

WEEK 2: ACT JUSTLY

LEADERS RESOURCES

A. COURSE OUTCOMES: OUR OVERALL GOALS

By the end of the course people will be able:

- To articulate the gospel for themselves and communicate it to others, without embarrassment or distortion
- To understand how the above actions help us to interpret and practise the breadth and depth of the gospel
- To recognize how the good news of Jesus Christ is rooted in the book of Acts and in the 4 Gospels

B. AIMS FOR THIS WEEK: WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

- 1 To re-engage with the heart of God for justice and integrity
- 2 To see how Jesus and the early church engaged with issues of injustice
- 3 To expand and extend our commitment to play our part in challenging injustice at every level in society

C. PLAN YOUR SESSION: A CHECKLIST

- Pray for your session and for those who will attend
- Read the passages, perhaps in different translations, to bring out the meaning
- Read the notes summary for the week
- Note the key words and other passages you can explore if you have time
- Read through the session plan
- Remember to review your session afterwards

D. SUMMARY FOR THE WEEK: TO INFORM YOUR THINKING

God is a God of justice, and as his children (adopted into his family) we should demonstrate that family likeness in our lives day by day, loving what he loves, caring about what he is concerned about. His righteous rule will come completely when the Kingdom of God is seen in all its fullness. In the meantime we are called to live out his kingdom values, guided by his Holy Spirit.

Through the Old Testament God sent the prophets to guide and warn his people. They were often ignored and sometimes treated harshly too. Today those who speak out with unpopular messages can also be treated the same in all walks of life.

If you look at the life of Jesus and his three short years of public ministry, you can see he spent a disproportionate amount of his time (as recorded in the 4 Gospels) in the company of those excluded from society. His harshest words were for the religious leaders who mainly ignored his teaching as they had the prophets before him. These men were so careful in their tithing that they even tithed their herbs - and yet ignored justice, mercy and faithfulness (See Matt 23:23-34).

In our readings today we have the Samaritan crossing the boundaries of racial hatred and doing the right thing. He is treating his enemy primarily as a human being. Righteousness is about living up to God's standards not our own, unlike Ananias and Sapphira (in the reading from Acts), and doing the right thing even when it is costly.

Young people and children quickly discover what injustice is all about through bullying, racism, favouritism, physical and verbal abuse and so on. If you've ever played a game with children you will know they are very sensitized to the issues of what is fair and what is not! Your local school would be a good place to start to explore how you can act justly.

E. WORDS FOR THE WEEK: KEY WORDS FOR THIS SESSION

Prophecy: *propheteia*. Speaking forth the mind and counsel of God. It is not primarily foretelling but rather a telling of the will of God in a particular context. In the Old Testament it was about one who stood in the presence of God and declared to the people of God the words of God. To be prophetic today is to both recount the work of God,

and to explain his purposes, and to bring his mind to bear on a situation.

Righteousness: *dikaiosune*. The character of being right or just. It was originally expressed as "rightwiseness". It is a word used of the character of God, his very nature. He is faithful to that character. God acted righteously in regard to sin, in that he did not take it lightly and dismiss it, but sent his Son to deal with it.

F. OTHER SCRIPTURES TO REFERENCE

Isaiah 58:6-7 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Matthew 6:33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

G. LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

This week's theme helps us to consider what it means to be pioneering faith communities – how to live differently as God's people in a world where injustice is rife. It also engages us in thinking about how we can influence the structures and policies that affect our lives. What can we do to bring a Christian perspective to bear on the way society works? It fits very well with our diocesan strategy, particularly strategic priority 3, as we seek to transform society.

H. REVIEWING YOUR SESSION

We would encourage you to spend a little time reviewing your session once you have led it through.

Here are some questions to think about:

- What went well and why – what evidence is there that it did?
- What would you change if you did it again?
- What advice would you pass on to the person who is leading the group next time?

CORE MATERIAL

Use the following structure to guide you through your session. Each part has a suggested time to enable you to be finished in 90 minutes.

1 OPEN WITH PRAYER (3 MINUTES)

Use the following passages from the scriptures to reflect upon before you begin your time together as a group:

Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times (Psalm 106:3)

Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:16b-17)

Or this prayer for justice

*Father, you have given all peoples one common origin.
It is your will that they be gathered together as one family in yourself.
Fill the hearts of mankind with the fire of your love
and with the desire to ensure justice for all.
By sharing the good things you give us,
may we secure an equality for all
our brothers and sisters throughout the world.
May there be an end to division, strife and war.
May there be a dawning of a truly human society
built on love and peace.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord.
Amen.*

Or

Use this reflection by Fred Drummond from the Evangelical Alliance:

Lord, you are King forever. You see all things, hear all cries and you never forget. I place my trust in you and in your coming kingdom.

