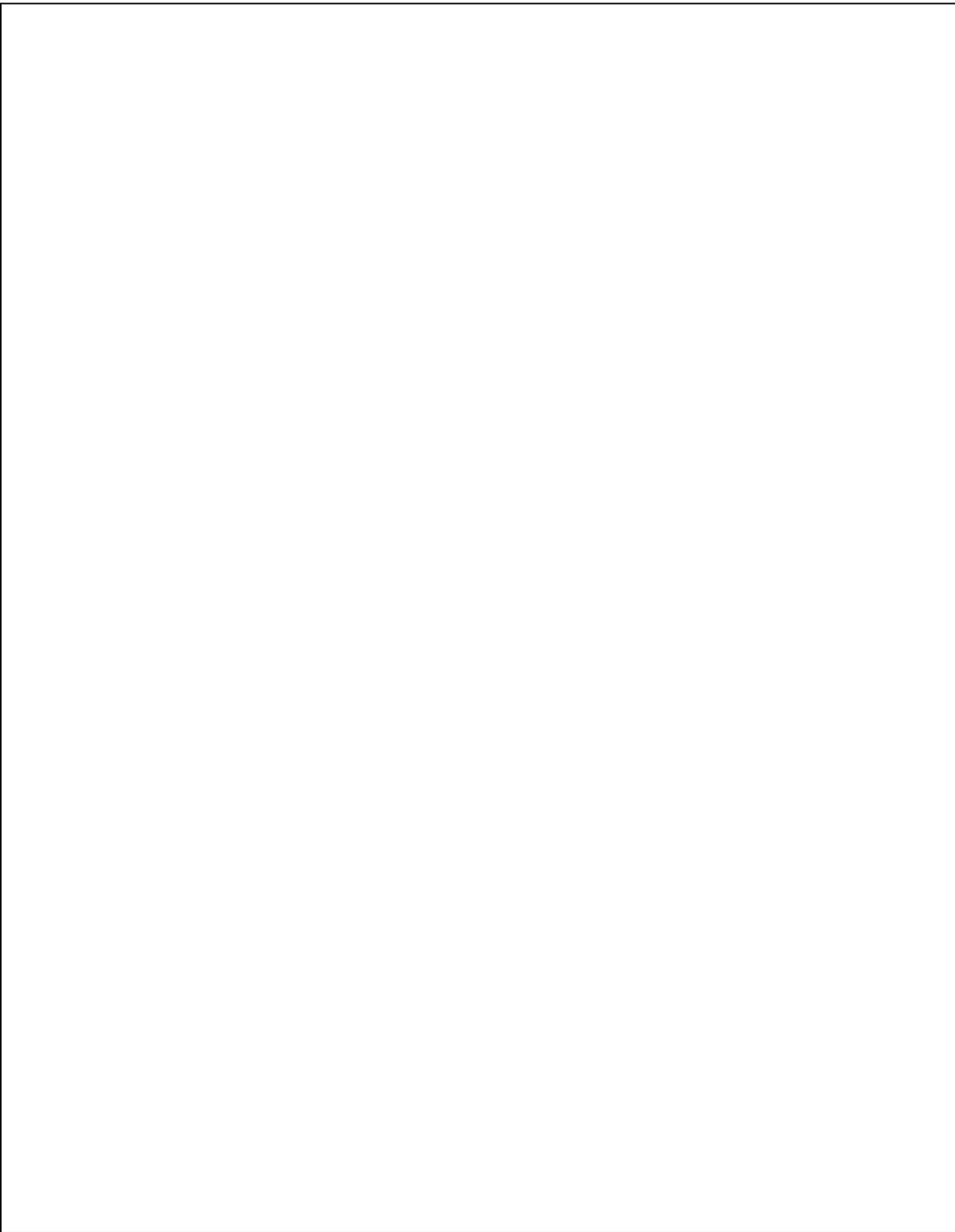
Group discussion (10 mins)

What have you learnt tonight?

How will that shape your ministry?

Where is your local Maori community - how can you connect with them?





GETTING READY FOR SESSION 12

Next week we will take a look at *Living Faithfully* pp. 26-31. In this section, +John Pritchard reflects on God's guidance. As we begin to look more in depth about our belief in God, this passage reassures us that as we try to know God, God already knows us well; therefore we have nothing to fear in our wondering about God. You might find this meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful as you prepare for next week:

Hosanna

It's not like me to shout –

honestly.

But then:

it's not like a Messiah to come –

humbly.

Humble Messiah,

hear our hosannas today.

Hear us and help us.

Hear us and heal us.

Accept all that we throw at you:

our garments,

these branches,

the shouts

that come from our hearts, our

sharply broken hearts.

Heroic Son of David:

heal us, and

give us the hope we cannot grasp.

Holy Son of David:

heal us, and

open the gate of heaven.

Humble Son of David:

heal us, and

let us follow.

Stephen Cherry, *Barefoot Prayers*, SPCK, 2013, p. 103.

SESSION 12

What is theology? What is doctrine?

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 26-31

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10 mins). *Has anything arisen from the material that was covered? Have you reflected on how you can enable and nurture Tikanga Rua relationships?*
- Think about what 'theology' is, and how we can engage with it (30 mins)
- Think about what 'doctrine' is, and how we can engage with it (30 mins)
- Pray together (before and after)

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF

Last week you had the opportunity to ask lots of questions! Has anything from that stood out? Are there still questions that you would like to reflect on? Where have your own major learning points been so far in LiFT?

In local groups take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through the course.

WHAT IS THEOLOGY, AND HOW CAN WE ENGAGE WITH IT? (30 mins)

A poster once said, 'There was a light until along came a theologian and snuffed it out.' *What do you think about that statement?* In part, this sort of opinion is a reaction to a perceived clouding of the

waters of clarity about who God is. There is a perception that 'theology' is more about confusing people with strange words and ideas, when all you really need is a personal relationship with God. You don't need books, boring lectures or fancy words for that! But let's just pause there a moment. Is that a fair opinion to hold?

*In your local groups, spend a few minutes responding to those thoughts. What do **you** think about 'theology' as a pursuit, as an idea? Does that word excite you, or confuse you? What sorts of things do you think a 'theologian' does? You may wish to make some notes below:*

In Block 1, a book by the author Francis Spufford was briefly mentioned. In 2012, he sat down in a coffee shop and wrote *Unapologetic. Why, despite everything, Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense* (Faber and Faber). It's a brilliant book which unashamedly states the case for Christian belief. But it does so in a real and raw way. If theology is going to be any use for us, it has to be real and raw, and able to grapple with the big questions that people are asking today. It is true that while not everyone might be asking questions about whether or not God exists, they are asking questions about how to live. That can often be the entry point for a conversation (in time) about God. Indeed, take the word 'theology': it is made up of two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *logos* - (word), so, at a basic level, theology is words about God. So anytime you talk about your faith, about God, about anything in your life that you might be trying to relate to God, you are actually doing theology. We are all theologians!

Back to Francis Spufford. At the start of his book he says this (be warned, he is provocative!):

'My daughter has just turned six. Some time over the next year or so, she will discover that her parents are *weird*. We're weird because we go to church.

This means – well, as she gets older there'll be voices telling her what it means, getting louder and louder until by the time she's a teenager they'll be shouting right in her ear. It means that we believe in a load of bronze-age absurdities. It means that we don't believe in dinosaurs. It means we're dogmatic. That we're self-righteous. That we fetishise pain and suffering. That we advocate wishy-washy niceness. That we promise the oppressed pie in the sky when they die...That we're too stupid to understand the irrationality of our creeds...That we're savagely

judgemental...That we're infantile and can't do without an illusory daddy in the sky...That we get all snooty and yuck-no-thanks about transsexuals, but think it's perfectly normal for middle-aged men to wear purple dresses...' (pp. 1-2).

This is quite deliberately provocative, and it sets out many of the stereotypes that people have about God and about people of faith. Spufford is bold in his words, and in his mandate to us that we need to be able to wrestle with our faith and to be confident in our beliefs. In order to witness to this—so Spufford implies in his book—it might be a good idea to take theology seriously, inasmuch as theology is about thinking deeply about God and why we believe, and being able to talk about that without fear of ridicule. While we are on the topic, another excellent book is by Rupert Shortt, *God is no thing. Coherent Christianity* (2016, C Hurst & Co.). This book is accessible and worth a read, though be prepared to take your brain for a bit of a work-out!

It's probably more the case that we 'do' theology rather than 'speak' it (though that is certainly true). When you first meet someone you will probably ask them some questions about who they are, and where they have come from? But let's turn that around and put the focus on you (us) because, as has been mentioned already above, you are a theologian already!

Jeff Astley, author of *Studying God: Doing Theology* (2014, SCM Press) says this (and here is trying to make a helpful distinction between academic theology and ordinary theology). It's quite a long quote, but bear with it because it is making some very helpful points:

'...ordinary theology tends to use anecdotes and insights from our ordinary experience and reflections about God, mixed with wise sayings and aphorisms that we have heard from others. It is inclined to speak of God largely in metaphor and parable, in the same way that much of the theology does that we hear in Scripture and hymns. Academic theology, in particular in the area of 'doctrine' (that is, Christian teachings), develops these personal, experiential stories and other figures of speech into impersonal concepts, pruning away at the riotous natural language of the religious woodland until it is transformed into the smoother contours of shrubs in a formal theological garden. It also seeks, by using reasoned arguments, to connect these elements together 'systematically' into one pattern, so that people can more easily move from one part to another...All this makes academic theology seem rather superior. But I would argue that, while such systematic, careful and critical thinking about God can be very helpful, it must always relate back to the ordinary theology that lies in the heart of everyday believers and thus at the heart of the Christian Church. In fact, ordinary theology has a religious or, better, a *spiritual* priority. It is our first theology, which arises directly from our faith, our experience and our relationship with God in worship and prayer: which themselves chiefly originate in our responses both to the gospel story and its challenges and to the reactions to these things of other Christians' (p. 3).

Here are some ordinary theological points made in conversations (again from the above book, p. 8):

- 'I think Jesus is full of God.'
- 'I, in my mind, think of Jesus to be an outer limb of God.'
- 'I suppose if you look at it in terms of getting into a stadium, and God is giving out the tickets...You don't need to spend loads of money to get a ticket. In fact, it is probably the more lowly person who is more guaranteed a place.'

- (someone talking about the difference between the Old and New Testaments)
'Perhaps God calmed down a bit when he got a son.'

Take some time in local groups to think about the above material, in particular the quotes just mentioned. Is there anything important or valuable contained in them? What might you want to add? If someone asked you about God, what would you say?

In his book *Let's do theology. Resources for Contextual Theology* (2009, Continuum), Laurie Green says this:

'Christianity is a transforming and vibrant faith which holds the key to our deepest concerns, and yet we are best with the constant difficulty of trying to find a fulfilling way to integrate our Christian belief and our daily life; instead, we hear this wonderful Christian faith being smothered by churchy arguments, complicated theological jargon and what sound like contrived explanations...It seems to me, that this sort of Christian witness to the relevance and vitality of the Christian faith could be greatly assisted if Christian had better tools for understanding the faith, and for seeing how very clearly it does relate to their joys and struggles. Those outside the Church would then be able to look at the lives of Christians in the Church and indeed feel that they were on their own wavelength, witnessing to a faith that does indeed ring many bells consonant with their own experience of God in their lives.'

This gives us some hope in our current endeavour, and indeed quite a lot of purpose! Laurie Green goes on to give us a scenario. Read it below and spend some time in your local groups discussing the process of 'doing theology' that it contains:

'Freda is an ordinary Christian woman faced with a problem. She is sitting in the office at the back of the shop where she works. She has just learnt from the boss of the chain of stores that employs her that she must make one of her staff redundant if the shop is not to close. She has good relationships with her staff and knows their personal stories – but she's been told that one of them has to go. First of all, she decides that the best thing to do is to read up on the law relating to employment, redundancy, and so on, and then to check the facts of the case carefully with her boss and her colleagues. Being a committed Christian, she might soon start praying about the situation, but this will not be the only thing she can call upon to help her to work out the answer to her problem. She may also find, for example, that she is helped by reflection with local Christians, perhaps at a Bible study group if there is one. Or maybe, as she worships the next Sunday morning, she finds herself singing a hymn that somehow puts her choices into better perspective. A talk with her vicar may prove helpful, or maybe she takes a Christian magazine and happens to read an article about the choices that Christians have to make in today's world. All this activity may help her in all sorts of ways to come to a decision about how she is going to cope with her work situations. She then talks with her colleagues at the store and they devise a strategy and implement it together. The question before us now is, 'Has Freda been doing theology during this process...?' (pp. 6-7)

We know that:

- Freda has been reflecting in her mind and her heart upon the nature of God, and what God would have her do in this situation;
- Freda has prayed;
- Freda has engaged with God's word in her Bible study;
- Freda has attended worship the next Sunday;
- Freda has had a chat with the vicar;
- Freda has continued with her reflections at work on the matter at hand, and this has been intimately part of her overall response to the situation. Maybe Freda was able to work with others and present an alternative solution to the boss to prevent someone having to be made redundant.

Laurie Green (pp. 10-15) presents a number of points which he describes as being part of 'doing theology':

- Theology is about salvation and the kingdom of God. People need to become the active subjects of their situations rather than pawns in the game of life;
- Theology includes action;
- Theology is about questioning power;
- All theology has context;
- Theology is about proclaiming that God is concerned for the marginalised;
- Theology is about recognising that we are in God's presence and that courageous spirituality is important.

You may have some points of your own to add to this list?

In terms of a method to help us engage, Laurie Green presents the following:

Start with experience;

Explore it;

Reflect on it;

Respond.

The past two points are critical, particularly in moving from reflection to action!

In your local groups, can you think of a situation that you are facing that through applying the above model in a conscious way, might help you find a way through it? It may be that you have a personal matter that you don't necessarily want to share with the group. That is fine! Take some time to think about it and you may want to make some notes below:

WHAT IS DOCTRINE, AND HOW CAN WE ENGAGE WITH IT? (30 mins)

John V. Taylor, who was a bishop and theologian said this, 'The choice for every human being is between death or death, the death of a letting-go that hurts like hell but leads to resurrection, or the death of slow extinction as all the energies are spent on getting and keeping, instead of living and giving' (quoted in +John Pritchard's *How to Explain your Faith*, 2006, SPCK, p. 15).

It is true to say that theologians have wrestled with this for centuries by seeking deeper meaning and understanding of God and the particularities of our faith. That quote above is a provocative description of where the Church is at today. We are at a cross-roads in many places: do we really believe in resurrection, or do we slowly die putting off the inevitable...?

The theologian Daniel Migliore says this:

'Christian theology has many tasks. This is evident both from a reading of the history of theology and from the wide variety of current understandings of its nature and task. Some theologians today contend that the task of Christian theology is to provide a clear and comprehensive description of Christian doctrine. Other theologians emphasize the importance of translating Christian faith in terms that are intelligible to the wider culture. For others theology is defined broadly as thinking about important issues from the perspective of Christian faith. And still others insist that theology is reflection on the practice of Christian faith within an oppressed community.

