

Spirit of Connectivity

May 2020 (3-30 May)



A Church instituted by Christ but constituted by the Spirit of Creativity



This month we are going to be thinking about the way God creatively and often miraculously uses the Holy Spirit to create a visible and invisible network of believers. He often uses the most vulnerable and surprising people to be his hands and feet in the world. His end goal or big picture being to redeem his creation. Paul speaks about this in Ephesians 1: 9-10.

Jesus also identifies his mission as redemptive in the words of his manifesto borrowed from Isaiah when he declared in his local synagogue that he had come to bind up the broken hearted and to bring justice and meaning into all our troubled lives (see Luke 4: 16-21).

We will explore:

- the creativity of the networked church
- the importance of a network in a time of suffering
- sharing our faith passionately but with a gentle loving approach
- being a witness in a worldwide network

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

The Creative Networked Church (3 May)

In week one we are going to look at Acts 2:42-47 and consider if this is a model for a very different kind of church community? Could this be the Network Church constituted by the Holy Spirit that we also need today? An online and offline community? One that suits the 21st century — enabling the Christian community to become more devoted to prayer, teaching and fellowship?

Using Acts 2:42-47 as our resource text this week, we will see how other parts of scripture might support a concept of church that is networked rather than institutionalised in one building, with one minister in one particular parish. Instead how effective would a church be that is networked across the world using technology as a tool to enhance the net worth of meaningful mission? Might it just reflect the energy and enthusiasm that first brought the Christian church into being?

1. Acts 2:42 1. **Creative Church** shaped by prayer, teaching and fellowship.
2. Psalm 23 2. **Creative Church** filled with expectation.
3. Acts 4:32-35 3. **Creative Church** sharing resources.
4. John 4. **Creative Church** challenging the institution.
8:53-59 5. **Creative Church** — networked homes.
5. Acts 12:12 6. **Creative Church** — attracts life.
6. Acts 2: 41 7. **Creative Church** is modelled on Father's house.
7. John 14: 1-4

The Suffering Church Network (10 May)

In week two we are going to look at Acts 7:55-60 . This is the story relating the death of Stephen the first Christian martyr. This story will become our resource story this week to help us reflect upon the cost of discipleship. Here is a strange truth — while Jesus said he had come to bring life in all its fullness, he never shrank from telling his followers that for some, the day would come when they, like him, would face persecution and even death. None of us are exempt from illness and suffering.

Each of us, as we seek to follow Christ, at some part of our life's journey will have to face up to the cost of following Jesus. For some Christians in recent years it has been a beheading, for others it has been loss of freedom and imprisonment, while others have experienced bullying and a loss of status and income. The readings this week will seek to bring insight into the way God creatively uses our suffering and loss to bring about a redemptive outcome. At the time of trial and loss often we don't feel like trying to understand; we are more interested in knowing how we can cope with the pain and the loss. However scripture is a great resource with its many insights giving us the ability to carry on in the midst of great hardships. **Reflect upon the importance of a network in a time of suffering.**

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| 1. Acts 7: 55-60 | 1. Personal Suffering — Stephen our example. |
| 2. Psalm 31 | 2. In our time of trial God is our refuge. (See the version in Eugene Peterson's <i>The Message Bible</i>). |
| 3. 1 Peter 2: 1-3 | 3. How to deal with rejection. |
| 4. John 14:18 | 4. In your suffering you're never alone. |
| 5. Hebrews 4:
14-16 | 5. Jesus understands our struggles. |
| 6. 1 Corinthians
10:13 | 6. The back to bear the burden. |
| 7. Revelation
2:10 | 7. Being faithful has its reward |

When the Holy Spirit moves in a Church Without Walls (17 May)

Acts 17:22-31 is our resource text for the week. It's an interesting story. The Apostle Paul finds himself in Athens, walking among the gods of Greece. He comes across an altar to "The Unknown God". The Holy Spirit uses this spirit or culture of openness towards spirituality to help Paul and others explore the God of all creation. He makes sure Paul doesn't criticise those of other faiths. Instead he builds on their inclusive approach and gains Paul a hearing. In this week's reflections we will be thinking on how we as Christians can be attentive to the Holy Spirit in order to listen to people of differing opinions, while at the same time being faithful to what we believe. Sharing our faith passionately but with a gentle loving approach is always more effective than confrontational arguments.

1. Acts 17: 22-31

2. Psalm 68

(Daily Worship writer to choose an extract from the Psalm they wish to focus on).

3. 1 Peter 3: 13-22

4. John 14: 15-17

5. Acts 1:1-11

6. Matthew 13: 31-32

7. Matthew 9:10-17

1. **The unknown God defined.** Paul moves from talking about God being unknown to suggesting that they have been searching for something that is innate within their hearts: the knowledge of the one true God the creator of all. This reading invites us to consider that perhaps even non believers know more of God than they might want to admit.
2. **The All powerful God.** God cannot be contained in buildings. The whole of creation acknowledges his awesome power. This is our God who gives us power to be alive. A regular attender of church buildings doesn't have a monopoly on God's ear.
3. **Always be ready with your reason.** This passage reminds us the message of the kingdom is for everyone. So we must never be afraid to share what we believe with those brought into our orbit of influence. And to allow God to speak through the least of these encounters.
4. **The Holy Spirit, God's presence in our lives.** It is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives as believers that draws us together. True fellowship does not require buildings or institutions, it is brought about by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer who constitutes the church "where two or three are gathered together".
5. **Waiting For the gift.** There is a need that opens up in a person, a longing for something more. It can never be encountered through being busy. Anyone who wants to develop a living faith must first of all make space to encounter the gift of the Holy Spirit. This inevitably involves periods of waiting. Often encounter comes through a network beyond our walls.
6. **The Kingdom of God has room for all.** God's Kingdom starts small in the heart of a man and grows to be like a generous tree sheltering all.
7. **Jesus the Network Connector breaking down barriers.** He eats with and befriends the wrong people - A church without walls is surely a community without barriers

A world-wide network of witnesses (24 May)

For the Church to grow each witness needed to have their own story of faith. Luis Palua the Argentinian evangelist is credited with saying “God has no grandchildren”. What he was highlighting was that everyone has to at some point recognise their faith for themselves. You can’t have a secondhand faith. We need to witness the power of Christ in our own lives before we can share with authenticity the power of Christ to change the heart of another individual.

The second century writer Celsus (c. 180 AD) once described the Christian Church as a close-knit structure that had a coherence of a social group. He wrote: ‘Their agreement is quite amazing’. It’s true that the early Christians were interconnected and that they communicated via travelling teachers, healers and letters. It was a communication network which functioned on an informal basis, but with time it became more formal. The bishop and Christian congregation in a certain area would function as a ‘node’, a point of reference and support, sending out and assisting teachers to travel further. It meant that even very small groups of Christians could be reached. At the heart of this community was a desire to share their faith with the whole world. There is much to learn from the first Christians but today we too have to find our networks to share faith.

1. Acts 1:12-14
 2. 1 Peter 4:12-14
 3. John 17: 1-19
 4. John 17: 20-23
 5. Psalm 68: 32-35
 6. John 7:37-39
 7. John 14: 5-14
1. **Becoming witnesses.** Praying constantly together.
 2. **The suffering witness.**
 3. **Protecting and sustaining the witnesses.** Jesus’s prayer #1.
 4. **Unifying the witnesses.** Jesus’s prayer #2.
 5. **The power of the witness.**
 6. **Streaming in our lives is a River of Hope.**
 7. **The network centred on Jesus.** A network that we are invited to be a part of.