

Christ Church W4 Core Values Series: 2012-2019

Talk One: “Party, Bible, Realistic, Humble, Spirit-Filled People” Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the **good news**^[a] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.^[b]

² As it is **written** in the prophet Isaiah,^[c]

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,^[d]
who will prepare your way;

³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight”’,

⁴ John the baptizer appeared^[e] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of **repentance** for the **forgiveness of sins**. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; **I am not worthy** to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with^[f] water; but he will **baptize you with^[g] the Holy Spirit.**’

Good morning. Today is one of the few days I wish I had written down sermons from previous years, not to copy, but to compare notes. When Nicola and I first came to this parish seven years ago the first series we began was in Mark’s gospel, and it is to the same passages and sermon points that we now feel led to return.

It’s often said that the culture of an organisation eats strategy for breakfast, a quote originally from the management consultant Peter Drucker. Whatever your strategy, if your culture is wrong it will trip you up along the way. Culture is made up of many things, but it includes the values that an organisation holds dear. 7 years ago in the parallel sermon I suggested the first five of those values from the Mark’s gospel, and they have been central to everything we have done, the vision we have developed and the culture we have tried to establish ever since.

If I can rewind a little, at the licensing sermon Bishop Paul Williams suggested that we needed to have an Unlimited Vision, an Uncommon Humility and an Unerring Faith. Vision is the other key component in establishing culture, and this parish has had little shortage of vision over the past few years. Whether establishing a shelter project, developing an intern scheme, commissioning congregation members as ministers for the workplace and church, reopening a disused church building and keeping a third one running for the community, holding weekends away and at home, developing a thriving youth ministry, training ordinands and curates, running mission trips overseas, opening our buildings seven days a week for God and for the community, undertaking three major building project phases and much more besides the mission here has been to join God transforming Chiswick, London and the World. It’s required a lot of faith, and we’ll come back to humility later as we look at our passage. But vision has to be

built on the right values, or you can be climbing the metaphorical ladder propped on the wrong wall... so values were the first thing we reset.

And where better to draw values from than the most compact summary of the life of Jesus we have. At the end of the day our unspoken core set of core values is to imitate Jesus. But that needs spelling out or we are in quick danger of creating him in our image and baptising whatever it is we want to do and calling it God's will. In our contemporary culture that normally goes something like this: Jesus was super nice, the church should be super nice. Christianity is all about being super-nice, or at the very least trying to be.

But Mark's gospel very quickly disavows us of such blasphemies. Jesus isn't particularly nice if nice is how you'd describe a country vicar (and does anyone really want God to be something so bland?). In the first eight verses we get an introduction to him, partly through the lens of his cousin and forerunner the hairy, scary prophet preacher John the Baptist. We pick up five things about him today, and will develop five more over the next four weeks.

Firstly he brings the party, second he's got Bible running through his veins, third he's incredibly realistic about the human condition – our sin and the need to repent, fourth he gives grace to humble people (but resists the proud), and finally that he has an agenda which is backed with power – the power of the Holy Spirit – which he wants to immerse us in and with. Let's look at these in turn:

1) Bringing the party – **Core Value #1: Party People**

The whole short account of the life of Jesus Mark is writing is called a 'Gospel' in verse one. This, as you probably know, means 'good news'. Jesus himself describes the effect of this good news gospel with three stories recorded in another Gospel (Luke Chapter 15). Each story tells of something or someone desperately lost being wonderfully found. That leads to a party. Meeting Jesus means being thrown a homecoming party by God himself. His Good news becomes our party. We're party people because he throws the party. What he does for us is such good news it causes an eternal celebration. We'll see why a little later.

2) Bible running through his veins: **Core Value #2: Bible People**

Mark is writing from Rome, probably using the apostle Peter's insights. He's writing mainly to people who didn't grow up with the Hebrew Bible. But right from verse two he's quoting two different prophets (Isaiah and Malachi) to make the point that not only is Jesus 'the Lord' prophesied about in the Old Testament, but so is his forerunner 'who prepares the way'.

There are different estimates of how many prophesies about Jesus there are in the Old Testament, with some suggesting over 400

Professor Peter Stoner worked with 600 students to figure out what the probability would be of just eight (of the over 400) prophecies being fulfilled in any one person who had lived up to the present time. The result: 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.²¹ [100 quadrillion].

Lee Strobel, an atheist-turned-Christian, performed some calculations to try to figure out what this would look like in real life. Lee notes:

"I imagined the entire world being covered with white tile that was one-and-a-half inches square—every bit of dry land on the planet—with the bottom of just one tile painted red. Then I pictured a person being allowed to wander for a lifetime around all seven continents. He would be permitted to bend down only one time and pick up a piece of tile. What are the odds it would be the one tile whose reverse side was painted red? The odds would be the same as just eight of the Old Testament prophecies coming true in any one person throughout history!"²²

The old testament is attested to by Jesus – who not only fulfils it, but also quotes from it extensively, especially when most sorely tempted, the New Testament is authored by the apostles and their scribes at Jesus' command. Imitating Jesus means standing under and accepting the authority of the whole of Scripture, interpreted through the lens of Jesus Christ who is the key to the whole as it testifies to him. **So our second core value is to be Bible People.**

3) Incredibly realistic about the human condition – our sin and the need to repent – **Core Value #3: Realistic People**

Mark then summarises Jesus' forerunner's message succinctly: be immersed in water (baptised) so that your sins can be forgiven. Just a few verses later in verse 14 we find out Jesus had much the same thing to say:

Jesus went into Galilee, **proclaiming the good news** of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe the good news!**"

Why is it good news to repent? Well have you ever tried it? Imagine you have had a dirty dark secret that no-one knows about, and then one day you find someone so full of grace and kindness you feel you can unburden your soul to them? You agree to meet them, and speak out your shame... they listen and assure you of their ongoing love for you whatever they may have felt of what you have done... how do you feel? A 2014 article in the journal of Social Psychological and Personality Science found out that a problem shared really is a problem halved. Stress levels go down when we confess our fears and failings. Confession is good for the soul...

But as we'll see as we go through Mark's gospel Jesus isn't just offering us a listening ear. He is much more realistic than to think we just need to share our psychological traumas to half them. He wants to do root surgery on our sin and cut out the bits of our heart that separate us from the love of God and our fellow humans... Confession is good for us, but as John the Baptist knew it can also activate our slates being wiped clean when that confession is made to God because of what Jesus Christ had come to do on the cross... [more of that as we look further into Mark's gospel and find out that Jesus is the one who has God's own ability to forgive sins]. So **core value #3 we too must be realistic people** about how the human condition has gone badly wrong and how much we therefore need Jesus.

