

What is Church?

CALL	reminds us we are	CHOSEN
CONFESSION	renews us as God's	REDEEMED
CONSECRATION	grows us as	HOLY DISCIPLES
COMMUNION	unites us as	JOYFUL FAMILY
COMMISSION	sends us as	SERVANT MISSIONARIES

PART FIVE: SERVANT MISSIONARIES

JESUS IS GOOD NEWS

The famous story of David and Goliath (in 1 Samuel 17) provides an excellent illustration of the good news of Jesus. The ancient church – the Israelites – are quaking with fear because of the giant Goliath who stands at the head of the enslaving Philistine army. Along comes a shepherd from Bethlehem. Though young and apparently weak, the LORD God is with him. David slays the giant and, in an instant, the Israelite army change from victims to victors. With a shout the Israelites surge forward and engage in the battle that is already won.

Goliath represents the devil, also called Satan. Goliath even wears scaly armour to make us think of the serpent in Genesis chapter 3. Jesus is the Shepherd-King from Bethlehem who defeats Satan through his death and resurrection. Each Sunday we celebrate his victory and then we join the battle. Sunday is the first day of the week, so we start the week knowing that Jesus has already won, that he is Lord, and that we have been set free to belong to him.

“Satan” means “Accuser”. He loves to accuse us of sin, to remind us of guilt and to make us feel wretched and unworthy. But all who trust in Christ should declare with confidence that his blood has cleansed them from all sin. The devil wants us to fear death (perhaps by making us live as if this life is all there is) but we believe in the resurrection. Right at the beginning the serpent whispered lies about God but we can combat lies with the truth of God’s Word.

Jesus fought for us in the Holy War against sin and the devil. He has won the battle. Now he enlists his followers to join the fight. Each week we are sent into the world to take part in Holy War: we fight by showing love and mercy to the outcast and unworthy; we fight by living with hope and joy as people who believe in the resurrection; we fight by working together against injustice and oppression; we fight by faith, trusting Jesus’ teaching even when his way of life runs contrary to the way of our society; we fight by speaking truth instead of lies. Baptism services often give this instruction to those being baptised: “Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life.”

The battle against the world is *not* about combatting other people or acting aggressively towards those who do not share our beliefs. It is about a life shaped by the good news – with faith, love and hope; with humility and servant-hearted generosity. Much of the time the primary battle is against the sin that lurks in our own hearts and minds. We fight against *the flesh* meaning every desire and thought that comes naturally to us but which is actually contrary to Jesus’ teaching and example. Coming to Jesus means sharing in the rewards of his victory. One reward is the privilege of joining his army and fighting the battle that sets people free.

PREPARATION: ACTS CHAPTER 2

Acts is the second book written by Luke, the sequel to his Gospel. Jesus summarised the message of the Old Testament in Luke 24:46-47. Verse 46 – the suffering and resurrection of Christ – is covered in Luke. Verse 47 – the gospel of repentance and forgiveness going to the nations – is covered in Acts.

- How does Acts 2 follow on from Luke 24?
- As his great Pentecost sermon ends, what response does Peter want to see from the people? What does this mean for you?
- How would you describe the life and activity of the early church? How does this compare to the life and activity of St George's Church?

WHO ARE WE: SERVANT MISSIONARIES

Ephesians 5:8-21 and 6:10-20

- How does the language of *light* and *darkness* explain our life as followers of Jesus? What might it say about our relationship to the wider world?
- Being filled with the Spirit is described in 4 verbs: speaking, singing, giving thanks and submitting (v18-21). How do these build up the church as a family of people united in and under Jesus Christ?
- Glance through 5:22-6:9. What areas of life does Paul mention? Do you think of these areas of life as part of your God-given calling?
- What does 6:10-20 tell us about the nature of the Christian life?

WORSHIP AND IDENTITY: COMMISSION – God sends us

At the end of the service we do not leave church – rather, as church, we are sent by God back into the world as servants and witnesses.

