

Sanctuary First

A PLACE TO BE

Discussion questions Lent 2018

Heaven Touching Earth Part 2 (March 04 - 31)

Discovering spirituality in the everyday, the fantastic in the ordinary...

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Heaven Touching Earth Resource Pack 2 PDF](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all 3 questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part 4: Sustaining our lives in the presence of God		
<p>Read Psalm 19: 7-10</p> <p>God's laws are described as <i>perfect, sure, right, clear, enlightening, pure, enduring, true, and righteous</i>. So far, so straightforward - you can imagine a contemporary legal system defining itself like this - at least in aspiration, such as the preamble to the US Constitution that refers to forming a "more perfect Union". If not perfect than 'perfecting'.</p> <p>But what's verse 10 all about? Sweeter than honey? The laws are not described as <i>nourishing, or satisfying, or nutritious</i>, as just good for you - they are <i>delicious</i>...</p> <p>Where on earth is the psalmist going with this?</p>	<p>Read John 2: 13-16</p> <p>In this reading Jesus literally turns the tables on those who are cynically turning a shared public space into a commercial opportunity.</p> <p>Through Lent this year we are being inspired by Celtic Christian traditions that don't make the same distinctions that we do between the 'secular' and the 'sacred' - the 'religious' and the 'non-religious'.</p> <p>What would Jesus make of our city centres?</p> <p>POPS (privately owned public spaces) take up a lot of our urban areas. Large nominally shared spaces where people work, travel and socialise are often privately owned and tightly controlled for profit.</p> <p>How do you feel about public space in our society? If you would like it to be different, how would you like to see it transformed?</p>	<p>Read: Luke 18: 9-14</p> <p>As a group, retell this parable but imagine it is playing out on social media.</p> <p>What would the Pharisees have been like on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram?</p>

Part 5: The healing rhythm of repentance		
<p>Read Exodus 32: 1-5 and 19-24</p> <p>In verse 24, you can imagine Aaron shrugging his shoulders and saying 'what's it do with me?' When all is said and done, all he did was get together a pile of gold and chuck into a fire and then - out came this calf! What was he supposed to do?!</p> <p>Don't you just hate it when you ask your friends and family for gold - melt it and then a golden calf comes out?</p> <p>There's a marked shift here. In the first few verses he's a gold calf sculptor extraordinaire. And then 10 verses later it's just something that happened to him...</p> <p>This is a familiar pattern, in the Bible, in society, in our everyday life. Where we enthusiastically commit to doing something and take the credit for it but then when it blows up we distance ourselves from it. We redefine it as something that happened to us rather than something we did ourselves.</p> <p>Why do we do this and what are the consequences?</p>	<p>Read Ezekiel 47: 1-12</p> <p>Repentance can bring healing to a broken life in the same way that a river brings vitality and transformation to a landscape.</p> <p>But sometimes instead of letting the river flow, we dam it up, unwilling to admit our failings and vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Honestly confronting our past mistakes in a safe environment can lead to huge emotional, psychological and relational benefits.</p> <p>What stops us reaching out to one another and asking for forgiveness? What stops the river flowing? How can we burst the dam?</p>	<p>Read John 7: 40-41 and John 1: 45-46</p> <p>Do you ever rule people out because of where they come from?</p> <p>Perhaps not where they come from physically, but where they come from metaphorically?</p> <p>Do we rule certain people out because they identify as part of some group, or hold some view, or read a certain newspaper, or vote for a particular political party? We may have legitimate concerns about any of these things, but regardless does it stop us from giving others a fair hearing?</p> <p>Can you think of a time that you wrote someone off and then they completely surprised you?</p>

Part 6: Redeeming the culture - through the ministry of hospitality

Read Luke 2: 41-51

In this reading we see, that even at a young age, Jesus was keen to challenge social preconceptions. His ministry as an adult was marked by an openness to people others would often reject such as women, outsiders, and outcasts and here we see him disregarding his own age and background and making a space for himself right in the midst of the cosmopolitan elite.

Are there communities in our lives that we hold ourselves back from? That we consider ourselves to be the wrong age/gender/background for?

As well as making an effort to include others how can we do more to include ourselves?

Read John 8: 31-36

Is the freedom being discussed in this passage a freedom *from* or a freedom *to*?

Is it a freedom from *something* or a freedom to do *something*?

Read Jeremiah 20: 7-13

In verse 7 Jeremiah is venting about what we might call today 'the haters' - those who don't get it, who nitpick and undermine - who don't give him a fair chance.

Bear with us as we make a lateral move from the prophet Jeremiah to... pop singer Taylor Swift...

Swift's monster hit *Shake it Off* is about a vulnerable person, affected by people harshly judging her and her life decisions. In her anthemic chorus she decides that while haters are going to hate she is going to 'shake it off.' She's going to let go of all the cruel things that have been said about her and instead sing a rallying call of defiance, inviting others to join her.

Jeremiah does the same thing in verses 9-12. Haters gonna hate, but he's gonna shake it off.

Jeremiah and Swift are both inviting us to sing along, to join with them. In both cases, shaking things off - letting go of the hurt and pain is a spur to invite and include others, to join together, whether that be in the temple or on the dance floor.

What are the things in our lives that we need to shake off, in order for us to be free to live life to the fullest?

Part 7: The Communion of Saints		
<p>Read I Corinthians 1: 26-31</p> <p>Not a noble? Not powerful? Not even all that smart... no problem, says Paul acting like a rather unusual talent scout.</p> <p>Being invited to join the Communion of Saints (the community of Christians stretching back into history and on into the future) is not about having a good bloodline, good connections, or a good CV. It's not our credentials that matter, it's Jesus's.</p> <p>What weaknesses do you have that could be useful to Jesus?</p>	<p>Read Isaiah 53: 1-6</p> <p>This reading foreshadows the coming of the Messiah. Verses 2-3 describe him as having "no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him".</p> <p>How important is this detail? Is it an aside, just to establish that the Messiah was not a musclebound action man, or is there something else being said about his 'ordinariness'?</p> <p>What do you think Jesus looked like? Not so much the basic visual details like hair colour and so on, but what do you think his expressions and mannerism were like?</p> <p>How do you picture Jesus?</p>	<p>Read John 19: 38-42</p> <p>Here we see Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (two followers more on the fringes of the Jesus movement) acting as coconspirators, under the cover of darkness to act compassionately and sensitively.</p> <p>Christianity is not all about grand gestures from triumphant people. This passage shows us that at a key point of the narrative, two folk with weaker, looser connections to Jesus are called to act. We don't see Peter storming the gates, reclaiming the body and conducting an elaborate public funeral. Instead, a couple of scared but heartfelt individuals have a quiet word and do what they can.</p> <p>Despite our doubts, and our ambivalence and our reservations we can still play an important part in God's plans.</p> <p>Throughout this theme we have been encouraging one another to spot the spiritual in the everyday - is there something of the coconspirator in this - of the ones keeping their eyes peeled...?</p> <p>In what way could you be a 'coconspirator for Christ'? Acting in the shadows to do something compassionate and caring?</p>