The last two points I'll deal with quickly:

- 4) He gives grace to humble people (but resists the proud). [cf: Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5] **Core value 4: Humble People**

John the Baptist knows he's not worthy to untie the straps on Jesus' shoes, even though he is older and goes before him. As Bishop Paul told us in 2012 we too must have an uncommon humility. Not to think less of ourselves in a self-depreciating way ('we're only little, we're not as good as...') but to think of ourselves less and Himself much more. It's why one of our vision points simply says: '...So that all the glory goes to Him'. Over the years we've attempted many things we knew we couldn't do in our own strength – be it building projects or outreach efforts, and part of the reason for stretching beyond our natural limit is so that all the glory goes to him... as we are realistic people (knowing our own shortcomings, shame and sinfulness), it stands to reason we must also be **humble people** because only God can do what only God can do... and everything we do must point to Him.

- 5) He has an agenda which is one backed with power – the power of the Holy Spirit – which he wants to immerse us in and with.

Jesus didn't leave us on our own after he died, rose again and ascended to glory. No, he and the father sent us his Spirit – the Spirit of Jesus, best summarised as the Holy Spirit. A holy Spirit is a holy Spirit. Like oil doesn't mingle with water so holiness and sin don't mingle either. So he promises to thoroughly immerse us in the Spirit so that we can be drenched in him and in his power. The Holy Spirit is thus the key to a people realistic about their problem with sin becoming a Jesus-like force of nature, emboldened with great power.

Five things then we need to be from these eight short verses:

A party people
A bible people
A realistic people
A humble people
A Spirit-Filled people...

On these values great vision can begin to be built, and next week we'll find out how the love of the Father and the calling of the Son begin to propel us in the direction of vision from a place of being immersed in that Spirit-filled love.

Talk Two: "Loved by the Father, Called by the Son" Mark 1: 9-20

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted^[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mark Stibbe once wrote a book entitled: “I am your Father: What every heart needs to know”... Another book he called: “The Father you have been waiting for: a portrait of a perfect Dad”. It’s a beautiful book on our Father God who is patient with us, waiting for us, compassionate to us, running towards us, affectionate with us, intimate with us, forgiving to us, accepting of us, extravagant towards us, and rejoicing over us. In the end he concludes it is time for us to come home to that Father God...

In our passage today Jesus hears his Divine Father’s voice offer him Love, Acceptance and Value. It’s so much easier to have significance and security when you know that someone loves you, accepts you and values you like that: “*You are my Son,*” says the heavenly voice, “*whom I love, with you I am well pleased.*”

But Mark Stibbe writes his well selling books because he, like so many of us in today’s world, didn’t get to experience a Father like that on earth. In a more recent book he tells a harrowing story of his time in boarding school and the scars that made on his life. Elsewhere he tells of fathers who are impatient, deserting, harsh, absent, overbearing, distant, unforgiving, judgemental, miserly and demanding. Such characteristics have lined many a psychologist’s pocket since at least 1909 when Freud wrote about humans as the ‘rat-man’ caught in compulsions that date back to their struggles with father figures in early life.

God the perfect Father has three things to say that even Jesus needed to hear, and we need to hear too however good, bad or indifferent our own parents and parenting may have been:

1) You are my Son.

This is an absolute statement.

You are.

Your core identity is.

The thing that defines you is:

You are **my son**.

Your core identity is **heavenly**.

The thing that defines you is **divine DNA**

Have you ever had someone look you in the eye and ascribe to you fundamental worth? In Isaiah 43:1 the heavenly Father offers this adoption to his people Israel (who have – by and large - been terrible sons and daughters for centuries):

But now, this is what the Lord says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name; you are mine.

In the ancient world a biological child could be disowned for various reasons, but if a child was adopted in Rome that meant:

1. That child was freely chosen and desired by the parents.
2. That child would be a permanent part of the family and couldn't be disowned at all.

So when Paul writes to the Romans in Romans 8 that: *The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.*^[1]

He means you've got that incredible and permanent affirmation that will last, and so he goes on to say you can call him: Dada: or “*Abba or Father.*” Or Papa or whatever intimate affectionate term you want to use, because that is who he is, and so that is also who you are. Full Stop.

Like Jesus: You are God's son and heir or daughter and heir. You are my Son.

2) Whom I love

But not only is God faithful to his family line, he also loves his family line. Jesus got to know he was greatly loved at his baptism, and you need to know that deeply too. He has adopted you and he loves you.

3) With you I am well pleased

But not only are you adopted, accepted and loved, you are also someone he is pleased with... On one level this is because he is totally pleased with Jesus (as you can see in this verse) and your faith in Jesus imputes to you all of Jesus righteousness – so what is there not to be pleased with!? When God looks at you God sees your big-brother Jesus - and that's quite a CV to get to wave at your accuser the devil when you need to tell him to get back into his place. You've graduated summa cum laude. Double first class. Flawless.

But on another level it's you as he made you that he looks at and is pleased with. We get that right in the book of Genesis. When he breathed his Spirit into your first

ancestors he was very pleased... when he knit you together in your mother's womb he was very pleased. When he watched you grow and try things and develop, and love and laugh and be he was very pleased. Yes sin came in and marred a lot of it, almost fatally, but Yes he was still that patient with us, waiting for us, compassionate to us, running towards us, affectionate with us, intimate with us, forgiving to us, accepting of us, extravagant towards us, and rejoicing over us Father who had a plan all along to call the bet of you back to the surface by putting an end to your corrupting way of life and giving you a chance for a brand new one... he was waiting for an excuse to be pleased with you and rejoices over your little successes and remains, as he always was, slow to anger over your sin.

You are my Son, Whom I love, With you I am well pleased...

So we need to know we are **Loved by the Father**. To know our core identity is tied up in the one who celebrates us joyously. But as humans we also need a purpose for living, something or someone to get out of bed for, and that purpose comes in this passage when Jesus imparts it to people: 'At once' and 'without delay' Simon, Andrew, James and John start to follow this man who knows who he is like no-one they have ever encountered before. Repent: there's a King here is his core message, and grown men, business men, hardened fishermen just drop everything to follow a man they seem to know little about.

Still today he calls: "Repent"

Turn from living the way you do.

Find purpose in me...

Rob Bell's Nooma DVD made a great play of this story... fishermen, he argued, were the lowest of the low. Those who failed at school. Unworthy of a call to follow a professional Rabbi. Those who hadn't made the grade.

Then Jesus comes along. Looks at them. Perhaps sees a humility of heart. Perhaps sees a potential, a longing, a yearning for purpose and more to life than routine drudgery. 'Follow me' he calls, and they realise in that moment all they have been waiting for. They have been **called by the Son**. Someone who can look at them. Affirm them. Adopt them. Be pleased with them. They see through him The Father. They sense destiny and call and purpose and church everything down and follow him, so that they too can follow the Father they've been waiting for...

So what about you... do you know that you are **loved by the Father**? Do you know what it is to be **called by the Son**? Are you loved, accepted and valued. Do you know adoption, significance and the security of bearing the divine name?