We go into the coming week:

- **SENT** by the Father to our specific situations and vocations
- **SPEAKING** the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ
- **SERVING** the world in the power of the Holy Spirit

BIBLE MEDITATION AND PRAYER: PSALM 72

Meditating on the Bible is about careful reading and reflection on a Bible passage, chewing it in your mind, then responding with prayer to your heavenly Father.

First: Read the Psalm a few times. Think about what the Psalm is saying – what it teaches about God, about the LORD Jesus, about the world, about the church.

Second: Pray with thanksgiving to God. Praise him. Marvel at what he has revealed, acknowledge the wonder that God has spoken to you in this passage of the Bible.

Third: Confess your sins to God. The passage may reveal your sin and failure, or expose the shortcomings of the church (local, denominational, national, etc).

Fourth: Make your requests to God. What do you need to ask for? How do you need to change? Perhaps the passage prompts you to pray for other people or churches.

This Psalm describes King Jesus and the blessings that come from his reign. The church lives so that the rule of Jesus might be made visible, so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. How does this affect your actions and priorities during each week?

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The flow of the Lord's Prayer takes us through the shape of the Worship service.

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”

- The coming week will be a spiritual battle as we fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. The battleground is first and foremost our own hearts and we need God's help to resist temptation.
- Evil is anything opposed to the rule of Jesus Christ, and anything that denies or ignores his grace and truth. Often this evil can be very subtle. We need deliverance from God if we are to walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

“For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.”

- We do not go alone into the world. Worship ends with a *Blessing* or *Benediction* to assure us that the living God goes with us. This God is not empty-handed: the kingdom, power and glory belong to our Father who says to his church “I am your God and you are my people.”

TRUTH IN PRACTICE

There are many implications of the wonderful reality that we are SERVANT MISSIONARIES. We are focusing on these three areas (Family, Money, Mission) because these are parts of church life that need strengthening at this time.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN

Children can know that they belong to God through Jesus Christ. They can take part in gathered worship and find the help of Jesus through preaching, through liturgy, through welcome, through singing, through the Lord's Supper and through their church family. Children can also be used in amazing ways by God to share his love and serve his purposes. Young Samuel heard God's voice and changed a nation. Young David defeated Goliath and became a great forerunner of Jesus. A young slave girl caused a mighty general to find healing – outward and inward – from the living God. We bring our children to church worship not simply that they might be blessed by Jesus, but also that they might become Jesus' blessing to others.

Through church children learn to serve. They could help their parents with refreshments after the service and start to experience the greatness of putting others first. They can befriend and encourage adults who are ten times their age!

No child is too young to be a missionary: from a very early age parents can pray with their children for their friends to discover how great Jesus is. Children can tell other children at school that they were at church on Sunday and learned more about God's love. Christian parents might get involved with a school, or clubs or sports groups, with the desire to bless and serve others with the kindness and help that they have found in Jesus. Ask your children to pray for your Christian witness in your workplace. Let them see that work is not just a way of getting an income, or a necessary evil that makes you grumble at home, but an area of life in which you have a calling from God to represent Jesus.

A family can be involved with God's global plan to grow his kingdom. You might sponsor a child through *Stand By Me* and pray that this child grows to be a follower of Jesus. If your child watches the news then pray with them for the church in a country that was mentioned. From an early age help children know that they are part of the international family of Christian brothers and sisters. Children love to be part of something big, to have a taste of adventure, and there is nothing bigger, or more adventurous, than being part of Jesus' church!

