

Rock, Paper, Scissors, Pegs
May 2023 (7 May - 3 June)



Rock, Paper, Scissors, Pegs

Rock, paper, scissors... pegs! This month we're doing a case study on some key shapers of the early church. What can we learn from the rock Peter? What will we uncover from Paul's papers? What gems glint in amongst the tantalising snippets? And who is Priscilla and why are we talking about pegs!?

This month we begin a new theme trilogy. Over the last six months we have reflected on the breadth and scope of our faith over space. Now we want to zoom in and plant these insights in specific lived examples of faith. So we begin in May by looking at some of the significant shapers of the early church who got in — not so much *at the ground floor* but *at the basement* of this brand new movement! Christianity for them was not simply some abstract and fuzzy concept — it was a living and breathing thing they had to come to terms with physically, emotionally, and socially. It inspired, challenged, stretched and fuelled them through tempestuous fluctuating times. So we're grounding our case studies in four everyday objects.

We have taken inspiration from the playground game rock-paper-scissors with its three interlocking components. Players of rock-paper-scissors must be quick on their feet adapting to the circumstances, like the first disciples. Rock, paper and scissors are ordinary objects too, things woven into the everyday act of existence, like the faith of the early church. Their faith wasn't a mystical magical thing kept separate from the rest of their lives — it was right in the middle of their everyday living and the daily decisions they made.

Then there's the tension and friction between the objects... like iron sharpening iron the creative tension between them ratchets up. Scissors beat paper, paper beats rock, rock beats scissors. Embedded in the game is a history of technology. A rock — essentially the most direct and basic of all tools. Paper an evolving shifting thing over time that has taken many forms from papyrus to parchment — a fundamentally simple object but labour intensive and time consuming to make. And then scissors — an advanced form of craftsmanship relying on a pyramid of multiple other technologies underneath it to work. Indeed even in New Testament times there would have been lots of rocks and versions of paper but no scissors in our machine-made modern sense. Some forms of shears but not the engineered scissors we know today. Scissors represent a complex point in human production capability. And yet even the sharpest edge of technology can be blunted by first principles — when it meets rock.

Human innovation in technology, or the arts, or in the church, is not a straightforward linear journey. It's more of a spiral moving forwards but in rotations as we discover and rediscover old truths that spin us forward. We might paper over the rocks, and cut the paper to smithereens but then the blades hit a rock and we reevaluate. Rocks are still important just like the bedrock insights in wider culture.

And what about those pegs? There's no pegs in the game, no alternative to the competition of rock/paper/scissors. But in the early church some tentmakers did see an alternative path — a way of making tents big enough to care for wider society while nurturing something new: God's vision of who we could be. People forging a way of life outside the rat-race, going against the grain with grace. Living lightly, planting pegs in the soil and welcoming one and all.

So join us as we explore how the early church came together spurring one another on and supporting one another in the midst of their hectic and unsure lives. They were a collection of rocks, papers, scissors and pegs — much more than the sum of their parts.

Just like us.

SETTING THE SCENE: A visual motif for each week. An optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the 4 week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

'Paper' a case study on Paul (7 May)

Paul's written legacy is one of the most influential in world history. What can we learn from this complex man who lived, breathed and wrote his way through the birth of an earth changing global movement? And in a wider sense, what does it mean to be God's paper — to be a canvass communicating to the world around us?

SETTING THE SCENE: **WRITING DESK**

SEEDS TO SOW: **IMAGINE WRITING A LETTER ABOUT YOUR FAITH TO YOUR HOMETOWN, WHAT WOULD YOU WRITE? "TO ALL THE SAINTS OF..."**

1. Acts 17: 16-31
 2. 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23
 3. 2 Timothy 4: 9-13
 4. Galatians 5: 22-6: 11
 5. Romans 5: 1-5
 6. Romans 12: 9-21
 7. 2 Corinthians 3: 1-6
1. **Paul engages with the culture.** He took time to answer questions and get into discussions. He walked around and carefully looked around him. In this reading we get an insight into the thoroughness of Paul the writer who paid attention to the world he found himself in. How are we engaging in the cultural habitat we find ourselves in?
 2. **Paul's the communicator.** Like Marshall McLuan Paul is interested in the *medium* as well as the *message*, not just *what* he says but *how* he says it and how he communicates to different groups. How do we tailor how we interact with different people and how do we do so while staying true to ourselves and God?
 3. **Paul put it down in writing!** If it were not for his scrolls and parchments we wouldn't be reading this now. Paul today might be saying 'Bring me my laptop... remember my external hard drive...' What tools do we use to communicate our faith and how do we archive what we're doing for future generations?
 4. **Paul's large letters!** Paul used metaphor and imagery to help paint a picture of faith. What pictures do we paint for others of our faith?
 5. **Paul's eloquence.** These words echo down through the centuries having been a solace to many. How are we being a solace for others?
 6. **Paul connecting the dots.** Paul is a kind of electrician in this passage talking about being a circuit connector of good and circuit breaker of evil. How are we overcoming evil with good in our daily lives?
 7. **Paul's legacy, our legacy.** In all his letters Paul was a compelling protagonist for Christ, talking the talk and walking the walk. What does it mean to be a letter of Christ in your life today?

'Pegs' A Priscilla Case Study (14 May)

Without pegs a tent is just a very large kite. The early church had many pegs who while able to look up to the heavens but could also hold firm to the ground they were set in. This week we turn to such a figure: Priscilla, a tentmaker, literally and figuratively, who was a shaper of the early church. Like the people we will look like next week, and unlike Peter and Paul, we know relatively little about Priscilla. Academics have various theories as they try to extrapolate from the little we do know but — as is often the case with pegs — vitally important pieces of the edifice can often be almost entirely hidden from view. So as we reflect on Priscilla this week we also meditate on all those souls quietly working away to hold things together and how important they are as we consider the metaphor of tent building.