We finish with a story Jesus told - reimagined to drive it home:

Philip Yancey: The Lovesick Father

A young girl grows up on a cherry orchard just above Traverse City, Michigan. Her parents, a bit old-fashioned, tend to overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, and the length of her skirts. They ground her a few times, and she seethes inside. "I hate you!" she screams at her father when he knocks on the door of her room after an argument, and that night she acts on a plan she has mentally rehearsed scores of times. She runs away.

She has visited Detroit only once before, on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the Tigers play. Because newspapers in Traverse City report in lurid detail the gangs, drugs, and violence in downtown Detroit, she concludes that is probably the last place her parents will look for her. California, maybe, or Florida, but not Detroit.

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she's ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she's ever felt before. She was right all along, she decides: Her parents were keeping her from all the fun.

The good life continues for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car—she calls him "Boss"—teaches her a few things that men like. Since she's underage, men pay a premium for her. She lives in a penthouse and orders room service whenever she wants. Occasionally she thinks about the folks back home, but their lives now seem so boring that she can hardly believe she grew up there. She has a brief scare when she sees her picture printed on the back of a milk carton with the headline, "Have you seen this child?" But by now she has blond hair, and with all the makeup and body-piercing jewelry she wears, nobody would mistake her for a child. Besides, most of her friends are runaways, and nobody squeals in Detroit.

After a year, the first sallow signs of illness appear, and it amazes her how fast the boss turns mean. "These days, we can't mess around," he growls, and before she knows it she's out on the street without a penny to her name. She still turns a couple of tricks a night, but they don't pay much, and all the money goes to support her drug habit. When winter blows in she finds herself sleeping on metal grates outside the big department stores. "Sleeping" is the wrong word—a teenage girl at night in downtown Detroit can never relax her guard. Dark bands circle her eyes. Her cough worsens.

One night, as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything about her life looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She feels like a little girl, lost in a cold and frightening city. She begins to whimper. Her pockets are empty and she's hungry. She needs a fix. She pulls her legs tight underneath her and shivers under the newspapers she's piled atop her coat. Something jolts a synapse of memory and a single image fills her mind: of May in Traverse City, when a million cherry trees bloom at once, with her golden retriever dashing through the rows and rows of blossomy trees in chase of a tennis ball.

God, why did I leave? she says to herself, and pain stabs at her heart. *My dog back home eats better than I do now.* She's sobbing, and she knows in a flash that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home.

Three straight phone calls, three straight connections with the answering machine. She hangs up without leaving a message the first two times, but the third time she says, "Dad, Mom, it's me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada."

It takes about seven hours for a bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time she realizes the flaws in her plan. What if her parents are out of town and miss the message? Shouldn't she have waited another day or so until she could talk to them? Even if they are home, they probably wrote her off as dead long ago. She should have given them some time to overcome the shock.

Her thoughts bounce back and forth between those worries and the speech she is preparing for her father. "Dad, I'm sorry. I know I was wrong. It's not your fault, it's all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?" She says the words over and over, her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn't apologized to anyone in years.

The bus has been driving with lights on since Bay City. Tiny snowflakes hit the road, and the asphalt steams. She's forgotten how dark it gets at night out here. A deer darts across the road and the bus swerves. Every so often, a billboard. A sign posting the mileage to Traverse City. *Oh, God.*

When the bus finally rolls into the station, its air brakes hissing in protest, the driver announces in a crackly voice over the microphone, "Fifteen minutes, folks. That's all we have here." Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She checks herself in a compact mirror, smooths her hair, and licks the lipstick off her teeth. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips and wonders if her parents will notice. If they're there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect, and not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepare her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-walls-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of 40 family members—brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother and great-grandmother to boot. They are all wearing ridiculous-looking party hats and blowing noisemakers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads "Welcome home!"

Out of the crowd of well-wishers breaks her dad. She looks through tears and begins the memorized speech, "Dad, I'm sorry. I know ... "

He interrupts her. "Hush, child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home."

Talk Three: "In a spiritual battle but on the winning side" Mark 1: 21-35

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and **demon-possessed**. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also **drove out many demons**, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ **Very early** in the morning, while it was **still dark**, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a **solitary place, where he prayed**.

I'm away this Sunday exploring the land that Jesus called home for most of his 33 years of earthly existence. Sometimes it's only as you travel away from Western materialist culture that some of a sense increases that maybe not everything in this world is explicable by atoms, molecules and matter. As I have travelled in India and Uganda this past year this has certainly been true.

But it is also true that in 21C UK we have travelled a long way from Western Materialist culture as well. Part of this is due to multi-culturalism. When I became a curate, aged 26 in Wolverhampton, one of the first things I was asked to do by a member of the Wolverhampton community was perform an exorcism. He was an Asian man, whose family had come from East Africa and he believed a witch doctor had put a curse on him in Africa causing him to always lose money. In fact he had spent thousands of pounds trying to remedy this with counter charms, blessings and curses, before someone advised him to ask for a priest. But other people also called on me who had grown up in the UK school system. One person asked me to their flat for similar purposes and were spooked when a cat fled before me. Others have told me of experiences in the 'spiritualist' religion of seeing dead people.

The Sun newspaper in May this year (2018) reported that:

An exclusive poll of readers shows that 60 per cent of us now claim to have seen a ghost.

More than half of Brits think it is possible to talk to the dead – with 48 per cent wanting to visit a medium.

And our survey also revealed a whopping 38 per cent believe they themselves have psychic abilities – such as predicting the future or talking to the dead.

In a similar vein surveys about religious practice like a poll in the Times this December (2018) show a rise in people who pray. Why is it that enlightenment modernist thinking which presumed everything could be explained by scientific reason and study seems inadequate for describing the full range of people's experiences, hopes and fears? Should we not have thrown off such superstitious nonsense as prayer by now?

Perhaps the answer lies in the very word 'materialist'. Materialism is the belief that that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all things, including mental aspects and consciousness, are results of material interactions. But what if not all things are the result of material interactions? What if there is a spiritual dimension as well that

cannot be measured by a deeper understanding of neurology, psychology or any other science.

Certainly it is rare at a funeral to encounter a true materialist. There are not many people who seem capable of holding a 100% conviction that when the last electrical pulses go through the brain, the heart stops and blood no longer flows, that the entire identity of the deceased person is lost forever and their remains just suited for pushing up daisies as part of the circle of life. Whether it is soul or spirit, reincarnation or heaven, ghosts or ghouls, or even freezing bodies in cryogenics for a future return, there is a desire at least that this is not the end, the absolute end. The Bible teaches that this is because 'God has put eternity in our hearts', and Augustine commented that our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in him...

But there is another field where people readily see a spiritual dimension. Stephen King's seventy Horror books have sold over 300 million copies world wide. Whether by malevolent clowns, or despicable demons in the form of megalomaniacs these books have a descriptive power that has ensnared generations.