Underlying each of these understandings of the task of theology is the assumption that faith and inquiry are inseparable. Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God. In this chapter I propose to describe the work of theology as a continuing search for the fullness of the truth of God made known in Jesus Christ...Christian faith prompts inquiry...' (pp. 1-2)

This all suggests that theology and doctrine (which comes from a Latin word meaning 'teaching'), are linked in that enquiry about God leads to the formulation of beliefs, and as Christians we subscribe to those beliefs as they have been put together (for example) in our Creeds.

In your prayer book take a look at the Creed on pp. 410-411. This is the Nicene Creed, which was adopted by the Council of Nicea in 325. In 381, it was amended at the 1st Council of Constantinople (here it speaks of the Holy Spirit as worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son). It is helpful to understand that the Creed was originally developed in response to the Arian controversy, where Jesus' divinity was denied. So already we can see how doctrine (teaching) is developed in response to situations.

In your local groups, take some time to work through the Nicene Creed. What are the doctrines about God that it contains? You may wish to make notes below. Bear in mind that for Anglicans, many of our doctrines are contained in our prayer books. So we are engaging in doctrine all the time!

Christian doctrine might be best described as bringing together beliefs about God in a systematic way. For this reason, academic theology is sometimes called ‘systematic’ theology: it is the study of systems of belief that, taken together, sum up what we think about God. It is important to remember that this is an historical endeavour. Thus our understanding of God has been worked out down the ages.

Daniel Migliore writes that the task of such theology is ‘to venture a faithful, coherent, timely, and responsible articulation of Christian faith. This is a critical and creative activity, and it requires both courage and humility. Systematic theology is challenged to rethink and reinterpret the doctrines and practices of the church in the light of what the church itself avows to be of central importance – namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ that liberates and renews life. All Christians, and especially those who exercise leadership in the Christian community as pastors and teachers, participate in the task of systematic theology insofar as they are constrained to ask at least four basic questions that bear upon every phase of Christian life and ministry’ (p. 11).

1. Are the proclamation and practice of the community of faith true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested in Scripture?
2. Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith give adequate expression to the whole truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ?
3. Do the proclamation and practice of the community of faith represent the God of Jesus Christ as a living reality in the present context?
4. Does the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by the community of faith lead to transforming practice in personal and social life?

(pp. 10-15)

These points above indicate that all of us should be engaging in the work of theology (as doctrine) all the time! We cannot separate the processes of thinking about our faith from how that faith is lived

out. Therefore we can take what others have said about God and incorporate this into our daily lives and reflections on God where we are.

In your local groups, take some time to share some ideas about how you might engage with a conscious process of thinking about God actively in your context. How might this be done in Vestry, or over morning tea? Share some ideas and strategies and make some notes below:

There are different ways of understanding how doctrine works and was (and is) developed; we have hinted at the historical nature of doctrine above when we looked at the Nicene Creed. The Anglican theologian Alistair McGrath writes that ‘Many theologians would argue that Christian theology is the exploration of the basic ideas of these creeds, investigating their basis in the Bible, and their impact on Christian thinking and living’ (p. xi-xii in *Theology. The Basics* 2004, Blackwell Publishing). McGrath goes on to outline aspects of what might be called an historical approach to understanding doctrine, by looking at figures such as Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74) and John Calvin (1509-64), and Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Karl Rahner (1904-84) [we might note in passing that the majority of theologians that are talked about happen to be men]. We can also look at historical periods such as the patristic period (100-451); the medieval period (up to 1500); the reformation (the 17th century); and the modern period (18th century onwards). In addition we could consider doctrine by topics (which is what we will be doing mostly from next week onwards).

Another innovative approach is made by Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland (eds.) in *Constructive Theology, a contemporary approach to classical themes* (2005, Fortress Press p. 8 onwards). Here we are reminded of the challenge of the word ‘doctrine,’ which ‘conjures up images of ironclad statements to which they must assent under the threat of heresy.’ This is what Francis Spufford is getting at in his writing (doctrine essentially has an image problem). So Jones and Lakeland proposed an alternative approach which they describe doctrines as ‘theological geographies’:

‘According to this image, doctrines are like maps – they are theological geographies drawn to guide Christians as they struggle to understand their faith. To grasp this metaphor, it may help to think, first, about the complex mental world of our deeply held beliefs about God – a rather large territory, to say the least. Next, try imagining this world of beliefs as a landscape – a vast and complex terrain holding within its borders all those images, stories, concepts, practices, and feelings that make up the sum total of ‘what we believe in.’ Now, with this image in mind, try to

imagine drawing maps of this landscape. Ask yourself, What would well-crafted pictures of it look like? These maps are what we call *doctrines*; they are collectively rendered maps that Christians have drawn over the years in order to help them find their way around this complex terrain of faith. When they are accurate, these sketched-out and patterned maps can be laid over our faith lives, helping us to see Christianity's content and order with a clarity we might not otherwise have.' (p. 9)

Do you find this image of map-making helpful? An excellent 'coffee-table' book on maps, if you are interested, is by John Hessler 'Map' (2015, Phaidon). What is exceptional about this book is the way in which maps are not what you think they are! Definitely worth a look!

Point to ponder: if you had to draw a map of your belief in God, what would it look like? Perhaps you might try to do this in your journal this coming week.

In your local groups, take some time now to reflect on this section, and anything from the previous section on 'theology.' What are the questions you have about this, and what, if anything, has surprised you? You may wish to make some notes below:



GETTING READY FOR SESSION 13

As well as doing some work on your journal and reflecting on the material from this week, begin to use the learning from session 4 to think ahead to some of the doctrines that we will be looking at in the coming weeks. Have a read of *Living Faithfully* pp. 130-136 on 'Sharing Faith,' a reminder that as we begin to probe deeply the ins and outs of what we believe, we must always think about how we might share our learnings and belief with others. You may also find this meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful:

Important Commission

*Let this day be calm and confident
because I have an important
commission. I need to do my best
for others without anxiety, rush or panic.*

Keep me focused.

Keep me open-minded.

Keep me in mind.

*Remain in my thoughts,
close to my pulse.*

Let me breathe deeply.

*Let me enjoy each moment as it passes
and hold me back when I begin
to try to do, or say, or achieve too much.*

May today be a good day.

Stephen Cherry, *Barefoot Prayers*, SPCK, 2013 p. 34.

SESSION 13

The Triune God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 130-136

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10 mins). *Has anything arisen from the material that you are wondering about, or that has struck you as significant during the week?*
- Examine the Doctrine of God (20 mins);
- Examine the Doctrine of Jesus Christ (20 mins);
- Examine the Doctrine of the Spirit (20 mins);
- Tackle an important doctrinal question – why suffer? (10 mins)
- Pray together (before and after)

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF

Last week, we looked at theology and doctrine, and particularly how we might relate how we understand and talk about God with our everyday lives. How can we be people of theology? How can we encourage regular interaction with an understanding of God and our faith with the people whom we interact with in church, and in our daily lives? Has anything stood out for you this past week as you have reflected on these themes?

In local groups, take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through LiFT!

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (20 mins)

God in twenty minutes? That's a tall order! But we did manage to cover the entire Old Testament in one session, so we should be able to cover this! We are clearly not going to be able to cover everything. There will be some elements that we can't discuss in detail, but let's use the material below to get the conversation started, and as an encouragement to you to do some further reading if you want to explore more...

Alistair McGrath writes this:

'God lies at the heart of Christian theology. But *which* God? And what is this God like? It is clear that the little word 'God' needs extensive amplification. Israel's reflections on the identity of its God – which they styled using phrases such as 'the Lord God of Israel' – took place against a backdrop of polytheism. Each nation in the region had its own god; many had highly developed pantheons, recognizing many different gods, each with its own distinctive function or sphere of influence. Simply talking about 'God' was thus not particularly informative. It begged the question: which of these gods do you mean? Part of the task of Christian theology is to identify the God in which Christians believe' (*Theology, The Basics*, p. 17)

This quote is helpful in that it reminds us that our understanding of, and beliefs about God are located in a history that stretches right back to the origins of Judaism. So a good place to start in working out our doctrine of God is in the Old Testament. In so doing, we have to wrestle with the rather complex reality of the origins not only of Judaism but of Christianity, and of the world in which those religions operated. This is why the above mention of polytheism is important. In actual fact, if we look at the Hebrew of Genesis 1, the word that we have translated as 'God' is in fact the plural, so more accurately should be translated 'gods.' ***A point to ponder perhaps?***

The basic idea that we find in the New Testament is that Christians worship and know the same God as Israel. With that, Christians also believe that God is revealed ultimately in Christ.

Have a look at the opening of Hebrews 1.1-3:

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.'

Alistair McGrath points out (as we have already seen in our sessions on the books of the Bible) that 'one of the most noticeable things about the Christian representation of God is that extensive use is made of imagery. God is depicted as a shepherd, a king, a rock – and a father.'

Can you think of any other analogies? Do any of these above speak to you; are there any that you find confusing or difficult? Spend a few minutes in your local groups talking about this.

Before we go any further, let's just pause for a few moments and consider some of the difficulties about God that Daniel Migliore and +John Pritchard raise:

'Talk about God has become a problem for many people today. While criticism of traditional doctrines of God arise from various sources and take very different forms, they often focus on the human experience of domination by some coercive power' (*Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 64.)

'What they say:

- God seems to be a cross between a megalomaniac and the tooth fairy;
- God's like a celestial football referee: he only interferes to tell you off;
- God seems to be like a disapproving parent, tut-tutting when you make a mistake or commit a sin;
- Maybe God is the ultimate control-freak, trying to impose his will on the world. He's a malevolent despot crushing the joy out of human life;
- God's a smiley Santa, everybody's feel-good friend. Only he's not much use in the bad times;
- God's like a celestial pink mist – 'immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.' Too mysterious by half.'

+John Pritchard *How to Explain your Faith*, SPCK, 2006, p. 52

Perhaps one of the (for many) tricky things is the imagery of God as Father. This image is deeply embedded in the Christian faith, not least because of the Lord's Prayer.¹

Alistair McGrath reminds us that we are dealing with an analogy, and asks what sort of ideas that the analogy convey: Fathers are human beings; Fathers bring their children into existence; Fathers care for their children; Fathers are male. The first is clearly not meant to be transferred into our thinking about God. The second is clearly important: God is our originator without whom we would not be here. There is also a lot to support the idea that God as Father is someone who cares. All that read, it is the fourth aspect of this analogy that has caused challenges. Both the Old and New Testaments use male language about God. Does this mean that God is male? It is important to note that the Bible also uses female imagery to refer to the love of God for humanity. Just as a mother can never forget or turn against her child, so God will not forget or turn against his people (Isa. 49.15). But still we need to ask: is God male? Does speaking of God as 'father' mean that Christianity believes in a male deity? Perhaps it is the case that to speak of God as father is to say that the role of father in ancient Israel allows us insights into the nature of God. It is not to say that God is a male human being. Yet the Old Testament is clear that mothers were also analogies for aspects of God's love for Israel. The important point here, as McGrath points out is that 'neither male nor female sexuality is to be attributed to God. For sexuality is an attribute of the created order' (*Theology, the basics*, p. 25).

In May 1373, the English writer and mystic, Julian of Norwich wrote:

'I saw that God rejoices to be our Father, and also that he rejoices to be our Mother, and yet again, that he rejoices to be our true Husband, with our soul as his beloved bride...He is the foundation, substance and the thing itself, what it is by nature. He is the true Father and Mother of what things are by nature.'

¹ As an aside, what do you think about the alternate Lord's Prayer in the New Zealand Prayerbook, p. 181?

A couple of other points that might help us tease out our understanding of God further:

- Firstly, God as a personal God. 'It is true that down the ages, theologians and ordinary Christians had had no hesitation in speaking about God in personal terms. Christianity has ascribed to God a whole series of attributes, such as love, trustworthiness, and purpose, which seemed to have strongly personal associations. Many writers have pointed out that the Christian practice of prayer seems to be modelled on the relationship between a parent and a child...it is helpful to consider what overtones the phrase 'an impersonal God' would convey...' (*Theology, the basics*, pp. 26-27). One of the greatest thinkers on this aspect of the doctrine of God was the 20th century Jewish writer Martin Buber. In his major work *I and Thou* (1927) he drew a fundamental distinction between *I-Thou* relations which are 'personal' and *I-It* relations, which are impersonal. Buber's approach affirms that God cannot be reduced to a concept, or to some neat conceptual formulation (which means by implication that even our Creeds are limited to a certain extent). For Christian theology, God's ongoing revelation is not simply a making known of the facts about God, but a self-revelation of God. Nor can we say that God is an object that we can discover. All of this has immense implications for our faith, which should be ongoing and expansive, held yet open to new discovery. The implication of a personal God is also an understanding of God as creator, and that God as creator stands apart from what is created: by that we mean that God creates, but does not act like a puppet-master controlling us at will. Events happen, and we might say that God purposes those events. Creation is essentially good, but we know that the presence of evil is real. God does not create evil, rather longs for us to fulfil our creaturely created essence of being good.
- Secondly, God as Trinity. We could do an entire session on this! The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult aspects of Christian theology! Indeed, Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States was very critical of what he termed as the 'incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic'! Do you remember the last Trinity sermon that you heard preached? This is one area where we can get into a lot of trouble and commit multiple heresies without even knowing it! For example, it can be popular to try and describe the Trinity as water that can be ice, steam and liquid. This is incorrect. Why? Because the same water cannot be liquid, ice and steam at the same time; liquid, ice and steam cannot mutually indwell one another; there's no love lost between liquid, ice and steam. The correct name for this heresy is 'modalism' – the attempt to split the Trinity into three parts.

Alistair McGrath writes that 'the best way of understanding the doctrine (of the Trinity) is to suggest that it is the inevitable and legitimate way of thinking about God which emerges from a sustained engagement with the biblical witness to the words and works of God. The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in scripture, and continued in Christian experience. This is not to say that scripture contains a doctrine of the Trinity, rather, scripture bears witness to a God who demands to be understood in a trinitarian manner' (*Theology, the basics*, p. 87).

THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST (20 mins)

Alistair McGrath writes that 'One of the most basic tasks of Christian theology is to clarify the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith. Questions about Jesus are addressed in the area of Christian theology known as Christology...If 'theology' is about making sense of God, then 'Christology' is about making sense of Jesus. So part of the task of Christian theology is to weave together the various elements of the biblical witness to the identity and significance of Jesus. The various biblical motifs that need to be integrated in this way include:

- the terms that the NT uses to refer to Jesus (look back in Block I to some of our work on this topic, especially at sessions 1 and 5);
- what Jesus is understood to have achieved, which is understood to be directly related to his identity;
- the impact that Jesus made upon people during his ministry – for example, through his healing;
- the resurrection, which NT writers interpret as an endorsement and validation of Jesus' exalted status in regard to God. Thus, for Paul, the resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1.3-4)

Theology, the basics, pp. 52-53.