SETTING THE SCENE: **CAMPSITE**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT KEEPS A PEG IN THE GROUND & WHAT KEEPS US GROUNDED?**

1. **Acts 18: 1–4**
 2. **Acts 18: 18**
 3. **Acts 18: 24-28**
 4. **Romans 16: 3-4**
 5. **1 Corinthians 16:19**
 6. **2 Timothy 4:19**
 7. **Exodus 33: 7-11**
1. **Some tentmakers.** We begin thinking about both literal and metaphorical tent making. Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were all people 'out of place' finding a new way of being. Did the work of making tents help inspire them in the metaphorical tent making of forming new communities in the Jesus movement? How can we be tentmakers in our communities, creating space for others?
 2. **Setting sail.** Priscilla is on the move again. As a tentmaker how do you think she adjusted moving from tent canvas to sail canvas and how do we adjust to being uprooted in the midst of our ministry to others?
 3. **A square peg...** Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos to understand the way of God better. How can we compassionately and sensitively help others in life and faith and how can we be humble and self-aware as we seek to understand, willing to accept help from grounding pegs like Priscilla and Aquila?
 4. **Co-workers in Christ.** Reflecting on the grounding nature of our friendships.
 5. **Greetings.** You've heard of pillars of the community, well what about pegs of the community? Priscilla was one such peg. Less showy than pillars perhaps, but vitally important. As stated above, a tent without pegs is just a big kite... Who are the pegs in our communities — holding things together?
 6. **Pegged together.** All these greetings creating a crisscross of communication — pegs to hold in place this fledgling new community.
 7. **Tent of meeting...** "God is always present but I'm not. Sometimes I'm somewhere else..." *Phil Stone, Director Scargill Movement.* Let's be inspired by the tent making of Priscilla and Moses to make our own tents of meeting where we can come to God.

'Snippets' An Early Church Shapers Case Study (21 May)

So back to rock, paper, scissors — and we'll use those scissors to look for the snippets, the little tantalising glimpses we get of some of the many souls who shaped the early church. Many are drawn from the remarkable sequence in Romans 16.

SETTING THE SCENE: **HABERDASHERY, SEWING SCISSORS, THREAD...**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT ARE WE SEWING AND MENDING IN OUR LIVES?**

1. **2 Timothy 1: 3-5** 1. **Lois, Eunice and you.** Reflecting on how faith is shaped generationally — directly and indirectly — by parents, grandparents and all the 'allopresents' who raise us.
2. **Acts 9: 36-42** 2. **What Tabitha Did Next.** We get a tantalising snippet of Tabitha's life, but what did she go on to do next? As we're thinking about scissors and snippets this week we are mindful of her role as someone who made clothes, is this something she carried on doing? Let's imagine together snippets of the rest of her life of discipleship.
3. **Acts 12: 12-17**
4. **Romans 16: 1-2** 3. **And what of Rhoda?** What doors did she go on to open having forgotten to open that one for Peter! What would life have been like for her over the years, remembering this moment?
5. **Romans 16: 7**
6. **Romans 16: 13** 4. **Phoebe's CV.** Imagine having Paul down as your reference? In a metaphorical sense who can we offer references for in our lives of discipleship?
7. **Romans 16: 15** 5. **The outstanding Andronicus and Junia.** As Paul had Andronicus and Junia we have Andronicuses and Junias in our lives whose outstanding presence supports us.
6. **Rufus's mother.** "...who has been a mother to me, too" wow! Rufus's mother was one of Paul's allopresents. What must it have been like to be like a mother figure to Paul?
7. **So many snippets of so many lives.** It can be easy to think about early church figures like Paul in isolation... but they weren't. They were both the product of and a contributing part of a vibrant community populated with saints living and striving together. Just like us.

'Rock' A Peter Case Study (28 May)

It's Pentecost, we have explored paper, scissors and pegs and now it's time to rock on with Peter! The big man, one of the most vivid protagonists of our faith, beloved for his flaws as much as his strengths. A true rock of the early church but one that could crumble, a man of great faith and great doubt. An unstoppable force that met the immovable object of God's love. This week we build a cairn out of the rocky fragments of this vital, vigorous life and see how it can help mark the way for us.

SETTING THE SCENE: **A CAIRN OF ROCKS ON A HILLSIDE**

SEEDS TO SOW: **MAKE A SMALL PRAYER CAIRN**

1. Acts 2: 1-21

(Pentecost)

2. Mark 1: 16-18

3. Matthew 14: 22-36

4. Matthew 16: 13-20

5. John 21: 15-19

6. Acts 10: 1-16

7. Acts 10: 17-48

(Writer to choose smaller subsection of verses to focus on)

1. **Rocky times.** It's a rocky moment, no one is sure what happens next. And then the big man gets up to speak...
2. **Rocking on.** Doing some geology as we go back to pre-rock Peter.
3. **Rocky by nature.** Impulsive Peter finds himself in rocky waters.
4. **Rocky by name.** When Jesus made this declaration he was aware of all of Peter — his strength and his fallibility.
5. **Rocky shore.** What can we learn from this scene for our lives of discipleship today? Can we take some rocks from this shoreline to build a little cairn to help the mark the way for us?
6. **The rocky road to Peter.** Peter and Cornelius are on the road to discovering new things.
7. **The rocky road to Cornelius.** A change of direction...