But you don't have to go to the horror shelves of a bookstore or video streaming site to find inexplicable horror. Alastair MacFadyen attempts a bold task in his book *Bound to Sin* to state that horror in our history books and newspapers is sometimes so extreme it cannot be explained by simple materialism. Abuse cycles and the holocaust feel like they require the language of 'sin' and 'evil' to explain them. Malevolent forces are out there and in here... in our hearts or souls. As St Paul put it:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

The Christian faith posits that there is a real battle going on in our lives, and for our lives. It is a battle of good versus evil, but it is not an equal battle. It is not an equal battle in two ways.

In the first way it is not an equal battle because evil is stronger than us. We can see this from the quote from Paul in Romans. 'What I hate I do... I cannot carry out [good]... the evil I do not want to do, this I keep doing... the sin living in me does that'. In Bible terms it has been like this ever since we handed over our responsibilities and rulership to a snake in the garden of eden. Humans were designed by God to rule this world, on his behalf and in his way, but when we rebelled we let in his enemy, a fallen angel called Lucifer – a being far more powerful than we could ever be. He and his fallen minions hated the idea of an autonomous group of human bipeds loving and being loved by the Creator and have done everything in their considerable power to frustrate our relationship with our loving Father the creator ever since [see CS Lewis' *Screwtape letters* for a marvellous portrayal of this].

So left to our own devices we are left to our own weakness and against a fallen angelic being who describes himself (unchallenged by Jesus) as the prince of this world. What should be God's glorious kingdom looked after by you and me becomes a demonic playground where sin, greed, prostitution, abuse, war, pride, arrogance, malevolence etc all easily abound.

But in the second way it is not an equal battle because God in us is far stronger than evil, sin or the devil. There is no Ying and Yang in the Christian religion. No equal and opposite spiritual force. No, when God takes to the scene in the form of Jesus, as seen in our passage demons wail and flee. And what is most extraordinary is that it is when Jesus is close by that we find out most about this spiritual warfare that is always going on.

IN CS Lewis' book the role the devil prefers to take in Western Materialist culture is of a laughable, comic book figure, easy to ignore and of no consequence at all to those of superior mind and understanding. A child's story to control/manipulate good behaviour. A fairytale to grow up from.

But when the Son of the Great King of Kings comes to earth, the minions of the 'prince of this world' expose themselves and shriek and yell. A kingdom clash emerges. They cannot keep silent when God is so clearly on the move so they pull out their A game, terrorising the human bipeds and extracting as much pain and suffering as they can, revealing their ultimate intentions: It's sometimes said that the Devil has all the best musicians, but the devil comes to steal, kill and destroy...there's no jamming session going on in hell, only loss, death and destruction for as long as God allows that tormenting horror to carry on for. The Son of the Great King of Kings comes to rescue humans from that horror and the demons hate him for it, but are powerless against it.

And so we have our eighth core value at Christ Church: **Value #8: We are in a spiritual battle, but on the winning side**

You see Paul carries on in the next part of Romans to seemingly agonise '*Who will save me from this body of death?*' before responding triumphantly: '*Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*'

As Jesus won by showing up on earth full of the power of his Father and defeating demons left, right and centre, so Jesus also won on the cross at what looked like his worst defeat. And as he conquered death at his resurrection, and sent us his Spirit after his ascension, so he has also enabled us, with him, to be victors not just over death and sin, but also over the devil and all darkness. We are in a spiritual battle, but we are on the winning side in a conquest where the final result is not in any doubt. Jesus has already won the whole victory and the adversary will be thrown into a lake of fire.

One plus God is a majority against any of hell's armies. Hallelujah! Praise be to God for liberating us and his full victory for us over darkness.

So the battle is unequal. In Christ we are able to say: 'Get behind me Satan' and he has to get behind us. If we resist the devil he will flee from us. We are victorious in Christ the Satan slayer. On our own we remain powerless, but in Him we have full and final victory, whatever the skirmishes we may get into when we forget to put on our righteous, faith-filled armour on a daily basis as we should.

When Jesus shows up in Galilee the battle intensifies. When Jesus is on the move building His Kingdom on earth as in heaven here in W4 the battle also intensifies. When you pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' you also pray "Deliver us from [the] evil [one]" for a reason. A clash of Kingdoms leads to kick back, but Jesus 'has overcome the world' so we are not to fear.

There is much more we could teach on this, but for today note this:

- Materialism cannot explain all around us. There is a spiritual dimension.
- Evil is present in the world, and is more powerful than we are left on our own.
- God is far more powerful than evil and works with us, as he did in Jesus, to defeat evil as we pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' and do the things Jesus taught us to do and gave us authority for.
- When Jesus is close the spiritual battle intensifies as Kingdoms clash.
- Jesus has already won the final victory.
- We are on the winning side.

And next week we'll note that Jesus often retreated by himself to pray and top up on his relationship with his Father while all these spiritual confrontations were going on...

His disciples once asked him why they couldn't drive out a particular demon themselves, and he said, 'that kind only comes out by much prayer'... If you're going to be effective in the spiritual battle you'll also need to keep going back to the source of all power....

Talk Four: "Headed for wholeness" Mark 1: 35-45; Mark 2:1-12

[²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.]

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.]

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

³⁸Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

⁴⁰A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

⁴¹Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

What do you think became of Lazarus – the man raised back to life by Jesus in the final great miracle/sign in John’s Gospel? Perhaps he got old and sick and died. The Eastern tradition suggests he lived on many decades as Bishop of Kition, but he never smiled because of the lost souls he had encountered in his four days in hades, and the Western Tradition has him as Bishop of Marseilles, ultimately beheaded under persecution of Domitian. What did Jesus bring him back to life for? A bishop’s mitre, a frowning forehead, or an *off-with-his-head!*

And what of our leper in this passage, or the others who got cleansed/healed? The leper’s healing is highly inconvenient – he can’t keep his big mouth shut about his miracle and the attention this causes forces Jesus out of the area... Simon’s mother-in-law gets up that day, but presumably ultimately fails in her health, and the scores of others healed will have included the forgetful, the ungrateful and the impenitent repeat offenders who cause repeated health problems to themselves through bad life style choices.

Why did Jesus heal at all? After all the effects were only temporary... some obviously come to faith and serve him, but others can’t even follow a simple instruction after being helped out of a life sentence of suffering.

Why do we have the NHS and BUPA and health clubs and diet plans... isn’t it all a bit futile to keep fighting for a few extra years in a nursing home? ‘Shouldn’t we take Solomon’s moody advice in Ecclesiastes and *‘eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die?’*

Such are the cheery questions we will wrestle with this morning! In an era where parts of the Christian church market 'healing' like a sales devise, we have to ask a fundamental question of what was Jesus trying to achieve when he healed people... and here in this passage we have several clues...

Firstly, he had compassion for the sick: The story of Peter's mother in law is touching. A deserving character, touched by Jesus who then gets up and keeps doing what she does so well – serving, caring, loving, sharing. Jesus sees her, loves her, likes her, heals her and she is supernaturally enabled to help him out too. He has compassion on her, and crowds of others. He is love and love heals.