Sometimes, this doctrine is referred to as 'the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ,' pointing us to the ways in which reflections on Jesus have tended to focus on his identity, and on the things he did that are recorded in the New Testament. Both of these aspects influenced the growth of the early Church, and the lives of key figures such as Paul. Daniel Migliore helpfully points out some challenges for those who have sought to shape this doctrine:

- How are we to make sense of the ancient creeds? We don't necessarily have full access to the discussions and debates that formed them, and the language can sometimes seem obscure and abstract;
- Something that isn't a problem as such, but which might make things seem a bit like a foggy Waikato morning, is the so-called 'quest for the historical Jesus' (which we looked at early on in LiFT);
- Another challenge comes from the variety of pictures that we get about Jesus in the New Testament, and the different emphases of the four Gospels. Added to this are the many interpretations of Jesus following the Gospels, in art and literature. This has both positive and negative effects, and we need to chart a careful course through these waters;
- Finally, something that is referred to as 'the scandal of particularity.' This means that certain emphases on the person and work of Christ have proved challenging: for example, some feminist theologians have argued that the true scandal of the cross (which Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 1.23) has been replaced by the ontological scandal of Jesus' maleness. 'Ontology' here means an essence – so the argument is that a focus on Jesus' male identity has left the real message of cross in the shadows.

(Faith Seeking Understanding, pp.164-166).

Now these points aren't necessarily going to have a huge impact on our faith day to day, but they are helpful to note. To help balance this, Migliore then goes on to provide some useful principles for our reflection on the person and work of Jesus:

- Knowledge of Jesus Christ is not simply 'academic' or historical knowledge. Faith in Christ is not just knowing about him but trusting in him, and being ready to follow him as the way, the truth, and the life;
- Jesus cannot properly be understood if he is seen apart from the covenant of God with the people of Israel or if the scope of his saving work is limited to certain individuals or to a select group rather than reaching out to the whole of creation. Thus, as Migliore points out, 'Christology has a cosmic as well as a historical setting. While it includes a concern for 'my salvation,' it must not be reduced to that concern. Nor should its cosmic dimensions be smothered by ecclesiocentric attitudes. In this sense, a 'nonexclusive' Christology is demanded by the scriptural witness itself' (*Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp. 167-168);
- The doctrines of the person and work of Christ are inseparable;
- Every understanding and confession of Jesus Christ grows out of a particular situation and both reflects and speaks to particular needs and aspirations. We must learn from understandings of Christ that are shaped by histories of suffering and hope very different from our own. The NT contains a plurality of Christologies...(and) Christians have both the freedom and the obligation to confess Christ in appropriate and relevant ways in their own specific contexts, in continuity with the New Testament witness and in conversation with the particular experiences, needs, and hopes of people here and now;
- The living Jesus Christ is greater than all of our confessions and creeds, and he surpasses all of our theological reflection about him. The risen Lord continually upsets our neat categories and classifications of him and the salvation he brings.

So what can we say about Jesus? Let's return to Alistair McGrath who gives us some key points:

- Jesus Christ is the historical point of departure for Christianity. In other words, Jesus brought Christianity into being. However it should be acknowledged that interpretation of this is rather complex! Alistair McGrath suggests that this be seen in the light of:
 - Jesus Christ reveals God;
 - Jesus Christ is the bearer of salvation;
 - Jesus Christ defines the shape of the redeemed life.

(*Christian Theology, an introduction*, pp. 274-276).

It also helps us to think about how this doctrine has developed over history, and some key points here are as follows:

- The Patristic period (roughly AD100 to either the 5th or 8th centuries): saw great attention paid to the doctrine of the person of Christ. Focus was on issues such as the question of the divinity of Christ – Jesus was human, but in what way did he differ from human beings in his being also divine? Two notable individuals from this period included Arius (God is the one and only source of all created things; nothing exists which does not ultimately derive from God - the issue being an emphasis on God the Father to the detriment of God the Son), and his opponent Athanasius, who

argued that it was only logical to accept Christ as God incarnate (whereas Arius' interpretation called this into question);

- The Alexandrian school (during this same period, often associated with Athanasius) is strongly soteriological in character – Jesus Christ is the redeemer of humanity;
- The Antiochene school differed from the Alexandrian school in its emphasis on the moral dimension – if redemption was to take place, it must be on the basis of a new obedience on the part of humanity;
- Medieval Christology developed the connection between Jesus' incarnation and the notion of the Fall (the moral aspect of the points made above). Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) argued that the coming of Christ was the result of the fall, and declared that there was little to be gained by considering alternatives;
- Much subsequent Christology takes its starting point from the conclusions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) which stated that provided it is recognised that Jesus Christ is both truly divine and human, the precise manner in which this is articulated or explored is not of fundamental importance. This meant that Christ had two natures (human and divine). But it should be noted that this assertion did not prevent ongoing debate, with a notable expression remaining in Eastern Christian religious thought that Jesus is of *one* nature: divine.

Spend some time in your local groups reviewing this material. Has anything stood out? Does anything surprise or puzzle you about the way in which this doctrine has developed and remains under debate? What might be the implication of that for us as church today?

Finally, a quote to help us think about the overall picture:

'Who do you say that I am?' (Mark 8.29)

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (20 mins)

Alistair McGrath comments that 'the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time' (*Christian Theology, an introduction* p. 235).

'The third article of the creed affirms that God is not only *over* us and *for* us but also at work *in* us. It speaks of the Holy Spirit and the new humanity in Christ. How do men and women participate in the great drama of creation, reconciliation, and transformation? What power enables humanity to have a share in the life and activity of the triune God? What new attitudes, practices, and relationships are to characterize (sic.) those who have encountered God's grace in Jesus? To what goal does our history and the history of the whole creation move? A reply to these questions must begin, as the third article of the creed begins, with an affirmation of faith in the Holy Spirit' (Daniel Migliore *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 223).

Daniel Migliore speaks of a resurgence of interest in the Holy Spirit and Christian spirituality both in theology and in the life of the church. A number of factors have contributed to this development:

- A desire to promote vitality and spontaneity in the life of the church rather than a focus on form and structure. To know God as Spirit is to experience God as a liberating rather than a coercive power. Resolving disputes by quoting doctrine or Scripture leaves little room for the movement of the Spirit;
- A renewed interest in the Holy Spirit gives evidence to a hunger for a deeper faith, for a new relationship with God, and for the spiritual resources to deal with significant issues in our time;
- A deeper desire to connect with the participation in the transforming power of Christ rather than a sense of historical distance from Christ's life and work;
- A recognised need to uphold the spiritual rather than ignore it, at the cost of burn-out and being overwhelmed;
- A sign of the increase in ecumenical activity, and connection with denominations that are vibrantly Spirit-led;
- A better understanding of the prominence and role of the Holy Spirit in the Biblical narrative.

(*Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp. 224-226).

“ ‘God is Spirit’ (John 4.24). But what does this tell us about God? The English language uses at least three words – “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit” – to translate a single Hebrew term, *ruach*. This important Hebrew word has a depth of meaning which it is virtually impossible to reproduce in English. *Ruach*, traditionally translated simply as “spirit,” is associated with a range of meanings, each of which casts some light on the complex associations of the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit.’
Alistair McGrath *Christian Theology, an introduction* p. 235.

We might identify some of these notions as follows:

- Spirit as wind – a parallel is drawn (in the Bible) between the power of the wind and that of God. See particularly the account of the Exodus (14.21) where the wind divides the sea thus representing both the power and redemptive purpose of God. Israel bordered the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the great deserts to the east. When the wind blew from the east, it was experienced as a mix of fine sand which scorched vegetation and parched the land (Isa. 40.7). The western winds were quite different however, being more gentle and cooling. God is compared by the OT writers to the rain brought by the western wind refreshing the land (Hosea 6.3);
- Spirit as breath – associated with life, thus *ruach* is often associated with God acting in creation;
- Spirit as charism – meaning the filling of a person with the ‘Spirit of God,’ by which a person will be enabled to perform tasks which would otherwise be impossible.

The early church found itself puzzled by the Spirit and unable to progress the theological doctrinal aspect of its function. It seemed that for the first few centuries of the life of the early church at least, theological debates were focussed elsewhere, and the role and presence of the Spirit was just accepted as the norm. There was a debate started by a group of writers known as ‘the opponents of the Spirit’ led by Eustathius of Sebaste. These writers argued that neither the person nor the works of the Spirit were to be regarded as having the status or nature of a divine person. They were opposed by Athanasius (who we have already encountered) and Basil of Caesarea, who made an appeal to the threefold Trinitarian Baptismal formula which was already in common use. All that

considered, the recognition of the full divinity of the Spirit happened relatively late, when compared to 'the Father and the Son.'

One of the most significant contributions to the debate about the Spirit was made by Augustine, who reflected that the Spirit is 'the bond of the Father and the Son.' Augustine sees that the Spirit is love, since God is love and the Spirit is God.

So what does the Spirit do?

- The Spirit causes inspiration and revelation;
- The Spirit plays a vital role in the function of salvation, relating Christ to the believer;
- The Spirit energises the Christian life.

In your local groups, spend some time talking about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the whole church, and in your own local community. Is enough room given to allow our perspective on matters to be changed by the Holy Spirit? Or do we spend too much time quoting doctrine and Scripture at one another? You may wish to make some notes below:

A DOCTRINAL QUESTION – THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING (10 mins)

Sooner or later, you will be asked, as a Christian, "so how can God allow evil and suffering?" Before we proceed with exploring this challenging issue, what would your response be to someone who asked you that question? *Discuss this in your local groups for a few minutes.*

In his book *How to explain your faith* (pp. 66-71), +John Pritchard tackles this issue. He says that we need to begin by acknowledging that anything we say on this issue may well be 'trampling on the holy ground of people's deepest pain.' He suggests that it helps if we adjust our way of thinking about God's working in the world from a 'top-down' approach to a 'bottom-up approach.' This means that we see God's interaction with the world from inside the created order. This is a God who has limited himself to working *within* the system God has created. In the very act of creating, God deliberately chooses to limit his absolute power in the interests of love and human free will. From this it follows that the whole of nature, not just human beings, must be free to 'be its dangerous self' (notwithstanding the human impact that causes climate change of course). Secondly, it might help if we see God at the heart of suffering, rather than outside of it. The image of Christ on the cross

demonstrates to Christians God's commitment to his wounded people. It is a profound realisation that 'God is in this with us' rather than 'God caused this to happen for a purpose we cannot understand.' A further step in the human story is to look beyond the suffering for signs of hope and redemption.

Sheila Cassidy, as medical director of a hospice in the UK said this:
'I've long since given up asking the 'why' of suffering. It gets me nowhere, and I know when I'm beaten. But this I do know: more important than asking 'why?' we should get in there, and be alongside those who suffer. We must plunge in up to our necks in the icy water, the mud and the slurry, to hold up the drowning person until he's rescued or dies in our arms. If he dies, so be it, and if we die with him, so be it also. Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friends.'
How to explain your faith, p. 69.

A story to ponder:

'The great violinist Itzhak Perlman suffered from polio as a child and ever since had been confined to a wheelchair. On one occasion he was performing a violin concerto when one of the strings broke with an audible 'ping' in the first movement. Everyone held their breath, waiting to see what he would do. With astonishing virtuosity Perlman continued playing as if nothing had happened, playing through the finale using only the remaining three strings. The applause was tremendous, but as the noise subsided he was called on to say a few words to the audience. Sitting in his wheelchair, a living symbol of courage, he said just one sentence: 'Our job is to make music with what remains.'

(Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

In your local groups, spend some time discussing these comments. Think back to your initial response to this question, have you been helped at all? How?

GETTING READY FOR SESSION 14

Next week we will be discussing the doctrines of the church, salvation and our understanding of heaven. Continue reflecting in your journal. Have a read also of *Living Faithfully* pp. 160-166. In particular, spend some time with the prayer activity on p. 166. You may also find the following meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful:

After a Holiday

I had my hopes and they were high.

My expectations were not specific:

they were about wellbeing and

contentment; pleasure enjoyable enough

to be remembered.

I had expectations of peaceful hours,

delightful scenes, pleasing encounters.

A change of pace was needed –

*I removed my watch – let the sun
tell the time.*

And so I give thanks:

for opportunity,

for time,

for the efforts of others,

for companions,

for encounters,

for everything that delighted

the eye,

for each moment of peace,

for inspiration from art and nature,

for the cool of morning,

for the warm of evening,

for food and drink,

for laughter and smiles,

for safe travel,

for a home to return to.

Alleluia.

Amen.

(Stephen Cherry, Barefoot Prayers, p. 55)

SESSION 14

The Church, Salvation and Heaven

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 160-166

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10 mins). *Has anything arisen from the material that you are wondering about, or that has struck you as significant during the week?*
- Examine the Doctrine of the Church (25 mins);
- Examine the Doctrine of Salvation (20 mins);
- Examine the Christian concept of Heaven (20 mins);
- Pray together (before and after)

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF

Last week, we looked at the doctrine of the Trinity, God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Has anything stood out for you this past week as you have reflected on these themes?

In local groups, take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through LiFT!

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (25 mins)

Probably several times during any given month, you are likely to recite The Apostle's Creed (refresh your memory on p. 48 of the Prayer Book). Theologian Alistair McGrath makes the point that:

'The Apostle's Creed includes a clause which declares that Christians believe in the church. So what does this mean? How is the church to be defined, and what is its purpose? This area of theology is traditionally called "ecclesiology" (from *ekklesia* the Greek word for 'church'). It is one of the more delicate areas of theology, as it raises awkward denominational questions which are of central importance to the identity of churches.'
Theology, the basics p. 105.

If you are worshipping in a cooperating venture, this will be an interesting reflection. What is your experience of denominations working together? If you aren't in a cooperating venture, you might still have experience of ecumenical life and worship. How do you respond to this quote above?

Whether we like it or not, we are part of the life of the church. Theologian Daniel Migliore (who we have met before) says that 'the church is not incidental to God's purposes. God enters into a covenant with creatures and seeks their partnership. If there is communion in the eternal life of God and God wills us to share in that communion, then questions regarding the nature of the church and its mission in the world, far from being matters of secondary importance to the understanding of Christian faith, are quite central.'

Migliore then goes on to say: 'The end for which the world was created and redeemed is deep and lasting communion between God and creation, a commonwealth of justice, reconciliation, and freedom based on the grace of God. **While flawed and always in need of reform and renewal, the church is nonetheless the real beginning of God's new and inclusive community of liberated creatures reconciled to God and to each other and called to God's service in the world**' (*Faith Seeking Understanding*, pp. 248-9).

Take a few minutes in your local groups to respond to that quote, particularly the words which I have placed in bold. What might that mean for us in our different contexts today?