Amen

2 INTRODUCTION (2 MINUTES)

Read the following aloud or use your own words to explain what it says:

Today we are looking at this world through God's eyes, seeing his pain and responding to his heart by engaging with issues of injustice and inequality privately, corporately and publicly. As disciples of Christ we are part of his new creation, called to speak out and act in his name to bring in his kingdom.

God has called us to know him and placed us in particular neighbourhoods and networks. How can we play our part in bringing in his reign and rule of justice where we are?

What is he calling us to pray for and to do?

3 BIBLE BASE (30 MINUTES)

Read Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ²⁶ He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' ²⁷ He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' ²⁸ And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' ³⁰ Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' ³⁷ He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Questions:

Try and hear this story afresh by looking at things from the perspective of the Samaritan.

What might have stopped him from helping the injured man?

How did Jesus use this engagement with the lawyer to speak out for justice?

How can we speak up for the voiceless today?

How can we live radically generous lives in a broken world?

Try to be specific and not just general.

Now read Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; ² with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ 'Ananias,' Peter asked, 'why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us[a] but to God!' ⁵ Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter said to her, 'Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price.' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' 9 Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.' 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

Questions:

The Early Church was under threat from within as well as persecution from without. Luke records what happened: Ananias and Sapphira had committed to giving the proceeds of a field to the work of the church – but didn't!

Why did it matter?

Integrity continues to be a key issue for the church, to “walk the walk as well as talk the talk”.

How do we help one another to be people of action and not just words? What stops us?

What issues of injustice ‘get your goat’? Local and global.

How can you speak up about them, and act upon them?

4 WORKING IT OUT (10 MINUTES)

Either watch the 2nd film on the USB stick about how people are offering loving service to those in need.

Or

Read one or two of the following examples out loud as examples of what people are doing about this in the Diocese of Winchester.

Work with Ex-Offenders.

The Footprints Project trains volunteers in Hampshire to support ex-offenders who ask for their help whilst in prison and are returning to their communities. Men and women leaving custody are met at the prison gate by their mentor and supported in accessing housing and benefits, healthcare, training and employment. Intensive mentoring is a significant factor in helping to reduce re-offending and in empowering mentees to reach the goals they set for themselves (The Footprints Project).

<http://www.footprintsproject.co.uk/>

Supporting Mental Health.

In 2009 a small group from Romsey Abbey set up Triangulate to raise awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, to signpost to sources of support and to challenge the stigma associated with the illness. The group has experts on the group but they believe their greatest strength comes from being prepared to stand up and work towards making a difference (Triangulate, Romsey)

<http://www.triangulate.org.uk/>

5 COFFEE BREAK (15 MINUTES)

During this time of coffee encourage people to talk about what they have heard and seen. Make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute if they want to.

To open up discussion:

What injustices make you angry? What do you think God is calling you to do about them?

6 WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

What have you noticed about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in the first part of this session?

Now give out the Alternative Profession of Faith (from this book, download it or the USB stick).

What is the difference between believing and trusting?

Together as a large group:

Looking through the eyes of unchurched baptism parties (you may have been one of these yourself!) what do you think these descriptions of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit mean to them?

How else could you describe them or explain them?

For personal reflection:

How do you experience God as Father, Son or Spirit?

7 COMMUNICATING MY STORY

Thinking about how you would explain who God is, are there particular phrases from the Bible, hymns/songs or prayers which convey to you something about who God is?

What favourite ones come to mind?

Or, perhaps you associate a particular image, shape or colour with the 3 persons of the Trinity?

Take the pyramid template and spend a few minutes writing or drawing on its 4 faces what you think about the different persons of God

Now get together in 2s or 3s (you will need as much space as you can find). Decide who will speak first, listen first (and observe, if you are in a 3). You will have 6 minutes each in a pair (or 4 minutes each in a 3).

Together as a large group:

Take it in turns to talk about your experience of God and understanding of him as Father, Son and Spirit. Use your pyramid if it helps!

In the same groups, use the sheet on listening skills to assess how well you each listened, not to assess what was said (if you are in a 3, the observer will have a chance to reflect on what they saw).

Then, share together how you felt about your experience of talking about God.

8 THIS WEEK'S TASK

During the week:

- See if you can summarise the Good News about what Christians believe in a tweet (NB A tweet can be at most 140 characters in length!)
- Then, if you can, write down what you believe about God and what it means for you to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There is more help in the individual booklet to help you.

9 PRAYER

End your session by giving thanks for a God who does not just paper over the cracks of injustice but is driven to action, and calls us to work with him in making a difference.

10 RESOURCES

The alternative profession of faith, pyramid template, the sheet on listening skills and the individual booklet can be found on the USB stick and on the website.

There are also tracts (available from the launch events) which can be used to help people to explain their faith.

11 NEXT WEEK'S THEME

Next week we will be looking at how we are called to serve God in his world, remembering the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus – serving sacrificially.