Secondly, he has indignation against illness. In the story of the leper we get the sense that sickness is perverse. It is not the way things were created to be. Face to face with the horror that is that skin disease he simply eradicates it, even at a cost to himself. He does it with touch and a word, showing he is not afraid of the infectious disease. He has a further indignation perhaps because this disease has meant this son of Abraham has been ostracised by an understandably(?) scared community. He removes it from the man and tells him how to get back into community.

But using healing as a marketing tools for his new 'Kingdom of God' party is clearly not on his agenda. He doesn't gather a crowd to show off the newly cleansed leper. Instead he tries to get him to slip quietly away. Nor is setting up a compassion healing clinic his priority. In verse 38 he tells his disciples he's not here to meet everyone's felt need for a miracle, but to preach the good news. In Chapter 2: 1-10 we find out that he places a higher priority on pronouncing to a paralysed man on a mat lying before him that his *sins have been forgiven* than getting the poor man up off the floor to walk.

So what does Jesus want when he heals people? Sometimes it seems to be a simply an overflow of compassion, other times an indignation against illness, and others a telling proof that he can do the great (hidden) work of healing sin-filled souls of their dark inner-sickness.

Part of the clue comes by asking, 'What is health?'

Morris Maddocks, a leading proponent of the healing ministry, quipped that we have no right to say that we are healed if we have the body of an athlete but do not care about the starving poor in Africa.

Like Lazarus, the leper and Peter's mother-in-law, all of us inhabit bodies that are wonderful and worthy, but also a transitory tent on our way to inherit an eternal home. We are to look after them well and not sin against them by excesses of any sort (not least as they are the temple of the Holy Spirit and who would dare defile God's own temple?), But health is more than physical fitness – it has emotional and intellectual aspects to it as well which may also fade, and spiritual aspects that should not.

The great reformer William Tyndale who was executed in October 1536 for his courage in defying authorities to bring the Bible to 'every ploughboy in England' in their native English. In his translation where Zacheaus is converted by Jesus in Luke 19 he uses

the word 'health' where our NIV uses 'salvation'. The two are interlinked. Hence Jesus tells the once wayward Zacheus: *'Today salvation/health has come to your house.'* Meeting Jesus is true health. Salvation is ultimate wholeness. Death out of our physical 'tent' bodies is a the final healing of all for those who have salvation/health.

We are headed for wholeness.

Jesus' miracles as recorded in the gospels give us great comfort that this is true, as do modern day miracles we may be aware of. Sickness is not part of his Kingdom. He is indignant about it. Compassion causes him to heal as well. But this life is fleeting and passes fast. Lazarus' true wholeness came by being a Jesus follower, and even if he was beheaded, he was whole. You too are headed for wholeness. Sometimes Jesus provides signs to us of the coming Kingdom by staying our sickness and demise, but ultimately it will be in death that we get the fullest healing...

We are in a spiritual battle. We are on the winning side. We are headed for wholeness.

Talk Five: "Dangerously Radical" Mark 2:13-17

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "**Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?**"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

At this stage Jesus has just met a paralysed man, told him his sins are forgiven, and left him lying there in full public gaze wondering what he had done so wrong that his sins were the biggest problem Jesus could see with him while his limbs still didn't work. A house roof had been destroyed to let him through and yet the commotion got even bigger when the man has a second phase of his encounter with the Christ and gets up and walks.

He then manages to cause an even bigger stir, again well outside of any recognised place to do religion, by heading to recruit a man with as much credibility in his community as the Lehman Brothers had during the 2008 financial crash in the UK. This man known as Levi, or Matthew to most of us, became one of the most important

scribes of Jesus' life and ministry, but he started life as a person non grata, collaborator with the Romans, who would be under a permanent cloud of suspicion from his peers that he was racking in above and beyond for his own profit and purse at the expenses of his beleaguered neighbours and fellow Jews.

The sneer in the teacher of the law and Pharisees question is obvious. They've found Jesus out now. He can't be of God. He associates with all sorts of undesirables and low lifes. He's sold out to big business, and collaborators of a corrupt regime. Guilt by association. 'I knew there was something dodgy about him' they begin to whisper...

Jesus, intriguingly doesn't dispute their take on the sinfulness of their fellow human beings... Again, he's not the nice country parson saying 'why can't we all get along'? He's not defending the guilty. Not assuaging their guilt. He makes just one simple point:

Sick people need a doctor.

He's the doctor. He's the answer to the greedy. He's the antidote to the oppressors. He's here for those who have written off their own moral life, as well as having had it written off by others... he is what they need, and some of them at least can see that they need him.

Levi is one. He throws a party, Zacchaeus style. Loads of people there. Not religious particularly. He throws a party. Loads of wine, you might imagine. He throws a party and the Son of the King of Kings, the Messiah, the Forgiver of Sins is right there in the middle of the party with him.

Dangerously radical, again.

I remember when Mark Russell, (CEO of the social justice and mission agency Church Army), came to speak on this and surrounding passages and issued a challenge for us to be **dangerously radical** again. Is there anything we do/say as a church that could provoke the reaction Jesus got from saying he was the answer to the human condition of sin; to eating with reviled sinners and collaborators?

Jesus once said; 'woe to you when everyone speaks well of you' [Luke 6:26]. False prophets get universal praise. A church following Jesus will be following him into the realms of criticism... but what might such a church get criticised for?

From these passages it seems two things:

- 1) A strong, and seemingly unsubstantiated, truth claim about Jesus himself.
- 2) A breaking down of boundaries others use to protect themselves

Jesus forgives sins. People need forgiveness. Having a value to be a **party** people sounds easily marketable until you couple it with a value to be a **realistic** people... the party comes when the lost realise they are lost and come home... Not many people like being called lost... it will always be dangerously radical to signpost people home to

the party, but it is always worth it. **Bible** people know that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no-one comes to the Father except through him, **Spirit-filled** people have courage in their bones because of His empowering, **humble** people just want to point to the one who **called** them whatever the cost, knowing they are **loved by the Father** and **headed for wholeness**, so they will face the **spiritual battle** that comes with proclaiming Jesus as Lord, knowing they are **on the winning side**.

But it would be easier to pull up the drawbridge, life in a ghetto or inoculate ourselves against the needs of a dying world by binge watching Netflix, downing yet another bottle of wine, hiding on holidays or careering off course by our careerism. A **dangerously radical** church remembers the words Pete Greig once famously wrote on the wall of the first ever 24-7 prayer room.

So this guy comes up to me and says,
"What's the vision? What's the big idea?"
I open my mouth and words come out like this...

The Vision?

The vision is JESUS – obsessively, dangerously, undeniably Jesus.
The vision is an army of young people.
You see bones? I see an army. And they are FREE from materialism.

They laugh at 9-5 little prisons. They could eat caviar on Monday and crusts on Tuesday. They wouldn't even notice. They know the meaning of the Matrix, the way the west was won.