Before we go on, often all we hear today is about difficulties that the church is facing; in our context, financial challenges, maintenance of buildings, and divisions. Here are some helpful words to bear in mind:

'For every problem facing the Christian churches, for every trouble or limitation that threatens its existence and effectiveness, there can be found, in these very struggles themselves, occasions of grace and invitations to healing' (Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds. *Constructive Theology*, 2005, Fortress Press, p. 203).

Let's take a (quick) tour through the history of this Doctrine!

We need to start with the origins of the community of faith as outlined in the **Bible**. It is important to note that the church has always stressed its origins and continuity with the people of Israel, so we need to first look in the **Old Testament**. Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann argues that there are three distinct phases in Israel's self-understanding: up to the founding of the monarchy under Saul, where there seemed to be a 'common commitment to Israel's central story'; secondly up

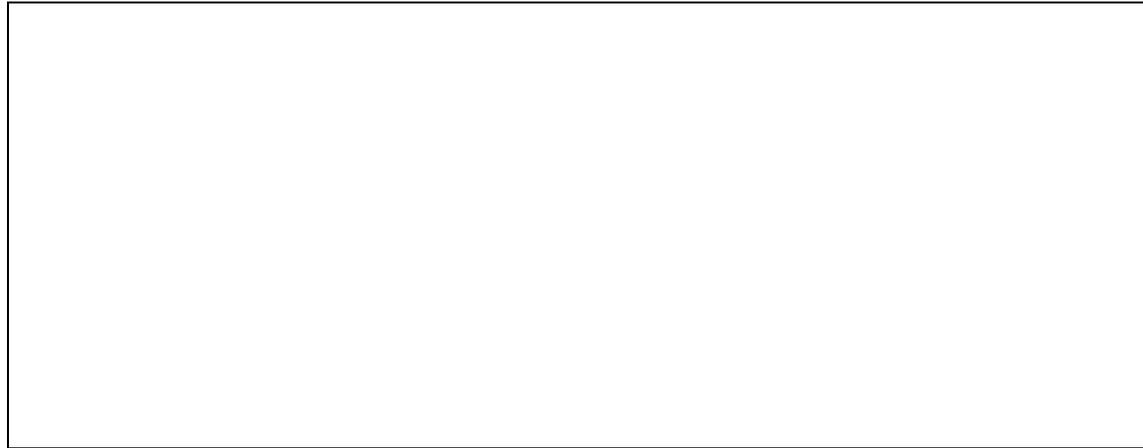
to the Babylonian exile with the rise of the temple and priests, kings, sages, and prophets; thirdly, post-exile where Israel emerged as a much smaller nation and reconnected its identity with the past. In the **New Testament** we find a stress of continuity between Israel and the Christian church, and various models for understanding the theological identity of the church: (1) *the church as the people of God*; (2) *the church as a community of salvation*; (3) *the church as the body of Christ*; (4) *the church as a servant people*; (5) *the church as the community of the Spirit*. It is important to understand that from this, the task of fulfilling these models lies with the generations following the world of the NT (and that includes us!).

In the **early church**, it appears that ecclesiology in any formal sense was not important. Because the church was relatively small and frequently persecuted, there was perhaps more of a sense of unity. With the conversion of Constantine in the year 312 quite a lot changed. Christianity gained acceptance, and began to take on a structure of its own. This also brought challenges, with leaders of churches becoming rivals in power, and an increased focus on 'the Bishop of Rome' (whom we now know as the Pope). There was quite a lot of controversy and, as Alistair McGrath points out, 'in the end it was the western church that forced the pace of theological reflection on the nature and identity of the church. It seems to be a general rule of the development of Christian doctrine that development is occasioned by controversy' (*Christian Theology. An introduction*, p. 394). One such controversy in this early period was occasioned by the 'Donatists,' followers of a breakaway African church leader Donatus (c. 311 - c.355). This caused a major split between that group and everyone else (the Catholics), and created serious points of difference. Both parties appealed to the writings of a leading figure in the church in the 3rd century – Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian said that disunity was a sin, but left as rather ambiguous the discussion about whether bishops could (after repentance) be restored to the fold. A stalemate occurred until the arrival of Augustine of Hippo whose views remain influential to this day: the church is not meant to be a society of saints but a 'mixed body' of saints and sinners; the church is 'made holy' by Jesus Christ. This view of course was brought to fruition and development by the **Reformation** of the 16th century, the next major phase of development.

The essential point of **Martin Luther** was that the church had lost sight of the doctrine of grace, which Luther regarded as central to the Christian gospel. Luther's belief was that an episcopally ordained ministry was not necessary to safeguard the existence of the church. What mattered was the preaching of the gospel! **John Calvin** further developed this by asserting a Protestant ecclesiology: (1) that the Word of God should be preached, and (2) that the sacraments should be rightly administered.

All this above is very much a 'potted history' of how understandings of the church developed. By way of interest of course, 'Anglicanism' emerged from the 1534 Act of Supremacy in the English Parliament which declared Henry VIII to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England. A separation from Rome occurred, and a new denomination developed which was both Catholic and Reformed.

In your local groups, take some time to reflect on the above. What does this history teach us about the life of the church today? What can we take from this that is positive (as it would be easy to write off hundreds of years of history and therefore the church, as simply bogged down by controversy and irrelevant to the real struggles of the world. You may want to make some notes below:



Let's finish this section by some thoughts from +Stephen Pickard and +John Pritchard, both making important similar points. Firstly, +Stephen talks about the importance of understanding what he describes as the 'not yet Church'; the Church that is still unfolding:

'Some years ago, when I was involved in organising a day retreat for some theological students, I said: 'It is not a quiet day, it's a slow day'. It rang a bell for many, certainly for me. A major task for the travelling Church is to find the optimal pace for the journey. Any long-distance runner knows how critical it is to pace themselves in order that they will have sufficient energy and stamina to finish and can respond to unforeseen contingencies on the way. By 'slow Church coming,' I wish to flag the importance for the Church of recovering a pace and rhythm for people on the Way. When the Church moves out of the fast lane, leaves the motorways for the B roads, looks beyond the quick-fix consumer and entertainment models for religion, and begins to follow in the footsteps of Christ, it really has to be one step at a time' (*Seeking the Church*, SCM, 2012, p. 213).

Secondly, +John Pritchard:

'Starting to belong to a local church (as part of the greater, universal Church) will always take time and patience, as will joining any other body of people with passionate convictions, be it a political party or a campaign for social reform. The Church isn't interested in quick-fix answers to profound questions. Nor is it interested in providing religious entertainment in competition with celebrity chat-shows, Premiership football or the latest computer game. The Church is committed to the fundamental transformation of human lives and the life of society, and so its methods will be more solid and sure, putting in foundations on which real change can take place in people's lives, visions and values. It starts with spending time with other Christians, being part of a community of particular character and quality, formed around the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Church uses beauty, symbols, relationships, theatre, music, art, action, prayer and parties – and much else besides, in the pursuit of this transformation. And that takes time and attention.'

How to Explain your Faith, pp. 115-6.

If there is time, discuss the above quotes in your local groups.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION (20 mins)

We have already touched on this topic a little when we looked at the doctrine of Christ, and we touched upon it during the Q and A session a couple of weeks ago. It helps to begin by asking what the meaning of the word 'salvation' is? Here is a definition from Daniel Migliore:

'In scripture and classical Christian theology, salvation is the fulfilment of life in relationship with God and others. It includes rescue from the bondage of sin and evil, forgiveness and healing, renewal of life and reconciliation with God, with neighbours and enemies, one's self, and the natural world. Salvation is more than a return to pristine creation, more even than the reconciliation with God and our fellow creatures that is present in the life of faith, hope, and love here and now. Salvation means final fulfilment of life in perfect and everlasting communion with God and our fellow creatures' (*Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 319).

In your local groups discuss this definition. Does this help you understand what salvation is?

One question that arises quite quickly from any discussion about salvation is its scope: who can be saved? Theologian Leslie Newbiggin argues that we shouldn't start with the question 'will I be saved?' but 'how shall God be glorified?' (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Eerdmans, 1989, p. 179). The drama of God's work of salvation in the world includes, but is not limited to, single individuals or single nations. Asking where and how God is being glorified and what part we are to play in God's great drama of salvation are perhaps more appropriate ways of relating to people of other faiths than first of all asking who will be saved.

Do you agree with this view?

The definition above is quite broad, so another way of framing this discussion might be to see salvation as simply: 'a central theme of the Christian message is that the human situation has, in some way, been transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (Alistair McGrath, *Theology, the basics*, p. 70). As with other topics, we begin by looking at the biblical witness, and perhaps even most basically that Jesus' very name means 'Saviour.' However, it is in Paul's letters that we find the most reflection on the topic. Paul actually uses various images to speak about the benefits that Christ secures for those who believe in him: **salvation** (release from danger), **adoption** (into the family of God), **justification** (entering into a right relationship with God), and **redemption** (securing release, usually through some form of payment). All of these words contribute to our overall understanding of salvation: it is not one thing, rather a blend.

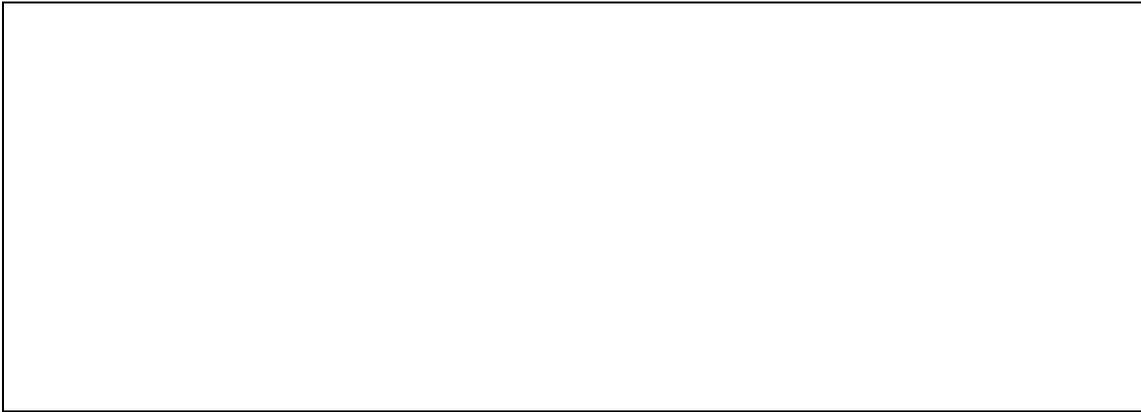
For some, the image of salvation as ransom is problematic, however it appears that the image of Jesus' death as a ransom came to be of central importance to Greek patristic writers such as Irenaeus. And the NT speaks of Jesus giving his life as a ransom for sinners (Mk. 10.45; 1 Tim. 2.6). However it should be said that the NT nowhere speaks about Jesus' death being the price paid to someone (such as the devil) to achieve our liberation. However that did not stop Greek patristic writers (and indeed composers of hymns and worship songs) pushing the analogy to its limits! Certainly the developing imagery of victory over the devil proved to be a compelling influence in church history. Perhaps you can think of some examples?

Discussion of these themes created an area of Christian theology known as 'theories of the atonement.' The word 'atonement' can be traced back to 1526, when the English writer William Tyndale was confronted with the task of translating the NT into English. There was at that time no English word that meant 'reconciliation' so Tyndale invented the word 'at-one-ment.'

Alistair McGrath outlines three approaches to the cross which have played a significant role in Christian theology:

- The cross as sacrifice: whereby the NT, drawing on OT imagery and expectations, presents Christ's death upon the cross as a sacrifice. This approach is strongly associated with Hebrews, and also elements in Paul's theology (with the use of the word *hilasterion* in Rom. 3.25 being notable in this regard). The idea was developed by individual theologians such as Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo whose writing in *City of God* in particular became very influential in the Middle Ages and would shape Western understandings of Jesus' death;
- The cross as a victory: this integrates a series of biblical passages that focus upon the notion of a divine victory over hostile forces. The NT declares that God has given us a victory through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15.57, for example). Again, early church writers such as Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo developed this line of thought. Christians were heavily influenced by Roman culture of the late classical period, whereby the victory of Christ was depicted as a great triumphant procession, comparable to those of ancient Rome in which the great military achievements of its heroes were celebrated. It was a relatively small and easy step for Christian writers to transform this imagery into the proclamation of Christ as the conquering hero. This has translated into many hymns and worship songs that we use today;
- The cross and forgiveness: an approach which integrates notions of judgment and forgiveness. The 11th century Anselm of Canterbury reflected that the above understandings failed to explain why God should wish to redeem us, and placed little value in understanding how Jesus was involved in the process of redemption. Anselm developed a view which held that human sin had disrupted creation and thus needed redeeming to restore humanity to its original status within creation. Anselm stressed that God is obliged to redeem us in a way that is consistent with the moral ordering of the creation, reflecting God's own nature. Human beings cannot do this on their own, and so God became human in the person of Jesus Christ in order to bring about this restoration. Interestingly this idea is faithfully reproduced in the 19th century hymn *There is a Green Hill Far Away*. Anselm's views were further developed by the 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas who talked about the adequacy of the 'satisfaction of Christ' to compensate for human sin. In terms of how Christ's achievement upon the cross affects us, later writers addressed this in three ways: **participation** (through faith we participate in Christ); **representation** (Christ represents God's covenant people on the cross); and **substitution** (we ought to have been crucified, but Christ took our place).

