

Jesus Agent of change

Preach good news to the poor – October 16th 2016

Opening prayer

"In 1753 John Wesley, the founder of Methodism said, "So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, 'They are poor, only because they are idle'." Yet today many churchgoers and members of the general public alike have come to believe that the key factors driving poverty in the UK are the personal failings of the poor – especially 'idleness'" (Truth and Lies Report 2013)

1. What could influence our response to poverty?

"Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart" (Deuteronomy 15:10a)

2. What is your understanding of what God is saying here?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3)

The Greek word for 'poor' here means to be in such a desperate state of poverty as to be dependent on others for support.

3. Human beings continue to experience spiritual hunger. Where do people search for answers?

4. Does humanity recognise its need of God?

5. What is God offering all humanity through our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

"Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35b)

6. Has this been your experience?

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:17)

7. How clearly do our actions speak of our love for God and others?

8. Are we as generous as we could/should be with our resources?

Lord Jesus,

You offer us life in all its fullness; life spiritually rich with your presence by the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us, we pray, to stay close to you, that we might show your love in our every word and deed. Help us to respond to poverty, not with 'a grudging heart' but with a generous heart full of your love for humankind.

Amen.

Jesus Agent of change

Proclaim freedom for the prisoners – October 23rd 2016

Opening prayer

“When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:39-40)

1. ‘The focus of this parable is that we should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for God’ (Life Application Study Bible NIV).
What are your thoughts on this?

The words of Jesus - ‘Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ (John 8:32)

2. What is your understanding of this verse?

‘Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.’ (Acts 13:38)

3. How would you explain ‘the forgiveness of sins’ to someone, unfamiliar with the church (‘non churched’), who asked you to?

‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’ (2 Corinthians 3:17)

4. By trusting our Lord Jesus we find love, acceptance, forgiveness and freedom to live for Him. Freedom from what? What are the things that can imprison us?

‘Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.’ (Hebrews 13:3)

5. What are practical ways you could do this?

Lord Jesus

Thank you that by believing and trusting in you we are loved, accepted, forgiven and freed to live for you. We pray for those who are imprisoned, in any sense of the word, that there might be a way for them to seek and find you, the Truth, and that you will set them free.

Amen.

Jesus Agent of change

Proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – November 20th 2016

Opening prayer

'Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you' (Leviticus 25:10)

1. Read Leviticus 25:8-13 and discuss the significance of 'the year of Jubilee/the Lord's favour'.
2. How is 'the Year of Jubilee' in view, throughout everything Jesus is saying in Luke 4:18-19?

'This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favour I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you"' (Isaiah 49:8)

3. What do you think God is saying here?

Jesus declared that 'this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. Jesus did not just point to something yet to happen; in His ministry and preaching God's kingdom was already being experienced.

4. Read John 3:16-17 and discuss how Jesus 'fulfilled' 'this scripture' (Luke 4:18-19).

'I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.' (2 Corinthians 6:2)

The Apostle Paul declares that salvation has already arrived in Christ. God is already pouring out many of the blessings of the age to come.

5. What glimpses of God's kingdom have you seen lately?
6. Are you aware of being a part of the Missio Dei (God's mission) here?

Throughout the Bible we hear how God is acting to renew and restore all things, using communities and faithful individuals.

7. How might God be calling you (as individuals and as a church) in a new direction, so that the Good News of Jesus might be shared in your local community?

Lord Jesus,

You are the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation. By You all things were created: things in heaven and things on earth. We praise You for all that You are.

Thank you for coming and living an earthly life; for showing us what the kingdom of God is like by being good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, releasing the oppressed, and by proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour.

Lord Jesus, You call us as Your disciples to share this Good News in word and deed. Help us we pray to fulfil Your Commission, to the praise and glory of God. Amen

Jesus Agent of change

Recovery of sight for the blind – October 30th 2016

Opening prayer

'So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.' (John 9:7b)

Such a simple sentence but for the man born blind this was life transforming!

1. Discuss what it must have been like for him.
2. Think now about what it is like for someone to suddenly 'see' who Jesus is (and believe) after a whole life of 'blindness'. If this has happened to you, why not take the opportunity to share testimony.
3. Read v.11, v.17, v.38 – Describe the spiritual transformation of this man that happened alongside gaining sight after being born blind.
4. Contrast this with the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees (v.16 and v.22)

'Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised.' (Acts 9:18)

You can read about Saul's conversion in 3 places in Acts (9:3-9, 22:6-11 and 26:12-18).

5. What elements do you learn from each account?
6. Do all conversions happen the same way?

'He wanted to see who Jesus was' (Luke 19:3a)

7. Are there people you know of who want 'to see who Jesus' is? How might you play a part in that?
8. Zacchaeus was a changed man after his encounter with Jesus. Can you describe how knowing Jesus has changed you?
9. What opportunities do you have for sharing the difference that knowing Jesus has made to you?

Loving Lord,

As those who have seen and believed, we pray that you would help us to keep our spiritual eyes open to how you are at work in our lives, in the church and in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray also for those who, like Zacchaeus, want to see who Jesus is. Lord, may they find their sycamore-fig tree to climb, or whatever is needed to bring them to a personal encounter with you.

Amen.

Jesus Agent of change

Release the Oppressed - November 6th 2016

Opening prayer

'The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.' (Exodus 2:23)

The book of Exodus describes the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, their journey to Mount Sinai, and the events that occurred during that time.

1. Discuss the oppression and deliverance of the Israelites as recorded in Exodus.
2. How was this experience used by God to help His people know how to treat others? (Ref Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:33 and many more)

'The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.' (Psalm 145:18)

3. Reflect on how the Psalms are such a comfort to people.

4. Think of examples of oppression today.
5. How can we respond, in Jesus' name?
 - a) As individuals
 - b) As church

The original word used for 'release' in Luke 4:18 has more than one possible translation. *Aphesis* - can be translated as to release, or send away, but also to remit, or forgive. The same word is used for 'forgiveness' in this verse at the end of Luke's gospel.

'and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:47)

6. Discuss your understanding of how forgiveness is release.
7. How does Jesus bring about transformation through this release?
8. Luke, through his gospel, was talking to the Greek-speaking world, and wanted them to know the message of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus. As Jesus' disciples today how can we pass this message on to people, especially those who have little or no faith background?

Father God, You defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; you maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Lord Jesus, You release people from the oppression caused by illness and circumstance through healing and miracles, and because of you, Holy Spirit you give life that sets people free from the power of sin and death.

Holy God, we pray that more people would come to know the healing release that You offer. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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