

## Teaching: Winter-Spring 2021



**The theme for the coming term will be to explore what it means to 'leave the ninety-nine'. We will look at what this tells us about the heart (motivation) of God and the mission of God. We will explore welcome – who is welcome and what does welcome actually mean. We will look at examples of how Jesus engages with 'the least, the last and the lost'.**

### Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2021

#### 1. Readings: (NRSV)

##### Mark 10: 17-22

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 18 Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother."' 20 He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money[c] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

##### John 8

8 1 while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 11 She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

**Luke 19:1-10**

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' 8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' 9 Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

**1 Corinthians 5**

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons — 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.'

**2. Questions:**

- a. What have been your best and worst experiences of being welcomed at church? Why was that?
- b. In what ways might the church (our church) demonstrate muddled thinking over welcome, or do you think we have it clear in our minds?
- c. What do you think Jesus was looking for in a disciple; a follower of his?
- d. Ashley suggested that everyone should be welcomed in to the church and we should see changing lives through the witness of the community, the teaching of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit. Is it really that 'simple'?
- e. What was your experience of becoming a disciple of Jesus and entering the church?
  - i. How much did you understand?
  - ii. How sinless was your life?
  - iii. How strong was your faith?
  - iv. What were your hopes?

**3. Prayer**

Recognise that our sole basis for God's welcome is Jesus' death and resurrection

*Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come*

Recognise the reality of our faith today – struggles with sin, doubts, fears

*Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt  
Fighting and fears within without  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come*

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve  
Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come*

Pray for the church of ABC; for our leaders and their decisions and responsibilities they carry.  
Pray for our culture, based on what we believe – that we reflect the example of Jesus and the teaching of Paul.

#### 4. Text of the Sermon:

##### **Leave the Ninety Nine: Who do we welcome?**

I've had a range of different welcome experiences when visiting churches and I can't say that one denomination seems to have got it any better than another; it seems to very much depend on the individual congregation.

So visiting two different **Pentecostal** Churches, the welcome on both occasions involved me having to stand up in front of hundreds of people, being clapped and in the other church which I visited with my family, us being surrounded by people who rested hands on our shoulders and prayed for us. I the extrovert smiled and politely thanked them, my family... not so much.

In **Anglican** churches I have been ignored, been eyed with suspicion and also, at St Mary's, Sale during my sabbatical, experienced probably the best welcome I ever known. I was incognito, welcomed by those who sat around me and then when the minister approached me felt I needed to come clean with who I was. A brief conversation ensued, but then, after the service he asked whether two people, who would not know who I was, might pray for me at this time. I sat with them, was ministered to by them; it was incredibly humbling and helpful.

My experience of **Roman Catholic** churches is mixed. We had a fabulous welcome when some years ago we visited the Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool, but then I also habitual feel excluded, second-class and TBH patronised when during ecumenical services in Roman Catholic churches as the Baptist representative I am politely and with a little embarrassment, told that of course as a non-Catholic I am not welcome to receive the Eucharist (communion).

Okay, so I haven't mentioned Baptist Churches, but I guess my experience is usually so skewed because they know who I am. But generally, it all depends on the individual church.

In all me experiencing of welcome and thinking about it there is question which I have struggled answer.

##### **Who do we welcome and who do we not welcome?**

You see the struggle I have is because I seem to have two voices telling me different things at the same time. I guess many of us have seen that video which comedian Matt Lucas released parodying Boris Johnson's advice in the early part of the pandemic. The one that goes, 'go to work, don't go to work, stay at home, don't go to work, go to work...'.  
And just as we might say, 'Well Boris, which one is it?'

We might equally ask ourselves – 'Hey church, which one is it?'

##### **Do we welcome everyone, or do we not welcome everyone?**

I say that because as a church we **say** we welcome everyone. With the full approval of the elders last year I painted on the glass doors of the church 'Everyone Welcome'. Everyone!

Yet it's also our practice that we set conditions on who can be a member – not everyone can be a member. And in my time here people's application for membership does get rejected. All of which led to one leader in the church suggesting that it can be easier to become a Christian and enter the KoG than it is to enter a Baptist church.

Matt Lucas may want to parody us and say ‘Everyone welcome, not everyone welcome. God to ABC, don’t go to ABC.’

**Let’s take a look at some Bible stories from the NT to help us out of this uncertainty.**

There’s a lot of material we could look at so I will reference just a few stories.

(At this point I feel a bit like a contestant on Countdown doing this, saying to Rachel Riley ‘I’ll have three from the Gospels please and one from Paul.)

- Jesus and the woman caught in adultery
- Jesus and the rich young man
- Jesus and Zacchaeus
- 1 Corinthians 15

These first two I’ll take together.

The first is of a wealthy young man who comes to Jesus to enquire about following him and Jesus appears to give the young man a qualification for following him.

**Mark 10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’**

But to understand this story correctly we always need to understand the context and recognise what goes before which, in fact, is a conversation in which the young man claims that he has kept every law in the book, since he was a young man – something Jesus doesn’t question. So the assumption could be made that there is nothing in this young man’s life which would prevent him from following Jesus – he ticks all the boxes.

And yet Jesus says that he still lacks one thing.

He needs to go and sell his possessions and take the proceeds and give it to the poor.

The story tells us that the man was stunned by Jesus’ answer and went away, because he was very rich.

Was his love of money another sin to address, comply with the law, tick off the list?

Of course its not. His love of wealth, the thing Jesus put his finger on, was the whole dispossession of this young man, the whole focus of the young man’s life.

He couldn’t follow Jesus, because he was following money.