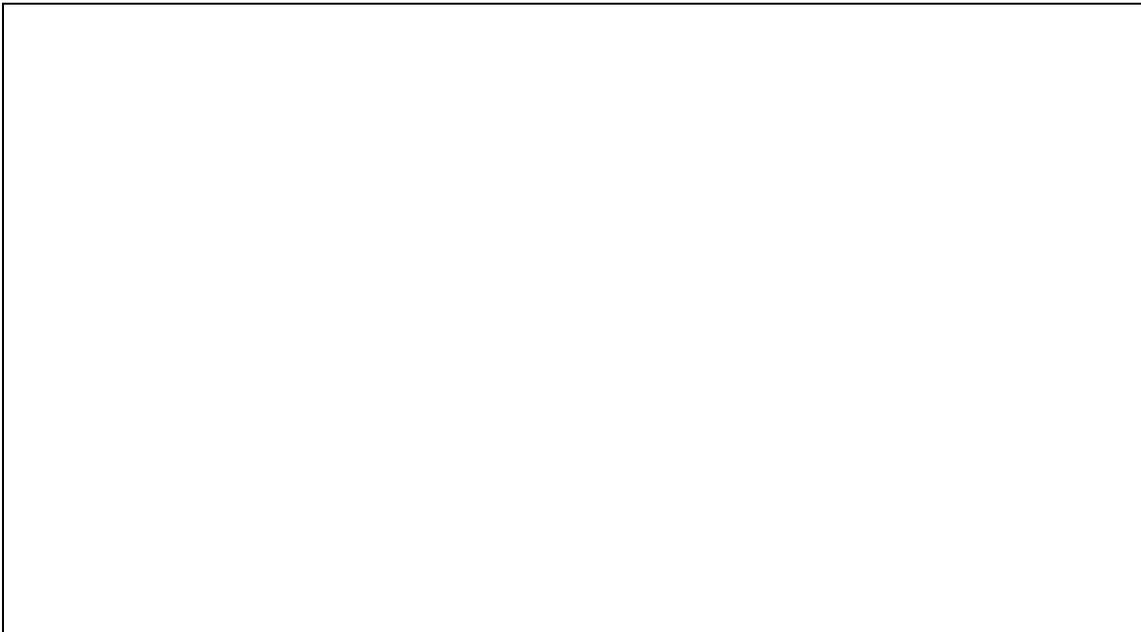
It is clear from the above, that understandings of the cross and the atonement have been developed in history and through hymnody in particular. Popular themes such as substitutionary atonement are not found clearly in scripture (at least not with the clarity some hold that view today). What are the implications for this in our understanding of doctrine and its development over history? If there is time, discuss this in your local groups. You may wish to make some notes below:



HEAVEN (20 mins)

Paula Gooder writes: *What comes into your mind when you hear the word heaven? Most of us have some kind of mental image – however vague – that comes to mind whenever we hear the word. One of the fascinating things about writing a book on heaven has been the responses it has evoked from others. Normally it is hard to get people interested in what you are writing. Even the most fascinating subject becomes less interesting as you describe it. This book has been very different. As soon as I have mentioned it, most people – both people of faith and those of no faith – have become animated and told me either what they themselves do or do not believe about heaven, or a story – ridiculous or serious – of what someone else believes. It is interesting that nearly everyone holds an opinion of some kind about this topic. Opinions may vary from person to person, but nearly everyone thinks something about heaven and has an image of what it might be like* (Heaven, SPCK, 2011, p. 1).

In your local groups discuss what you understand by the word 'heaven.' You may wish to make some notes below:



Paula Gooder goes on to reflect that heaven is a word that tends to crop up in many different contexts today, and is certainly not confined to religious discussions. In art, film, music and media, references to heaven occur with great frequency. The word is also used to denote a feeling of bliss

(whether that be a holiday destination or a piece of chocolate!), an experience that is somehow 'out of this world.'

Alistair McGrath reflects on notions of heaven by grounding (!) our heavenly thoughts in the assertion that Christianity is a religion of hope, focussed on the resurrection of Jesus as the grounds for believing and trusting in a God who is able to triumph over death. The term 'heaven' is used frequently in Paul's writings to refer to Christian hope. Although we often think of this as being in the future, Paul's thinking (as indeed with the Lord's Prayer) is a blending of realms that can be described as earthly and heavenly. Paul asserts in Phil. 3.20 that believers are 'citizens of heaven.' McGrath comments that 'one helpful way of thinking about the modest New Testament statements on this subject is to see heaven as a consummation of the Christian doctrine of salvation' (thus following on and connected to our previous topic), 'this states that the presence, penalty, and power of sin have all been finally eliminated, and the total presence of God in individuals and the community of faith has been achieved...the New Testament parables of heaven are strongly communal in nature. Heaven is here portrayed as a banquet, a wedding feast, or as a city – the New Jerusalem. Eternal life is thus not a projection of an individual human existence, but is rather to be seen as sharing, with the redeemed community as a whole, in the community of a loving God' (*Theology, the basics*, pp. 124-5).

Take a look at this passage from Revelation (21.1-5) below and in your local groups discuss the implications for our understanding of heaven:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

This image above resonates strongly with the words of Paul mentioned about that Christians are to be regarded as 'citizens of heaven' (Phil. 3.20). What might that mean for us? What do citizens of heaven look like?! You might like to read 1 Cor. 15 where Paul reflects on the meaning of the resurrection; the image of a seed that Paul uses was taken by many writers to mean that there was some organic connection between our earthly and heavenly bodies, so resurrection could be viewed as the unfolding of a predetermined pattern within the human organism.

If we are 'citizens of heaven,' then what is our manifesto? How can we encourage our church communities to be reminders of this hope?

Take a look at this biblical passage; what do you notice and what are the implications of this for our understanding about the place of heaven? (Hint – it has to do with direction!):

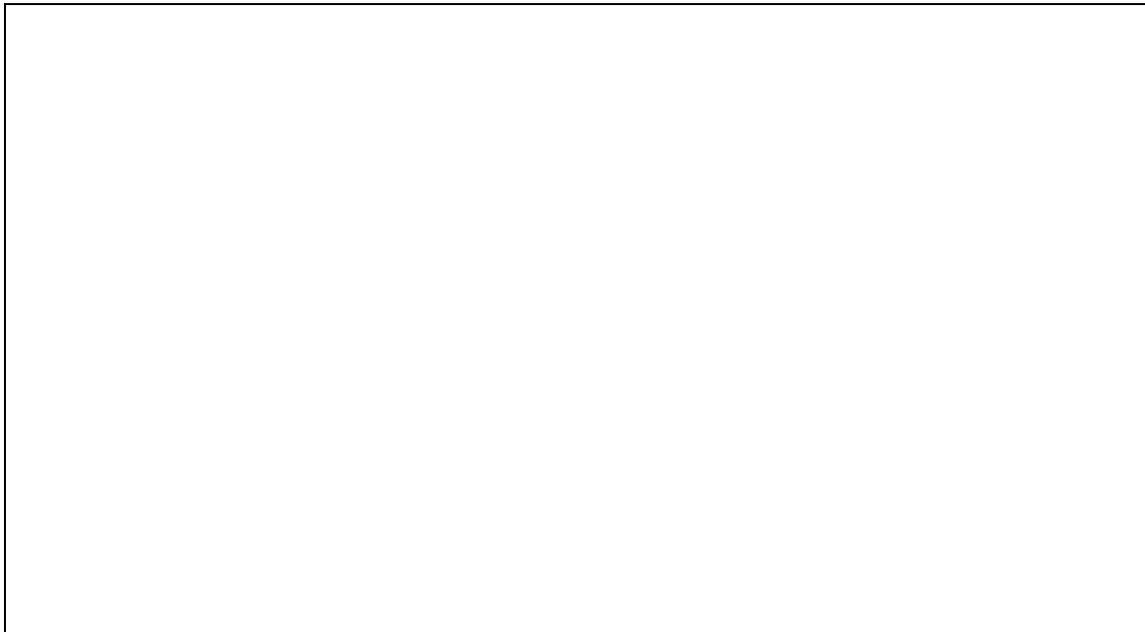
¹⁰Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall

spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” ¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Gen. 28.10-19

Spend some time in your local groups discussing this.



GETTING READY FOR SESSION 15

Next week we will be discussing the sacraments. Continue reflecting in your journal. Have a read also of *Living Faithfully* pp. 56-62. The sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) are profound ways of reconnecting us with the essence of what it is to be human and how our relationship to God might be expressed. You may also find the following meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful:

Simplicity

Lord, make me simple – for I have become too complicated.

Take from me the vain dreams of sophistication and status,

and give me in return a desire to be shaped by the service

of others.

*Take from me the desire to accumulate or hoard
and give me in return a decluttered life
and simple spirit.*

*Help me to be content with what is
and with who I am.*

*Help me to delight in what I see,
what I hear.*

*Help me to appreciate the people I know well.
help me to see the stranger's grace.*

Give me your gifts of straightforwardness and clarity.

Lead me into integrity.

*Pull me from the deceits of shame
and let me become
wholehearted and
transparent.*

*That when people see through me,
they might glimpse your trace.*

(Stephen Cherry, Barefoot Prayers, p. 92)

SESSION 15

Understanding the Sacraments

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 55-62

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10 mins). *Has anything arisen from the material that you are wondering about, or that has struck you as significant during the week?;*
- Consider what a sacrament is, and think about some of the background to how we understand this (25 mins);
- Think about sacraments and Christian initiation (20 mins);
- Think about the Eucharist (20 mins);
- Consider other sacraments and symbols (10 mins);
- Pray together (before and after).

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF

Last week, we looked at the doctrine of the Church, Salvation and the Christian understanding of Heaven. Has anything stood out for you this past week as you have reflected on these themes?

In local groups, take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through LiFT!

WHAT IS A SACRAMENT? (25 mins)

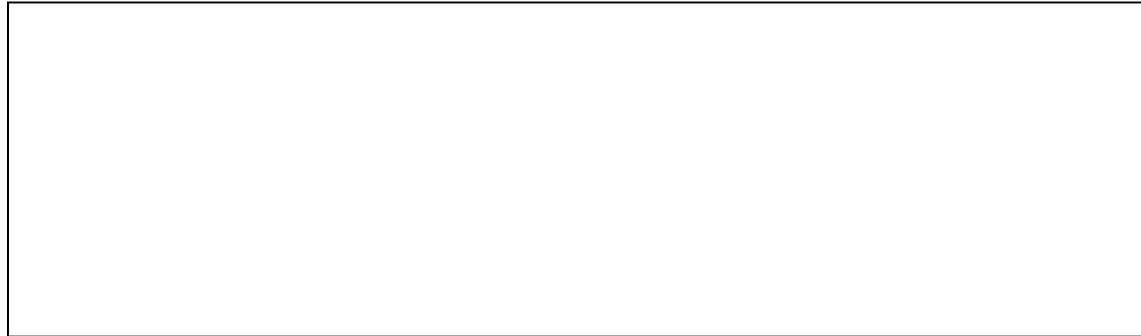
Let's start with a basic question: if someone asked you, what is a sacrament, how would you respond? You might begin your answer by saying 'Baptism' or 'the Eucharist', but for someone completely outside the life of Christianity, how would they understand that? It might then help to say that a sacrament is a 'sign' and a 'rite' (or perhaps a 'ritual'), something that is done (often), and that points to a deeper meaning. A definition might be: 'sacraments are Christian rites in the sense that they are repeated Christian actions that serve to enact or express Christian ideas' (Ross Thompson, *The Sacraments*, 2006, p. 5). It then must be said that while all Christian sacraments are rites, not all rites are sacraments! In Anglicanism there are two sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist; in Roman Catholicism there are seven: Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, and Holy Orders.

The term 'sacrament' was first used to denote things that had previously been described in Greek as 'the mysteries.' To this day, Eastern churches speak about the 'mysteries' rather than the 'sacraments.' Interestingly, in the Anglican 1662 BCP order for Holy Communion, this sacrament is described as 'these holy mysteries.' The Greek *mysterion* derives from *mueo* 'to shut the mouth!' It denotes a mystery that is perhaps whispered, passed on as a mystery. It is related to the word *mystikos* where we get 'mystic' and 'mystical' from. Note the contrast with a word found in the NT *kerygma* which means 'proclamation.' So there is a creative tension between proclaiming (the good news) and mystery. Take a look at Psalm 19.1-3:

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of his hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.*

If we look at the Bible, firstly in the Old Testament, there is a Hebrew word *raz* which is used a lot in the apocalyptic books to describe obscure, dreamlike imagery. *Raz* means something hidden, and it occurs eight times in Daniel alone. In the Gospels, *mysterion* appears in Mk 4.11, Mt. 13.11 and Luke 9.1-10, as the secret meaning of the parables. It also occurs frequently in Paul's letters (Rom. 16.25-27; 1 Cor. 2.6-9; Eph. 1.8-10; Eph. 3.2-5; Col. 1.25-27).

In your local groups take some time to look at these references from Paul. As you look at the passages try and answer these questions: who or what is the mystery? What is its relation to time? What other ideas is it closely related to in these passages? You may wish to make some notes below:



If you were now asked 'what is a sacrament?', based on your reflections on the above, how might you answer?

Theologian Alistair McGrath writes that there are four essential components to the definition of a sacrament:

- A 'physical or material' element, such as water, bread, wine, oil;
- A 'likeness' to the thing which is signified, so that it can represent the thing signified (so wine can be said to have a 'likeness' to the blood of Christ;
- Authorisation to signify the thing in question (so the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, for example);
- An efficacy, by which the sacrament is capable of conferring the benefits which it signifies to those who partake in it.

Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 422.

Peter Lombard, the 11th century theologian and Bishop of Paris defined a sacrament as below. His view has remained current to today's understandings, and is used by Roman Catholicism to define sacraments beyond the Anglican understanding (note that the 39 Articles only recognise Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments. The 39 Articles do talk about 'commonly called Sacraments but not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel' – confession and absolution; holy matrimony; confirmation; ordination; anointing of the sick).

'A sacrament bears a likeness to the thing of which it is a sign. "For if sacraments did not have a likeness of the things whose sacraments they are, they would not properly be called sacraments" (Augustine). [...] Something can properly be called a sacrament if it is a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and exists as its cause. Sacraments were therefore instituted for the sake of sanctifying, as well as of signifying. [...] Those things which were instituted for the purpose of signifying alone are nothing more than signs, and are not sacraments, as in the case of the physical sacrifices and ceremonial observances of the Old Law, which were never able to make those who offered them righteous.'

BAPTISM AND CHRISTIAN INITIATION (20 mins)

Baptism is one of (perhaps **the**) the components of becoming a Christian. It expresses identity and commitment, and a 'taking on' of Christ in our lives. There is much we can say about this sacrament, but here are some words from ++Rowan Williams to aid our conversation:

'We begin with baptism: with the fact that people are formally brought into the Christian community by being dipped in water or having water poured over them. The word 'baptism' originally just meant 'dipping' [*as an aside, it might be more appropriate for example to call John the Baptist, John the Dipper!*] If we turn to the New Testament we find this word featuring in the ministry and teaching of Jesus, and also, quite extensively, in St Paul's letters. Jesus speaks of the suffering and death that lies ahead of him as a 'baptism' he is going to ensure (Mark 10.38)...from the very beginning, baptism as a ritual for joining the Christian community was associated with the idea of going down into the darkness of Jesus' suffering and death...we are, so to speak, 'dropped' into that mysterious event which Christians commemorate on Good Friday, and, more regularly, in the breaking of bread at Holy Communion...I am inclined to add that you might also expect the baptized Christian to be somewhere near, somewhere in touch with, the chaos in his or her own life – because we all of us live not just with a chaos outside ourselves but with quite a lot of inhumanity and muddle inside us. A baptized Christian ought to be somebody who is not afraid of looking with honesty at that chaos inside, as well as being where humanity is at risk, outside.'

Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*, SPCK 2014, pp. 1-5.

In your local groups, take time to reflect on what your baptism means to you? How does it affect how you life your live? Do you think about it often?