They are mobile like the wind, they belong to the nations. They need no passport.
People write their addresses in pencil and wonder at their strange existence.
They are free yet they are slaves of the hurting and
dirty and dying.

What is the vision?

The vision is holiness that hurts the eyes. It makes children laugh and adults angry. It gave up the game of minimum integrity long ago to reach for the stars. It scorns the good and strains for the best. It is dangerously pure.

Light flickers from every secret motive, every private conversation. It loves people away from their suicide leaps, their Satan games. This is an army that will lay down its life for the cause. A million times a day its soldiers choose to lose that they might one day win the great 'Well done' of faithful sons and daughters.

Such heroes are as radical on Monday morning as Sunday night. They don't need fame from names. Instead they grin quietly upwards and hear the crowds
chanting
again and again:

"COME ON!"

And this is the sound of the underground. The whisper of history in the making. Foundations shaking. Revolutionaries dreaming once again. Mystery is scheming in whispers. Conspiracy is breathing. This is the sound of the underground

And the army is discipl(in)ed. Young people who beat their bodies into submission. Every soldier would take a bullet for his comrade at arms. The tattoo on their back boasts, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain"

Sacrifice fuels the fire of victory in their upward eyes. Winners. Martyrs. Who can stop them? Can hormones hold them back? Can failure succeed? Can fear scare them or death kill them?

And the generation prays like a dying man with groans beyond talking, with warrior cries, sulphuric tears and with great barrow loads of laughter!

Waiting. Watching. 24 – 7 – 365.

Whatever it takes they will give: Breaking the rules. Shaking mediocrity from its cosy little hide. Laying down their rights and their precious little wrongs, laughing at labels, fasting essentials. The advertisers cannot mould them. Hollywood cannot hold them. Peer-pressure is powerless to shake their resolve at late night parties before the cockerel cries.

They are incredibly cool, dangerously attractive inside.

On the outside? They hardly care. They wear clothes like costumes to communicate and celebrate but never to hide. Would they surrender their image or their popularity? They would lay down their very lives - swap seats with the man on death row - guilty as hell. A throne for an electric chair.

With blood and sweat and many tears, with sleepless nights and fruitless days, they pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on them.

Their DNA chooses JESUS. (He breathes out, they breathe in.) Their subconscious sings. They had a blood transfusion with Jesus. Their words make demons scream in shopping centres.

Don't you hear them coming? Herald the weirdos! Summon the losers and the freaks. Here come the frightened and forgotten with fire in their eyes. They walk tall and trees applaud, skyscrapers bow, mountains are dwarfed by these children of another dimension.

Their prayers summon the hounds of heaven and invoke the ancient dream of Eden.

And this vision will be. It will come to pass; it will come easily; it will come soon. How do I know? Because this is the longing of creation itself, the groaning of the Spirit, the very dream of God. My tomorrow is his today. My distant hope is his 3D. And my feeble, whispered, faithless prayer invokes a thunderous, resounding, bone-shaking great 'Amen!' from countless angels, from heroes of the faith, from Christ himself. And he is the original dreamer, the ultimate winner.

Guaranteed.

[draft edition 6 January 2019].



Christ
Church
W4

Loving God, Loving Community

Going Deeper Notes
Sunday 6 January 2019

NEW SERIES: CORE VALUES FROM JESUS: MARK 1:1-8

Introduction:

In this series we revisit some of our core values as a church by going back to basics in the Gospel of Mark.

According to Papias (Bishop in 120AD), Mark's gospel is based on the words and teaching of the apostle Peter, possibly written as early as the late 50s AD. It was written from Rome for the wider church to take note of:

If you read through the whole book (which takes the same time as watching a movie), you'll find Jesus clearly shown to be the Messiah, but a human one. The Son of God, but also the Son of Man who suffers despite having great power and authority. The Lord, who calls his followers to follow him in humble service, self denial and suffering. A teacher – who inspires with a vision of the Kingdom of God explained in word and deed.

It's a fast moving story so read it through in a sitting and hold on for the ride.

Prologue: Mark 1:1-8

Teaser Question

If someone were to write the story of your life, where should they start?

Read Mark 1:1-8

Who does Mark describe Jesus right from the start? How would you explain those terms today to someone who knew little about Jesus?

What does gospel mean? What makes us good news - *party people*?

Where does Mark quote from in verse 2 & 3?

[Malachi 3:1/Isaiah 40:3].

How do you think the Old Testament was used by the early church?

What makes us **Bible people** today?

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # **Bible** People # **Realistic** People # **Humble** People # **Spirit-Filled** People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical

How would you help someone get into Bible reading?

What was John the Baptist's message in verse 4? What are the benefits of repentance and forgiveness? Where in your life / church's life has it made a difference to be **realistic people** about the problems of sin?

John has a nation changing impact, but points away from himself in verse 7 to "one coming after me..." What are the characteristics you most admire of **humble people**? Why?

Jesus, John says, will baptise us with the Holy-Spirit. What do you think that meant to the first Christians? What does it mean to you to be a **Spirit-filled people**?

Take home:

Which of these values do you need to refresh this year?

Notes:

Which of these values do you need to refresh this year?

one to think on:

'Realistic People':

What is the most convincing argument an atheist/materialist can give for the origin of evil in the world?

In '*Bound to Sin*' McFadyen considers how horrific suffering in the world can be explained. If horrors like the holocaust / abuse can only be explained by resorting to language of sin, then theological language is needed to adequately describe the world. In other words: it is precisely because things are wrong in the world that we need to talk about sin, repentance, the devil and God to make sense and make good public policy. He argues evil can be so extreme it requires an explanation (and a solution) beyond the material world.

You can join a Christ Church W4 small group at any time of the year, but why not try out a SMALL Group this term... Small groups span across all our congregations and are a great way to meet and mix with people and become disciple making disciples in a community. Details of all groups in the guide booklet.

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical



**Christ
Church
W4**

Loving God, Loving Community

Going Deeper Notes

Sunday 13 January 2019

NEW SERIES: CORE VALUES FROM JESUS: MARK 1:9-20

Introduction:

In this series we revisit some of our core values as a church by going back to basics in the Gospel of Mark. Last week's talk, and others in this series can be found at christchurchw4.com/study.

OPENING: GOOD, GOOD FATHER?

What images of Father have been stamped on your mind: "impatient, deserting, harsh, absent, overbearing, distant, unforgiving, judgemental, miserly and demanding"

OR:

"patient with us, waiting for us, compassionate to us, running towards us, affectionate with us, intimate with us, forgiving to us, accepting of us, extravagant towards us, and rejoicing over us"

Have a listen to "Good, Good Father" by Chris Tomlin and ask God to reset your impression of what it means that he is your Father if it needs it at all.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqybalesbuA

Recap: Values 1-5

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People

Which of the above values do you want God to grow in you this year and why?

Read Mark 1:9-20

Loved by the Father

In what three ways does God affirm Jesus at his baptism?

At what point in Jesus' life does this happen?