MONEY

Our money belongs to God because we belong to God as his chosen people. As redeemed people our money is redeemed when we start obeying Jesus' teaching about giving and generosity. God's Word matures us to be holy disciples, so obedient Christians give to church to enable people to teach the Bible. We use our resources to support one another in the church family, joyfully remembering that Christ gave his all for us. Finally, we are servant missionaries. Serving people is frequently costly and requires sacrificial giving. We are all missionaries yet it is a glorious sign of God's kingdom when we invest money in people who plant new churches and take the gospel into needy areas of our community, nation and world. Churches supported the apostle Paul, freeing him from the need to work for a living and enabling him to offer the gospel free of charge (2 Corinthians 11:7-9, Acts 18:5, Philippians 4:14-19). We let go of treasures on earth and receive treasures in heaven. We send and support a Christian worker who works among people we will never meet in our lifetime but who will greet us in eternity. Our use of money reveals whether or not we are truly living as servant missionaries.

MISSION

We have seen that worship is like ascending the mountain of the Lord, to receive his instruction and eat at his table. Then we flow down the mountain like streams of living water, taking life out into the world. We entered heaven, now we are sent as citizens of heaven doing God's will on earth. We are missionaries who have been given God's mission.

At times this may mean starting new initiatives or joining bold, adventurous plans. Someone might start a charity or travel to another country to share the good news of Jesus. This may be God's plan for you. Yet much of our mission consists of going about our ordinary life with a desire to live and serve and love like Jesus. Paul's letter to the Ephesians showed us God's great plan: to unite all things in heaven and on earth in and under Jesus Christ our Head. The same letter then goes on to talk about husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters (which has application to the workplace). The eternal, cosmic plan of God is worked out in our ordinary daily life. This is our calling. The word *vocation* (calling) is sometimes used exclusively for clergy or missionaries, yet every Christian is called by God into his church and called to be servant missionaries in their everyday situations. When family life is filled with Jesus' truth, when we love and serve the neighbours in our community, when we pray for our rulers or seek the good of our work colleagues, there we are engaged in God's mission.

UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP: GATHERING AND SENDING

On Sundays the church gathers together to worship. Some churches call this gathering *Divine Service* and the wonderful reality is that God gathers us so that he can serve us! He cleanses us, he speaks and transforms us, he feeds and unites us. Then he sends us into the world as his servant missionaries. We go out to bring the cleansing of the gospel, to speak truth and transform society, to feed the hungry and work for unity.

We see this in Mark 6:30-52. Jesus' disciples gather around Jesus and our Lord is eager to spend time with them and give them some rest. Then crowds gather and Jesus "had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things" (v34). After the teaching comes a meal, when Christ takes the food, gives thanks, breaks the bread and distributes the food to the people. Finally, he dismisses the crowd and sends his disciples out.

Gathering, teaching, a meal, sending. Here is the pattern of worship. The church is sent out like a boat on the sea of the nations. We might find stormy opposition! But take courage! Christ our Lord is praying for us on high (v46); he is the "I AM" who is with us (v50).

The end of the service may be the end of *gathered* worship but it is not the end of worship itself. We present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. In our bodies we go into the world, pouring ourselves out for the life of the world. This is God's will for us, so services end with a blessing. The Minister does not simply pray for a blessing, he pronounces God's blessing in the name of the Triune God. He speaks a *benediction*, a "good word", over the church on behalf of Christ. We have met with Jesus by the Spirit, now we are sent so that the world might meet with Jesus, by the Spirit at work in his body, the church.

Gathering and sending is the weekly pattern but it is more than a weekly cycle. We pray that God would grow us as his people (CALL). We seek to grow in wonder and praise at our redemption (CONFESSION). We want to be matured by God's Word (CONSECRATION). We desire to grow in unity and love (COMMUNION). We seek to be better equipped to engage with the holy war that is serving the world and being missionaries of the gospel (COMMISSION). Over time we we grow according to a pattern we see in the Bible:

Priest → King → Prophet.

In the *priestly* stage we hear and receive instructions from God. As we meditate on God's truth we grow in wisdom as *kings*. Then with God's word on our lips we go into the world as *prophets* to change it by our speech. After hearing God speak, and after eating at the royal table, we are sent into the world as God's prophetic people.