In her book *Natural Symbols* (2003), anthropologist Mary Douglas talks about natural symbols such as water being powerful in representing *cleansing, life and death*. Water keeps us clean (inside and outside), it is necessary for life (we are 60% water!), and it is extremely powerful to the point where it can be destructive. If we look at the story of the Israelites in the OT we see that water had all of these meanings in their journey. In the NT in Mk. 1.1, 9-12 we notice all of these elements too: 'The beginning (*genesis*) of the good news of Jesus Christ...; mention of John's *baptism of repentance and cleansing* from sin (though note here the challenge of Jesus' baptism when Jesus was meant to be sinless // with the debate on infant baptism); and Jesus is immediately driven into the wilderness (possibly reflective of Adam's being driven out of the garden, so perhaps a *recapitulation of the fall* (?); it is a *trinitarian theophany* (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit appear); the *dove* may represent the dove that returns to Noah so symbolising the theme of a new beginning and a new covenant; the baptism *inaugurates Jesus' earthly ministry*; and to an extent it *prefigures the end* of the story (Jesus' death), something which is reflected in the quote from ++Rowan above. For Paul, baptism is most importantly participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, bringing new creation; it joins us to the Body of Christ, a universal new humanity in which all share equally regardless of race, gender or status (1 Cor. 12.12-13). Baptism is a 'putting on' of Christ (Gal. 3.26-28). The Book of Acts refers several times (eg. 16.15, 33, 18.8) to baptism of whole households together. This would probably refer to children and slaves with the head of the household having authority to made decisions for the whole house. This is often used as an argument in favour of infant baptism. Certainly by 200AD, children were being baptised. Augustine defined a position that became normative in the West, arguing that infants inherited 'original sin' from Adam (but note that this involved a particular and somewhat negative view of sex, which many find problematic). Augustine also argued that in an emergency, a layperson could baptise so long as it was with water in the name of the Trinity (something that is acceptable today).

In your local groups, take some time to discuss the matter of infant baptism. This is common in Anglican and Roman Catholic practice, however Baptists for example only allow those who believe to be baptised. What might be the role of Confirmation for Anglicans in developing an understanding of Confirmation, given that we do practice infant baptism? Is it up to us to decide who can/should be baptised?

Let's return to ++Rowan Williams for some further reflections:

'[Baptism] is a gift because in this community of baptized people we receive life from others' prayer and love, and we give the prayer and love that others need. We are caught up in a great economy of giving and exchange. The solidarity that baptism brings us into, the solidarity with suffering, is a solidarity with one another as well. It is what some Christian writers have called, in a rather forbidding word, 'co-inherence'. We are 'implicated' in one another, our lives are interwoven. What affects one Christian affects all, what affects all affects one.'

Being Christian, pp. 10-11.

Given that churches are communities of the baptised, in your local groups consider these questions (or even just one of them);

- *In what ways did Jesus immerse himself in the depths of God and humanity, and in what ways might you follow his example?*
- *How might you or your church act as a mediator or bridge-builder between particular people or groups in your neighbourhood?*
- *Have you sometimes felt a barrier or shutter go up between you and God? If so, what would you say has helped, or might help, to remove that barrier and allow God back in again?*

EUCHARIST (20 mins)

Let's start with a quote from ++Rowan Williams again:

'For Christians, to share in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, means to live as people who know that they are always guests – that they have been welcomed and that they are wanted. It is, perhaps, the most simple thing that we can say about Holy Communion, yet it is still supremely worth saying. In Holy Communion, Jesus Christ tells us that he wants our company.'

Being Christian, p. 41.

Like Baptism, the Eucharist uses natural symbols that have widespread meaning:

- *The Meal* – eating together means to share in life together;
- *Passover* – the Synoptic Gospels describe Jesus' last supper as a Passover meal, whereas John sees it as a fellowship meal celebrated on the eve of Passover. The latter is likely (and recall the Q and A session where Bishop HA raised caution about celebrating Passover meals during Holy Week);
- *Covenant* – a new relationship between God and humanity.

Theologian Alistair McGrath talks about three central elements of what the Eucharist is about:

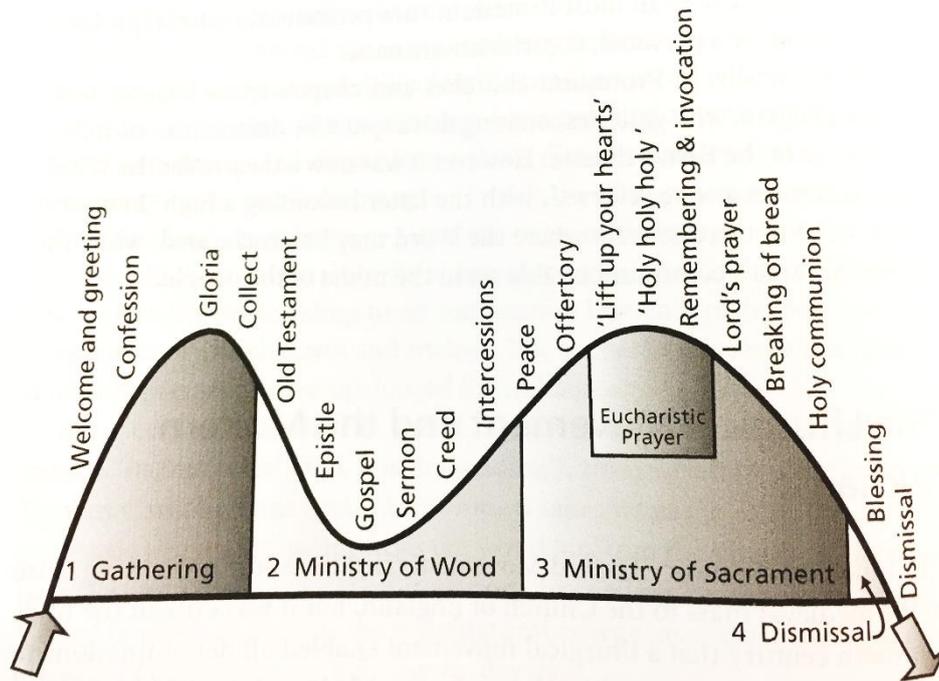
- A recollection (looking backward) – Christians are invited to look into the past and recall the saving acts of God in general, and above all, the cross and resurrection of Christ. If we look at Psalm 136 for example, we see a general principle at work of Israel being invited to remember God's past actions in delivering them from Egypt and leading them into the Promised Land. The central elements of the Eucharist are bread and wine, which represent Christ's body and blood, so the Eucharist directly

takes us back to that last supper of Jesus and his disciples, and to the cross and resurrection;

- An anticipation (looking forward) – Christians are invited to anticipate what is yet to happen. Take a look at what Paul says in 1 Cor. 11.23-26 ‘for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’ Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428) wrote this: ‘Every time that the liturgy of this awesome sacrifice is performed, which is the clear image of the heavenly realities, we should imagine that we are in heaven [...] Faith enables us to picture in our minds those heavenly realities, as we remind ourselves that the same Christ who is now in heaven is [also present] under these symbols. So when faith enables our eyes to contemplate what now takes place, we are brought again to see his death, resurrection, and ascension, which have already taken place for our sakes’;
- An affirmation of our faith – if we take as core the understanding that sacraments affirm the present faith of individual believers, then the Eucharist is such an affirmation (that engages the mind and the imagination);
- An affirmation of our belonging together – alongside the point above, if we hold to an understanding of sacraments as strengthening the mutual commitment and support of members of the Christian community, then by celebrating the Eucharist together, we strengthen our life together in the Body of Christ.

In your local groups, take some time to reflect together on what the Eucharist means in your community? Do you think a clearer understanding of what it is would help encourage and strengthen people’s faith and commitment to discipleship (rather than that simply being that thing we do every Sunday morning [or mid-week])? You may wish to make some notes below:

Because as Anglicans, we are both Catholic and Reformed, the Eucharist is central to our life together. It is important to see our Communion liturgy as a whole:



In your local groups, discuss this picture above. Where are the 'high points', the 'low points' and the 'points in-between'? Do you agree with the flow of this chart – why/why not? Given the Eucharist is a multi-sensory experience, how might creativity and movement be used to aid understanding of the Liturgy? You may wish to make some notes, or draw a picture or two below!



There is some debate about what actually happens in the Eucharist, however these words of ++Rowan Williams speak to the heart of the matter:

'Holy Communion...is the way in which the whole of the Gospel story is played out in our midst...(in the Bible) we recognised those biblical figures in the remote past as part of our own family. In Holy Communion that becomes something very immediate, something enacted very physically: we are members of the same kindred and, here and now, guests at the same table. We are experiencing Jesus creating community by his welcome, but we are also, with the patriarchs and apostles, those who are liable to forget, betray and run. We are the ones who are called back and invited afresh on the resurrection day to experience yet again the creation of community, even through death and even through betrayal, abandonment and denial. And we are now the ones who, as we receive Holy Communion, are commissioned to renew the face of the earth. We are those who can see humanity and the whole material world in a fresh way, seeing people and things sacramentally, seeing the depth within them, where the giving of God is always at work.'

Being Christian, pp. 54-55.

OTHER SACRAMENTS AND SYMBOLS (10 mins)

This is an opportunity for you to get creative in your local groups! Above, we have discussed two main sacraments (Baptism and the Eucharist), but as we have seen, there are others that at least in the 1662 BCP are close to being sacraments. What work do you think your local church could do to engage in furthering understanding of sacraments and symbols of our faith so that others might increase their understanding of them? What if we saw lots of elements of our lives as being somehow sacraments (see the poem by Martin Wroe below):

Sacrament

The Sacrament of a joke, the funniest story

The Sacrament tears in your eyes

The Sacrament of a meal, slowly cooking,

The Sacrament of a round glass of wine

The Sacrament of a child's first, wide-eyed steps

The Sacrament of all that trust in you

The Sacrament of bass, drum, guitar

The Sacrament connected to the ... hip bone

The Sacrament of being there, right place, right time

The Sacrament of a listening ear

The Sacrament of the novel you can't put down

The Sacrament of the poem with no rhyme

The Sacrament of starlings, in V-formation

The Sacrament of eye-contact (with a dog)

...

The Sacrament of questions with no answers

The Sacrament of silence. Enough said

The Sacrament of a life baptised by love

The Sacrament of the divine

In bread and wine.

(quoted in Dave Tomlinson, *The Bad Christian's Manifesto*, Hodder, 2014, pp. 179-180).

You can make some notes below:



Next week we will be discussing Christian vision and discipleship. Continue reflecting in your journal. Have a read also of *Living Faithfully* pp. 94-100. The focus of this chapter is on justice, and we will be looking at this as part of the session next week. Please also (if you can) take a look at these YouTube videos with Peter O'Connor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jznOhFrSvJY> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoMpzIzjrFM&t=388s>. Peter is Professor of Applied Theatre at the University of Auckland, and was a keynote speaker at the 2017 Diocesan Ministry Gathering. He has worked in Christchurch schools following the earthquakes, and this video contains his reflections on some of that experience. Peter is a Christian, and brings to his work a blend of discipleship and vision that is inspiring.

You may also find the following meditation by Stephen Cherry helpful:

The Day Looks Dull

The day is planned.

Its priorities established.

The diary, like a section through a landscape,

has been built up over time.

Layers laid down.

But that does not make it

interesting,

exciting

or in any way promising.

To be frank, this day looks dull.

The diary looks too full.

I wish there were more gaps.

A little white space for creativity,

or recreation, perhaps.

So my prayer is serious.

I need a lifeline of spirit;

an injection of hope.

I need to see the possible in the

predictable.

*I need to see the space in the congestions.
I need to see again the
humanity of the people I will spend
the day with; the spirituality of those
I encounter across the meeting table.*

*Refurnish me with a sense of
purpose for those all-so-slowly burning
projects and
quietly unfolding plans.*

Replenish me with vision.

*Renew me with hope of
transformative action.*

*Rekindle in me the passion that long since
got me involved in all of this.*

*Rouse my sense of responsibility for
my time, and rid me of the
fantasy that a day in your service
could be dull.*

*The day is planned. Nonetheless, let it be
unpredictable*

(Stephen Cherry, Barefoot Prayers, pp. 40-41)

SESSION 16

Christian Vision and Discipleship

Personal reading prompt: *Living Faithfully* pages 94-100

SESSION SIGNPOSTS

In this session we will:

- Pick-up and debrief from last week (10 mins). *Has anything arisen from the material that you are wondering about, or that has struck you as significant during the week?*;
- Look back at these past 7 weeks of teaching and learning and consider what may have impacted upon us the most? (10 mins);
- Reflect on our watching of the YouTube video with Professor Peter O'Connor. What do we learn about vision and discipleship, and particularly the role of imagination? (20 mins);
- Look at +John Pritchard's chapter on Justice in *Living Faithfully* and what we can learn about vision and discipleship from these insights (20 mins);
- Reflect on some further core aspects of discipleship and how this might be put into action in our local contexts (25 mins);
- Pray together (before and after).

PICK-UP AND DEBRIEF

Last week, we looked at the sacraments. Has anything stood out for you this past week as you have reflected on these themes?

In local groups, take 10 minutes to engage in conversation around these topics. You may wish to make some notes below. Remember to keep reflecting as we progress through LiFT!

LOOKING BACK (TO LOOK AHEAD!) (10 mins)

The overarching theme of this second main section of LiFT teaching has been to deepen our understanding of some of the basic building blocks of our faith. As we have delved into matters of theology and doctrine, we have also been reminded of the importance of considering mission and evangelism, and what it means to attend to our Tikanga Rua relationships? *In your local groups, try and name (if you can) which session has most stood out for you (whether that be for helpful or for challenging reasons!). Is there anything that you would like to delve deeper into? What might the major learning points for your local community be? You may wish to make some notes below:*



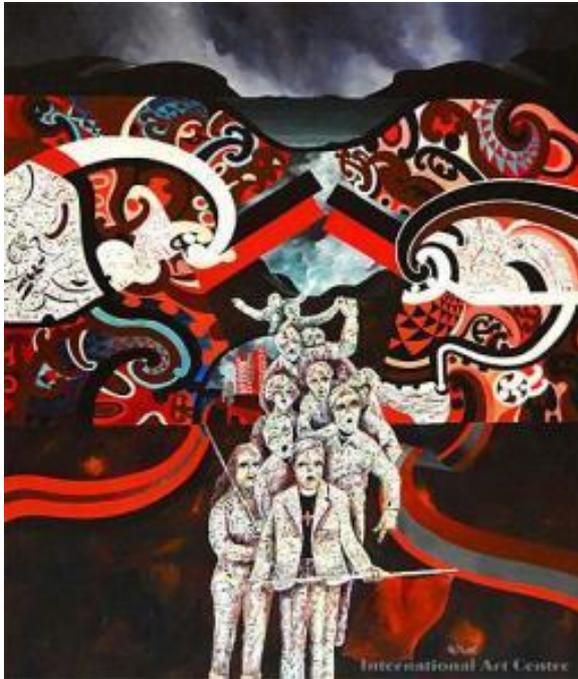
'A TEASPOON OF LIGHT' – THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN CREATING A VISION FOR DISCIPLESHIP (20 mins)

In the two videos that we watched to prepare for this week's session, Professor Peter O'Connor of Auckland University speaks about his work in using applied theatre in schools following the Christchurch earthquake. When Peter spoke to the Diocesan Ministry Gathering (2017) he asked the question: 'where do we keep our imagination'? How would you answer that? *In your local groups try and answer that question now (quickly if you can; don't give it too much thought!).*

In past LiFT sessions we have looked at the books of the Bible, and in particular the Book of Revelation, an exercise in using the imagination if ever there was one! There is a long history of engaging the imagination in the setting of Christian vision. Let's take a look at these examples below, all artworks (either current or in the past) in Auckland Art Gallery, and consider some reflections:

1. **This land is ours** Buck Nin (1978) Painted following the 1975 hikoi march from Te Hapua to Wellington, protesting against Maori land loss at the hands of the Government, and private ownership.