Why might Jesus / others need this?

Who have been the key people who have affirmed you so far in life?

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People

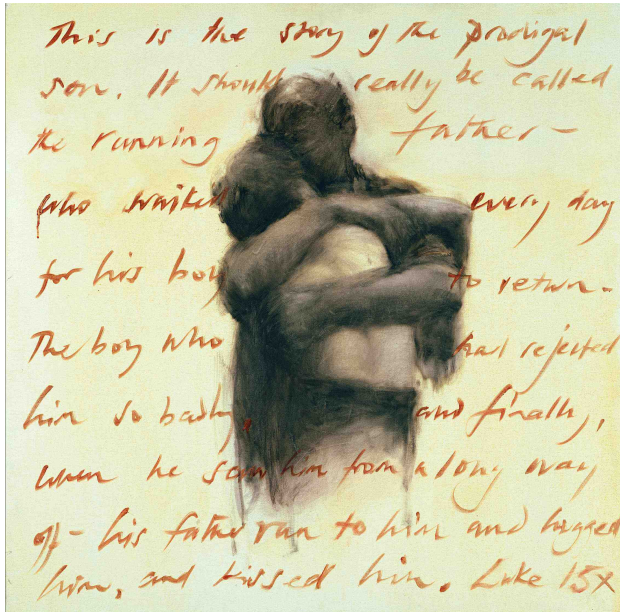
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side

Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical

What did/does it mean to you to have their affirmation?

How deeply do you know God's affirmation for you?

1) As his son/heir?



2) As someone he loves?

3) As someone he is well pleased with?

Called by the Son

How do the disciples respond to Jesus?

What is surprising about this response?

What does it cost them?

What is on offer?

What would it cost you?

What is on offer?

"Loved first, called second..."

Do you have these in the right order?

"But not only are you adopted, accepted and loved, you are also someone he is pleased with... On one level this is because he is totally pleased with Jesus (as you can see in Mark 1) and your faith in Jesus imputes to you all of Jesus righteousness – so what is there not to be pleased with!? When God looks at you God sees your big-brother Jesus - and that's quite a CV to get to wave at your accuser the devil when you need to tell him to get back into his place. You've graduated summa cum laude. Double first class. Flawless.

But on another level it's you as he made you that he looks at and is pleased with. We get that right in the book of Genesis. When he breathed his Spirit into your first ancestors he was very pleased... when he knit you together in your mother's womb he was very pleased. When he watched you grow and try things and develop, and love and laugh and be he was very pleased. Yes sin came in and marred a lot of it, almost fatally, but Yes he was still that patient with us, waiting for us, compassionate to us, running towards us, affectionate with us, intimate with us, forgiving to us, accepting of us, extravagant towards us, and rejoicing over us Father who had a plan all along to call the bet of you back to the surface by putting an end to your corrupting way of life and giving you a chance for a brand new one... he was waiting for an excuse to be pleased with you and rejoices over your little successes and remains, as he always was, slow to anger over your sin."

Notes and talks on: christchurchw4.com/study

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical



Christ
Church
W4

Loving God, Loving Community

Going Deeper Notes

Sunday 3rd Feb 2019

NEW SERIES: CORE VALUES FROM JESUS: MARK 2:1-10

Introduction:

In this series we revisit some of our core values as a church by going back to basics in the Gospel of Mark. Last week's talk, and others in this series can be found at christchurchw4.com/study.

Recap: Values 1-9

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People
Humble People # Spirit-Filled People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a
Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness

Opening Discussion:

What character in a film/book you've read gives you most insight into sin?
Why?

Sin: 1 Timothy 5:24 says: *"Remember, the sins of some people are obvious, leading them to certain judgment. But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later."*

Why do you think some sins are more hidden?

Who are they hidden from?

From your experiences, what happens to us/others if we try to live too long with secret/hidden sin?

Read the extract from Tim Keller 'Getting a Long-Term Diagnosis'. Why is forgiveness rarely most people's felt need? What in your experience has made it a felt need?

RICO TICE: What makes Jesus so unique?

Mark's gospel shows Jesus' power and authority:

- To teach (taught as 'one who had authority')
- To heal (Peter's mother in law/leper etc)
- Over nature (storm on Galilee / feeding 5000_
- Over death (Jairus' daughter)

But even more astonishing is Jesus' power and authority over sin... watch Rico Tice explain this: google: 'Christianity Explored Talk 2': or: <https://tinyurl.com/ya47z2m2>

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical

Jesus' power over sin

Read Mark 2:1-10 Why do you think Mark tells this story in so much detail?

What do you think it would have been like to be in that room with Jesus?

If you could have asked him one question afterwards what would it have been?

What do you think happened to the once paralyzed man after this encounter?



Prayer:

Spend some time confessing your sin to Jesus. GO back over the hours of the day, the days of the week, the weeks of the year and ask him to bring to mind anything that needs to be confessed...

Take time over this and then write down how you feel after taking time to be honest with God.

Getting a Long-term diagnosis

#headed for wholeness #realistic people

Jesus knows something the man doesn't know — that he has a much bigger problem than his physical condition. Jesus is saying to him, "I understand your problems. I have seen your suffering. I'm going to get to that. *But please realize that the main problem in a person's life is never his suffering; it's his sin.*"

If you find Jesus's response offensive, please at least consider this: If someone says to you, "***The main problem in your life is not what's happened to you, not what people have done to you; your main problem is the way you've responded to that***"—***ironically, that's empowering.*** Why? Because you can't do very much about what's happened to you or about what other people are doing—but you can do something about yourself. When the Bible talks about sin it is not just referring to the bad things we do. It's not just lying or lust or whatever the case may be—it is ignoring God in the world he has made; it's rebelling against him by living without reference to him. It's saying, "I will decide exactly how I live my life." And Jesus says that is our main problem.

Jesus is confronting the paralytic with his main problem by driving him deeper. Jesus is saying, "***By coming to me and asking for only your body to be healed, you're not going deep enough. You have underestimated the depths of your longings, the longings of your heart.***" Everyone who is paralyzed naturally wants with every fiber of his being to walk. But surely this man would have been resting all of his hopes in the possibility of walking again. In his heart he's almost surely saying, "If only I could walk again, then I would be set for life. I'd never be unhappy, I would never complain. If only I could walk, then everything would be right." And Jesus is saying, "My son, you're mistaken." ***That may sound harsh, but it's profoundly true. Jesus says, "When I heal your body, if that's all I do, you'll feel you'll never be unhappy again. But wait two months, four months—the euphoria won't last. The roots of the discontent of the human heart go deep."***

Why was forgiveness the paralytic's deepest need? Why is it our deepest need? What other "needs" do we feel are deeper than our need for forgiveness?