Fulfilling the law, ticking off compliance with all the rules is not what it is to follow Jesus.

Being able to say I don’t do that, I don’t do that, I don’t do that is not enough to follow Jesus. What is enough is being wholehearted in following Jesus and not money or anything else.

In John 8 we read of the scribes and the Pharisees who brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, for which the law states she should be killed by stoning. But they ask Jesus what he thinks. His answer:

**John 8:7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’**

The story ends with Jesus refusing to condemn her, but also telling her to not sin anymore.

**10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ 11 She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’**

What Jesus does is two-fold.

He addresses the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. His 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' The hypocrisy which says that no person is without sin. (It brings to mind the line I heard some years ago – ***Why is it that Christians get so upset with people who sin differently from the ways they do?***)

Jesus shows that the religious leaders, the insiders are in fact no different from the woman. They are all sinners. So who are they to pronounce judgement?

But he also has a message for the woman in which firstly Jesus does not condemn her. But also he tells her to, 'Go on your way, and from now on do not sin again' he calls her to a life without sin.

**Do you think she remembered what Jesus did for her that day?**

**Do you think that she was stunned by Jesus' non condemnation of her, against the Pharisees condemnation?**

**I think she sinned again. I hope she remained a follower of Jesus.**

And I also cite Jesus and Zacchaeus simply because it evidences the extraordinary lengths that Jesus goes to, to demonstrate welcome and inclusion.

You'll probably know that this character Zacchaeus was basically a thief, swindling people out of money through his work as a tax collector. As such he was despised by the wider populace. So when Jesus saw him, how would Jesus deal with this one then?

**Rebuke him for his wrong practice?**

**Disassociate himself from him so as not to be sullied by his reputation?**

**Explain why Zacchaeus could not find his place in God's kingdom?**

Well in fact, none of that. As Luke records the story Jesus says absolutely nothing to Zacchaeus about rebuking his lifestyle, concern for his own holiness or why Zacchaeus might be beyond the pale. Jesus says to Zacchaeus:

**'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.'** Luke 19:5

No judgement, no condemnation, no concern for Jesus' own purity at being associated with this person and entering his home (something which the crowd thought extraordinary).

And the result:

**8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.'** 9 Then Jesus said to him, **'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'**

In this story Jesus doesn't even describe the change which would be an appropriate response in the person's life – selling possession, no longer sinning – all we read is classic 'Leave the ninety nine' - **the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost**. Something we see repeatedly in the Gospels:

**Luke 7**

**"Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!"**

**Luke 5**

**The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?'**

To which Jesus answered

**‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.’**

We do get it wrong when either we think that becoming a Christian is first about either:

- Living a life without sin (that’s legalism)
- Persuading someone to believe something new (intellectualising it)

When it’s actually about being reconciled and becoming a wholehearted follower of Jesus.

I’ve included 1 Corinthians 15 because it’s one of those passages which I’m likely to get quoted back to me. It’s a passage where there is judgement. Where people are placed at arms-length, where people no longer have a place in the life of the God’s people.

In it Paul writes:

**9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you.’**

There we are; as plain as day! Paul telling is the church that we have to make judgements about those we welcome and include and those we exclude!!!

But yet again we fail to understand those words unless read in their right context.

These stern words are written to those *in* church, **anyone who bears the name brother or sister**, they are not about those outside who are being welcomed in. As the final verse tells us, **God will judge those outside. ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you.**

We cannot use a person’s failures and sin to exclude them. Get them into church, include them in the community and there **with the community of believers, under the teaching of scripture and with the power of the Holy Spirit** in the church then challenge, and teach with much care, winsomeness and grace.

Become a follower and join with others in the community. There learning and lifestyle changes and develops. Back in the summer Arthur Brown gave us a simple template for this and it seems that at least one local church has adopted **this same template.**

St Peter’s, Hale 

Services [Who We Are](#) Children & Youth What’s On 

**BELONGING, BELIEVING, BECOMING**

That is the conclusion I have come to.

The summary of all my words could simple be Belonging, Believing, Becoming.

There is no person, no person who genuinely wanted to follow Jesus that I wouldn’t baptise.

I have great faith in the church, working as a community, under the teaching of scripture and with the power of Holy Spirit to challenge, and teach with much care, winsomeness, love and grace. Because that is what the church has done for me.

That's the church I want to be a part of.

### **Closing:**

When I was growing in my teenage years the church I attended with my family met in a community centre, not unlike The Hub.

On occasion there would be evening Gospel services, when our minister Ken, who trained with our John Boyers, would preach a gospel message and invite a response. Over the years I saw friends in the youth group, my best friend Gill and also my younger sister all respond to this invitation to follow Jesus, move from the row in which they were sitting and walk the aisle down to the front.

Whenever the appeal was made and during the four or five minutes given for people to respond, the pianist would always play the same song which we sang along with. Many of you will know this old song and have guessed it already) some of you won't.

The song was called **Just As I Am** – in fact Billy Graham chose it as the title of his autobiography. But here's the thing; the song invited me to come to Jesus **Just As I Am**.

The words go:

**Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come**

Verse two is interesting in that it acknowledges our flawed state as we come to Jesus

**Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt  
Fighting and fears within without  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come**

The final verse, verse five

**Just as I am, Thou wilt receive  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve  
Because Thy promise I believe  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come**

What is it ABC – a welcome, inclusion based on judging lives and identifying sin when we too are sinful. Or Just As I Am?

I close with a short video of Mahalia Jackson singing the first two verses of the song.

As I do, I invite you not to think about others, but to recall your own response to Jesus' invitation and that fact that you came 'Just as I am'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw-g4-DTKfU>