Land - identity - exile – Exodus



2. **The Days and Nights in the Wilderness** Colin McCahon (1971) 'I' human identity and God. 'Who do you say that I am?' asks Jesus in Matt. 16:15 // Mk. 8:29 // Lk. 9:20.



3. **My Personal Christ** Tony Fomison (1975-76) reworks a 16th century Italian Correggio painting.

Art interpreting art depicting Christ



4. **Prepared piano for movers** Haussmann (2012) - video installation.

Part of the Auckland triennial



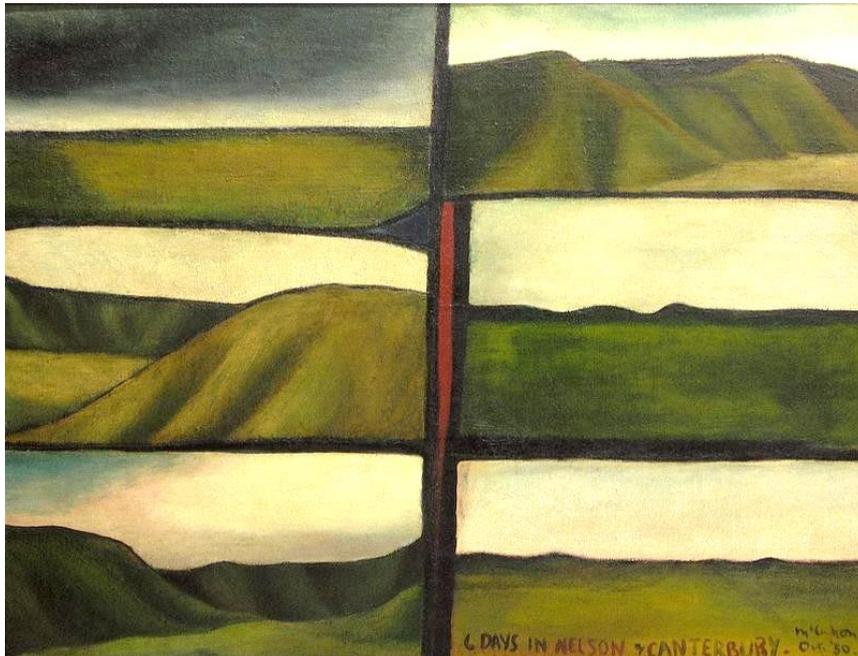
The camel through the eye of the needle (Matt. 19:24 // Mark 10:25 // Luke 18:25)

5. **Jonah and the Great Fish** A Lois White (1945)



6. **Six days in Nelson and Canterbury** Colin McCahon (1950)

Genesis I



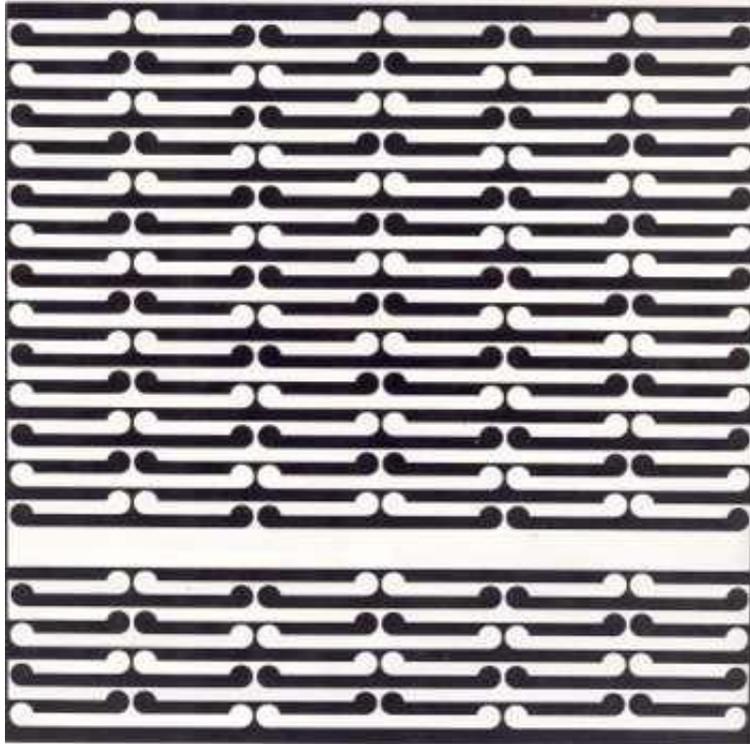
7. **Ka Kata Te Po** Saffronn Te Ratana / Ngataiharuru Taepa / Hemi Macgregor (2011)



Revelation - response to persecution. Protest and petition. Look up!

8. Gordon Walters

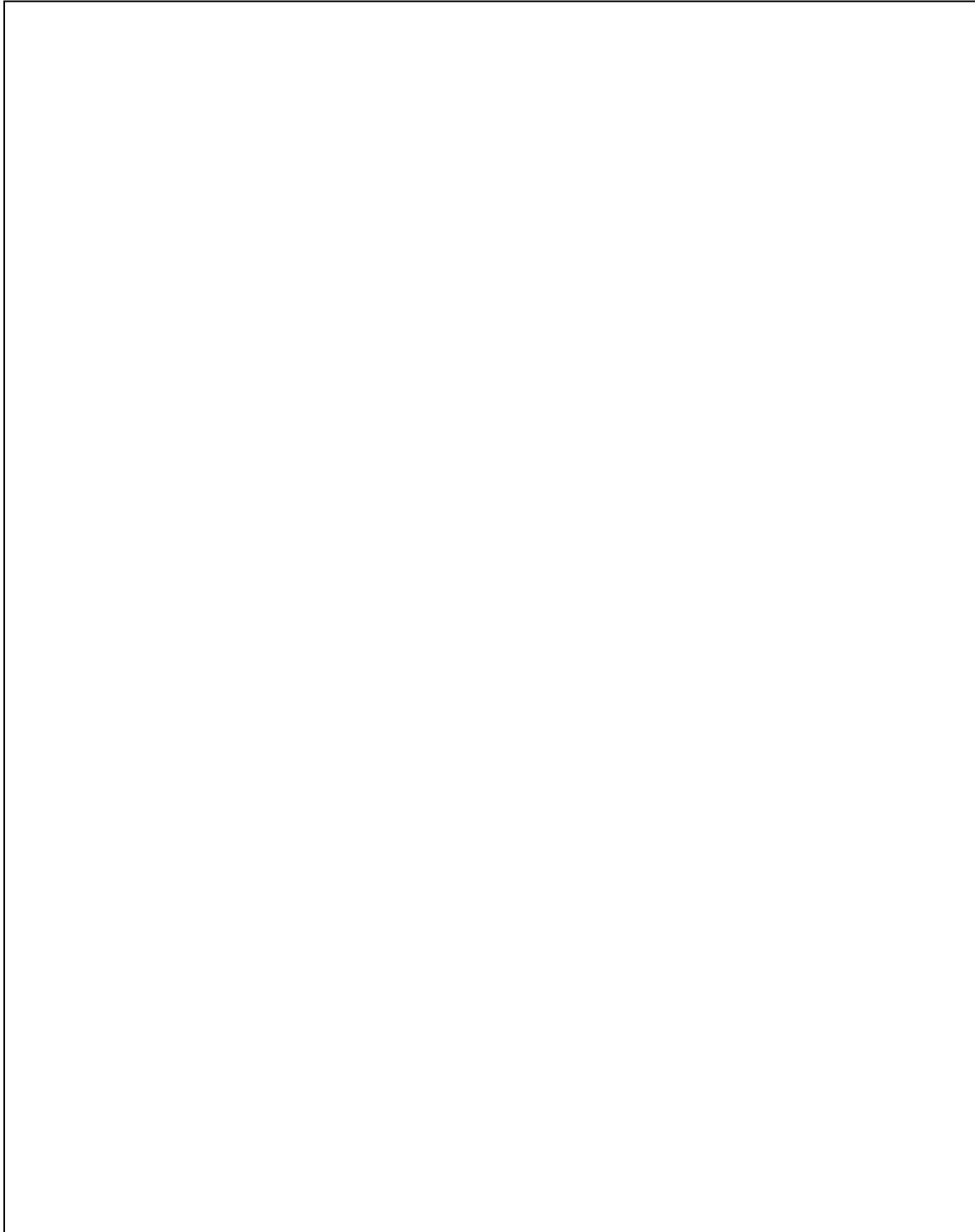
The Jewish Rabbinic understanding of the Torah (text) as black fire and the space around the words as 'white fire'. Both have equal meaning. Text + interpretation = meaning.



If there is time in your local groups to consider some of these paintings and reflections then we will do that. You may wish to make some notes below:

VISION AND DISCIPLESHIP – JUSTICE (20 mins)

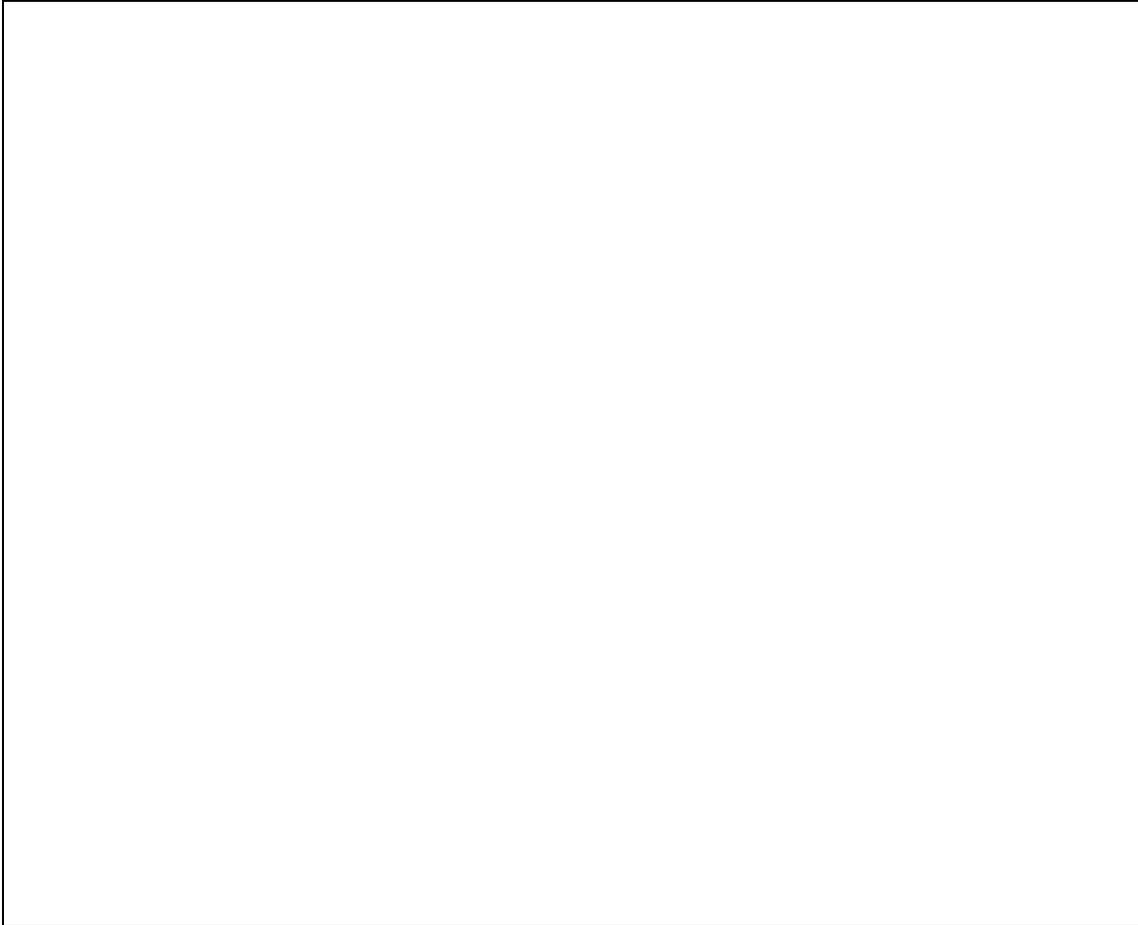
In preparation for this week's session, we were asked to read pages 94-100 from *Living Faithfully*. Part of the challenge of Christian discipleship is trying to be faithful to the vision of the Kingdom of God laid out in the Gospels, and encapsulated in the Lord's Prayer in particular. You will spend the next 20 mins in your local groups reflecting on +John Pritchard's comments on 'doing justice.' Try to focus your conversation—if you are able—on an identified issue of justice either in your local community or further afield, and what your church family might do to engage and address this issue. You may wish to make some notes below:



DISCIPLESHIP (30 mins)

Let's look at five areas of discipleship, and some associated biblical passages. You may wish to make notes as we go along in the space provided:

1. **Discipleship as story and journey** (John 1.36-39);