Tim Keller, Deeper Healing

Our **values** at Christ Church W4

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People # Humble People # Spirit-Filled People
Loved by the Father # Called by the Son # In a Spiritual Battle, but on the Winning Side
Heading for Wholeness # Dangerously Radical



Christ
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Loving God, Loving Community

Going Deeper Notes

Sunday 10th Feb 2019

NEW SERIES: CORE VALUES FROM JESUS: MARK 2:11-17

Introduction:

In this series we revisit some of our core values as a church by going back to basics in the Gospel of Mark. Last week's talk, and others in this series can be found at christchurchw4.com/study.

Recap: Values 1-9

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Capernaum was a fishing and commercial town with a small population of around 1500 people and two synagogues. It was set on a major trade route on the Northern banks of the Galilee.

It became the centre of Jesus' public ministry, and was the town that Peter's wife's family was from.

Opening Discussion:

"Jesus is the starving, the parched, the prisoner, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the dying. Jesus is the oppressed, the poor. To live with Jesus is to live with the poor. To live with the poor is to live with Jesus." Jean Vanier (founder of the L'Arche community)

To what extent do you think Jesus' priority was for the poor? Why?

Read Mark 2:11-17

Who is Jesus reaching out to here?

Why does it get him into trouble with the religious people around him?

What is it about Jesus that means he is not easily affected by how others see him/ what they say about him?

Levi, also known as Matthew, would have been a successful wealthy man. He goes on to be the author of the first gospel of Jesus.

What was Jesus' ministry to wealthy and affluent people in his day?

What is the gospel for wealthy people today? Is it any different to the gospel for the poor?

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Values

At the end of this series on our values, what, if any, stand out to you now?

Prayer:

Ask God to work in you and the rest of the church family this week and to bring us into deeper and deeper unity, love and truth.

Notes:

Space to write...

Not the healthy who need a doctor...

#dangerously radical # party people #realistic people

Jesus then causes an even bigger stir by heading to recruit a man with as much credibility in his community as the Lehman Brothers had during the 2008 financial crash in the UK. This man known as Levi, or Matthew to most of us, became one of the most important scribes of Jesus' life and ministry. But he started his career as a person non grata, a collaborator with the occupiers, who would be under a permanent cloud of suspicion that he was profiting at the expenses of his beleaguered neighbours and fellow Jews.

The sneer in the teacher of the law and Pharisees question is obvious. They've found Jesus out now. He can't be of God. He associates with all sorts of undesirables and lowlives. He's sold out to big business, and collaborators of a corrupt regime. Guilt by association. 'I knew there was something dodgy about him' they begin to whisper...

Jesus, intriguingly, doesn't dispute their take on the sinfulness of their fellow human beings... He's not a nice country parson saying 'why can't we all get along'? He's not defending the guilty. Not assuaging their guilt. He makes just one simple point:

Sick people need a doctor.

He's the doctor. He's the answer to the greedy. He's the antidote to the oppressors. He's here for those who have written off their own moral life, as well as having had it written off by others... he is what they need, and some of them at least can see that they need him.

Please note:

17 Feb 10:30am services are combined at St Alban's with Guest Speaker Mike Tufnell... Mike will be speaking at 9am as well.

At the 6pm services we have a ***special guest speaker*** talking about his ongoing battle with depression and how God has worked in and through him despite all parts of his life/ministry falling apart – ***not one to miss!***

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Going Deeper Notes

Sunday 20 January 2019

NEW SERIES: CORE VALUES FROM JESUS: MARK 1:21-39

Introduction:

In this series we revisit some of our core values as a church by going back to basics in the Gospel of Mark. Last week's talk, and others in this series can be found at christchurchw4.com/study.

Recap: Values 1-7

Party People # Bible People # Realistic People
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Intro: Materialism

Materialism is the belief that that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all things, including mental aspects and consciousness, are results of material interactions... Put another way: 'we are all just the sum of our (measurable) parts'.

Why might the claim that 'it is rare at a funeral to meet a true materialist' be true?

What quote from Ecclesiastes 3:11 might be helpful in explaining this?

Look at the CS Lewis quotes in the text box: How does the Christian belief in a spiritual battle over our souls/lives contrast with materialism?

CS Lewis:

"There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan."

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They are equally pleased with both errors, and hail a materialist and a magician with the same delight."

"The enemy will not see you vanish into God's company without an effort to reclaim you."

Opening Discussion:

What factors have helped you/others come to think that there is a spiritual dimension to life?

Read Mark 1:21-39

What evidence is there that Jesus was in a spiritual battle from this passage?

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Who seems to be winning?
How would you describe the demons' reactions to Jesus?
Why do you think they are referred to as 'impure/unclean spirits'?
How does the demon describe Jesus in v.24? (cf. Acts 19:15).

What does James 2:19 tell us about demons and God?

What does Jesus do to the demons? (e.g. v.25, 34, 39).
What verbs are used to describe this?

How do the crowds react to Jesus in Mark 1?

Where is there darkness in your life you need to be delivered from?

Do you feel able to deliver yourself from it?

Why/why not?

What would an encounter with Jesus do?

Prayer:

What seems so important about verse 35 in relation to this spiritual battle? (cf. Mk 9:29)...

"The Christian faith says that there is a real battle going on in our lives, and for our lives. It is a battle of good versus evil, but it is not an equal battle. It is not an equal battle in two ways.

In the first way it is not an equal battle because **evil is stronger than us**. We can see this from the quote from Paul in Romans. 'What I hate I do... I cannot carry out [good]... the evil I do not want to do, this I keep doing... the sin living in me does that'. In Bible terms it has been like this ever since we handed over our responsibilities and rulership to a snake in the garden of eden. Humans were designed by God to rule this world, on his behalf and in his way, but when we rebelled we let in his enemy, a fallen angel called Lucifer – a being far more powerful than we could ever be. He and his fallen minions hated the idea of an autonomous group of human bipeds loving and being loved by the Creator and have done everything in their considerable power to frustrate our relationship with our loving Father the creator ever since [see CS Lewis' *Screwtape letters* for a marvellous portrayal of this].

So left to our own devices we are left to our own weakness and against a fallen angelic being who describes himself (unchallenged by Jesus) as the prince of this world. What should be God's glorious kingdom looked after by you and me becomes a demonic playground where sin, greed, prostitution, abuse, war, pride, arrogance, malevolence etc all easily abound.

But in the second way it is not an equal battle because **God in us is far stronger than evil, sin or the devil**. *There is no Ying and Yang in the Christian religion*. No equal and opposite spiritual force. No, when God takes to the scene in the form of Jesus, as seen in our passage demons wail and flee. And what is most extraordinary is that it is when Jesus is close by that we find out most about this spiritual warfare that is always going on.

When the Son of the Great King of Kings comes to earth, the minions of the 'prince of this world' expose themselves and shriek and yell. A kingdom clash emerges. They cannot keep silent when God is so clearly on the move so they pull out their 'A' game, terrorising the humans and extracting as much pain and suffering as they can, revealing their ultimate intentions: The Son of the Great King of Kings comes to rescue humans from that horror and the demons hate him for it, but are powerless against it."

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