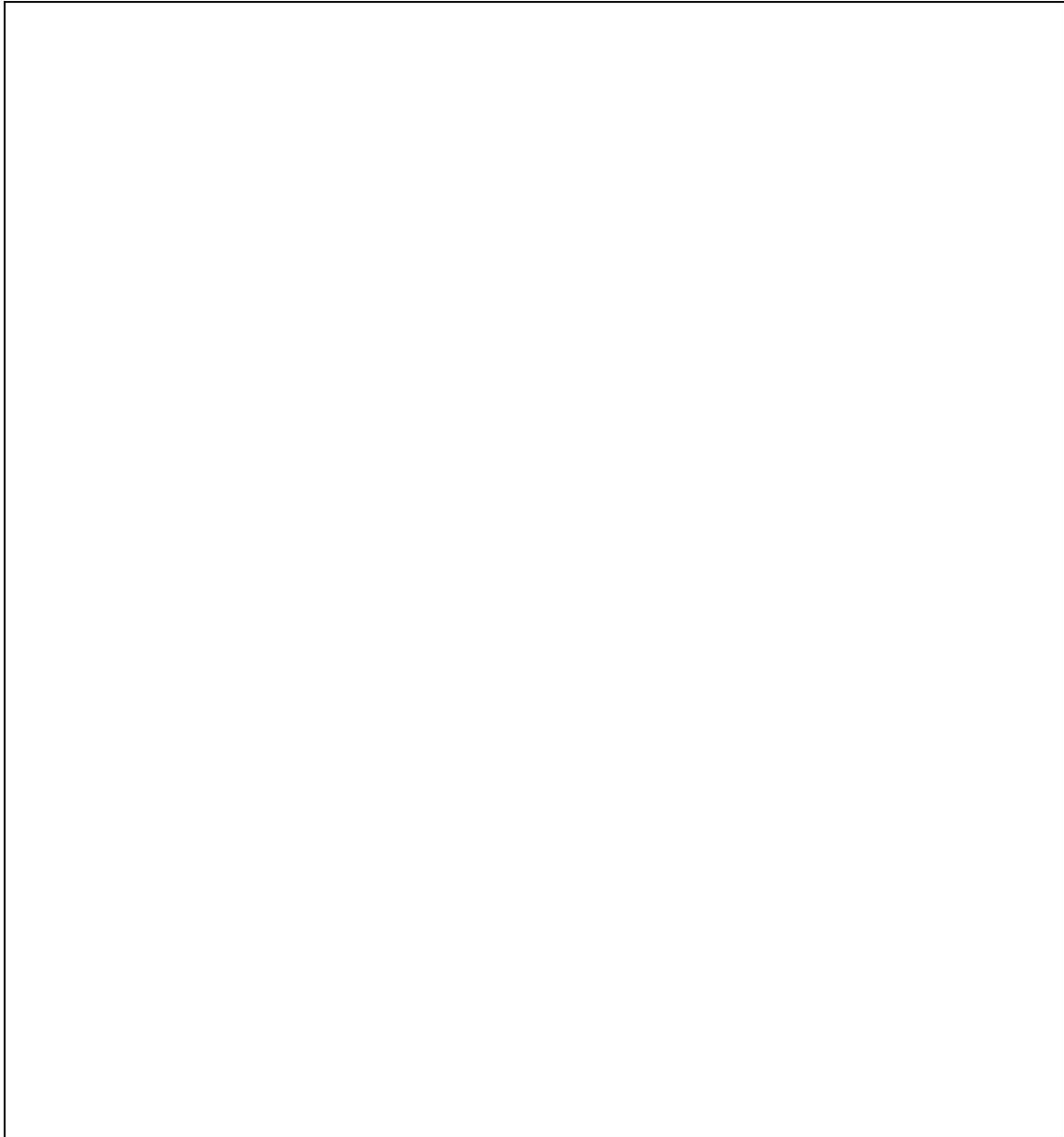


2. **Discipleship as overflowing hospitality** (John 2.1-12; Mark 4);

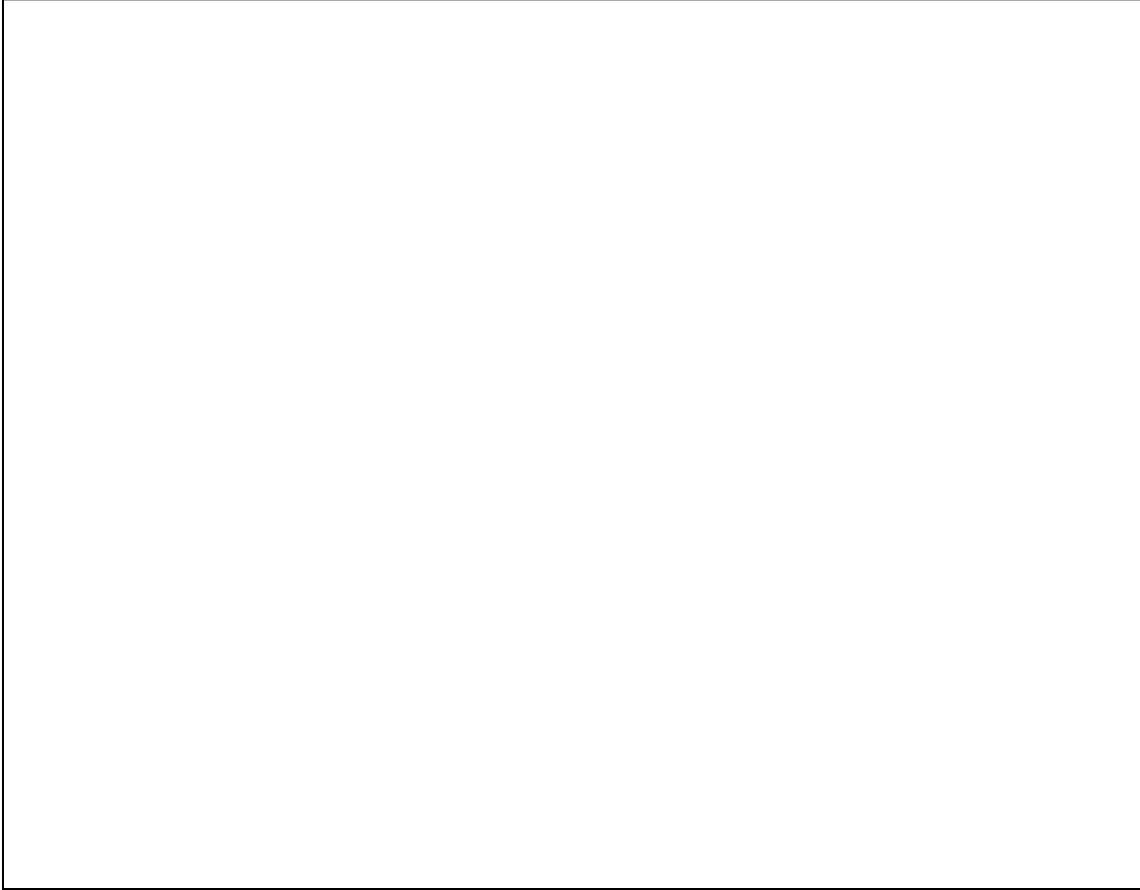




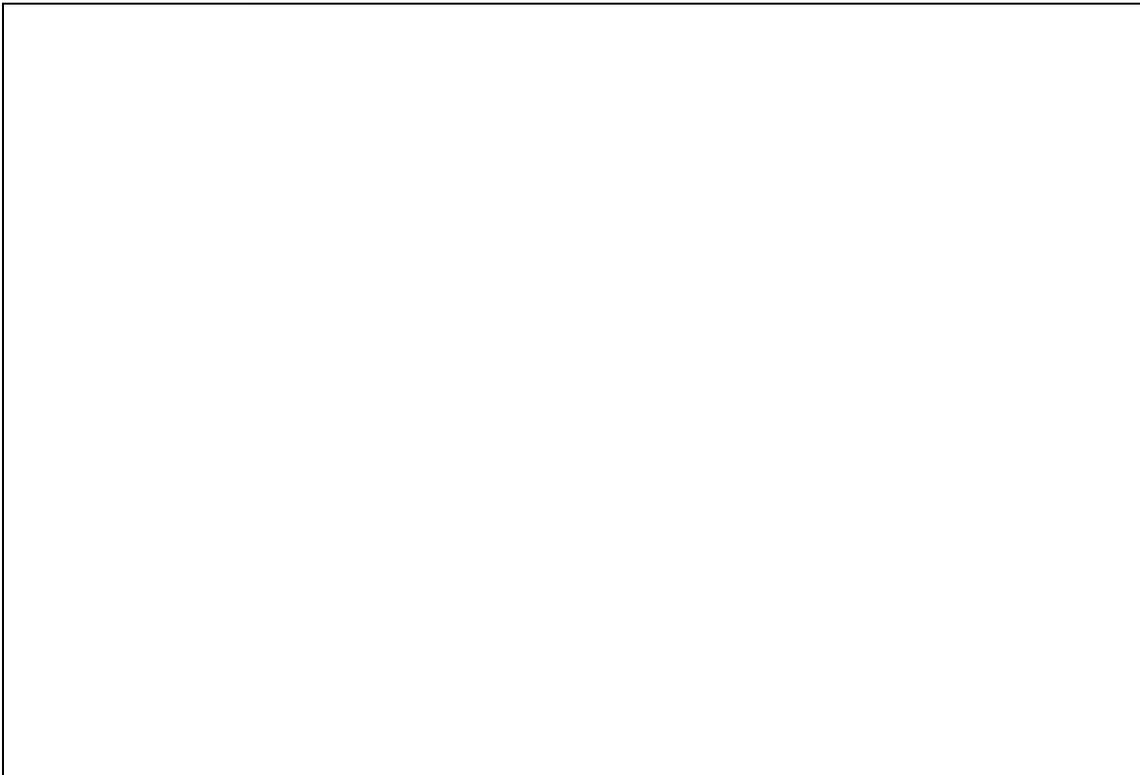
3. **Discipleship as encounter** (John 4; Mark 7.1-23);

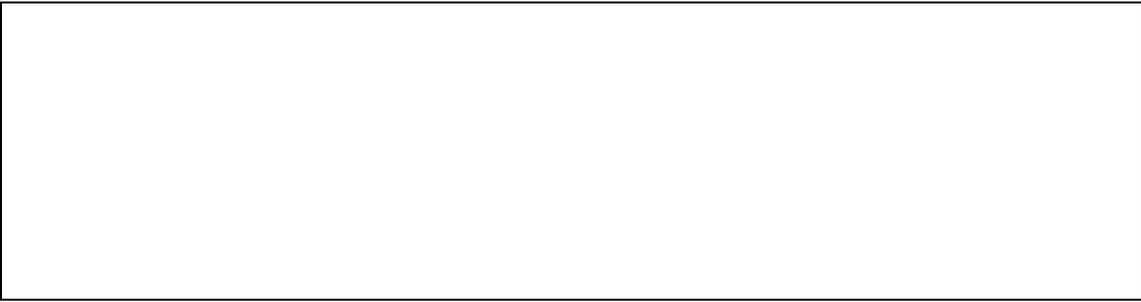


4. **Discipleship as making room** (John 14.1-7; Mark 10.46-52);



5. **Discipleship where the end is just the beginning** (Mark 16.1-8; John 21)





GETTING READY FOR BLOCK 3

Well done on completing blocks 1 and 2 of LiFT! In the final 6 sessions we will be covering preaching, ethics and morality, art, faith and theology, and sharing together what our experience of LiFT has been like, and what we might do next! As we begin to look ahead to these sessions, start to look back in your Journal – what are the main things you have been drawn to reflect on? What are the growth points, and what ‘edges’ may have been softened in your thinking? You may find this reflection from Stephen Cherry helpful as you look ahead:

May this day be blessed

‘May this day be blessed.’

*I do not know what that means
in advance.*

*I am asking for happiness,
but not for anything superficial.*

‘May this day be blessed.’

*I hope it will be indeed.
But how?*

*I am asking for a visit of grace,
but not for anything disruptive.*

‘May this day be blessed.’

*If it is, it will not be by my effort,
but by my acceptance.*

I am asking for openness,

the capacity to receive.

'May this day be blessed.'

*As was yesterday,
though I am not sure how.*

*Let my eye see backwards
and notice the blessing that was.*

'May this day be blessed.'
I am confident that it will be.

*My prayer is not for anything more,
simply to see and feel and know.*

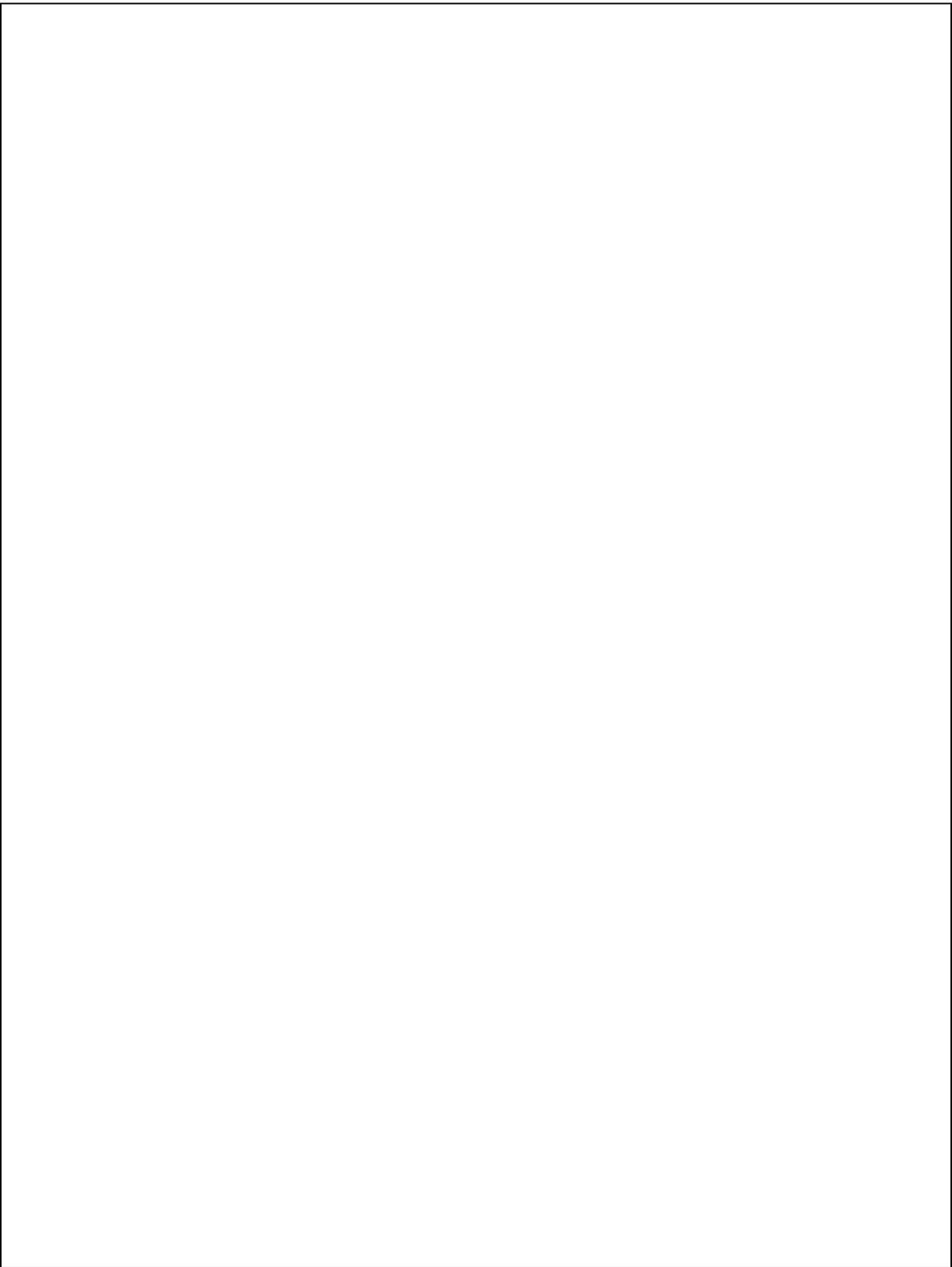
'May this day be blessed.'
*Not in anticipation but
in the living.*

'May this day be blessed.'
*Not by what I give or receive,
but in what I see and feel.*

'May this day be blessed.'
And may I be part of the blessing.

(Stephen Cherry, Barefoot Prayers, pp. 37-38)

Questions and Reflections



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