

Week of Prayer 20th – 24th Sept Listening to the Voices

How did Jesus offer welcome?

Watch Video 1: An interview with Jeniya Gwendu <https://youtu.be/rkuk45TQPIU>

MONDAY – Welcoming racial diversity

In Jeniya's video she talks about church for her being like 'entering a welcoming sanctuary'.

The word 'welcoming' brings up connections of being received with open arms, going where you are always invited and a sense of when you are there, you will be received and accepted for who you are.

The word 'sanctuary' speaks of a place to run to when you are under attack or frightened, it speaks of safety and a place where you will be fully cared for.

This is how Jeniya describes church for her.

A key note in her message is for people of colour or of different ethnicity to be accepted for who they are and Jeniya especially emphasises that we learn to love on another as expressed in John 13:34:

'...love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

For Reflection

When Jesus was asked 'who is my neighbour', he responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan together (Luke 10:30-37) and with this fresh reading imagine that the victim is of white British ethnicity and that the Samaritan is of a different ethnicity, African, Asian, Southeast Asian, Eastern European or any other who may be your neighbour. At the time of the parable the tensions were running high between the Judeans and the Samaritans, we may not be in this place of racial tension with our neighbours, but nonetheless ask yourself these questions:

Questions for discussion

1. What does it look like, where I live, to reach across the ethnic lines and care for those who are ethnically different from myself?
2. The Samaritan is taken to a place of safety, a sanctuary, where would be a place of safety for those in your community who do not feel loved or accepted by our society?
3. How could your church be a 'welcoming sanctuary' to those from differing ethnic backgrounds?

Pray

- If this is relevant for you, repent of past attitudes, which were more exclusive than inclusive.
- Pray for the refugees from Afghanistan and other places in the world seeking sanctuary in our country.
- Honestly seek God to understand better what it means to 'welcome' those who have a different ethnic background from ourselves.

How did Jesus offer welcome?

Watch Video 2 Creation Care: An interview with Hannah Gray https://youtu.be/kt3ZTKO_q4c

TUESDAY – Creation Care

With our theme being ‘Listening to the Voices’ you may ask the question; how can creation be a ‘voice’? Interestingly in Romans 8:22 Paul writes in a way that it is almost as if creation were given a voice, the voice which is a groan: *‘We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.’*

We are part of creation, creation is all around us and blesses us, feeds us physically and nurtures our soul spiritually, but in our church the ‘voice’ of creation may not be heard, perhaps the groaning has not been loud enough.

In her video Hannah spoke about church for her being a place which makes a ‘positive difference to people and places’ and yet at times she has felt alone and frustrated over this issue which has been in complete contrast with professional life. We worship the creator God, and we are one of his created and we are tasked with being good stewards of all he has given us.

How can we grow in this area and listen to this voice?

For Reflection

You may like to read one or all of these passages:

Jesus interacted with nature and used creation in his parables:

Matthew 8:23-27

Matthew 13:1-9

Matthew 13:31-33

What other examples can you recall?

Jesus’ teaching about justice:

Matthew 5:1-10

Taking a couple of verses from the Beatitudes, vs 5&6:

‘God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.’

Questions for discussion

1. In what way may we be exhibiting pride in how we treat creation?
2. What does it look like to thirst for justice for our earth?
3. What does it mean to love our neighbours in this context of creation care?
4. What can your family and church do to make a difference for our planet?

Pray

- Ask God to open your eyes more to his amazing creation and your part in it, sit in a quiet place and listen to the ‘voice’ of creation.
- If this is relevant for you, seek forgiveness for your attitude to creation care
- Pray for countries like Indonesia and the Philippines who are being profoundly impacted by rising sea levels

How did Jesus offer welcome?

Watch Video 3 Women in Ministry: An interview with Rev Mary Taylor <https://youtu.be/sS8Enf6cV1E>

WEDNESDAY – Welcoming women in Ministry

Mary Taylor, one of the Regional Ministers of the Yorkshire Baptist Association, spoke about the manifesto which we have been given both from Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 3:28

‘Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Mary makes the point that if we are called to go to ALL the earth making disciples, then surely God wished to release 100% of the population, both men and women for this task. Jesus treated women with transformational respect, empowerment and gave them a position in that society which had never been dreamt of. He lived out the verse which Paul wrote many years later in Galatians 3:28 that ‘all are one through Christ’ Jesus daily demonstrated what that meant.

Therefore, how did Jesus offer welcome to women? He loved them, healed them, transformed them, trusted them and sent them out.

For Reflection

Here are some encounters which Jesus had with women which you may wish to read again:

Mark 14:1-11

John 8:1-11

Luke 8:40-48

John 4:10-42

Questions for Discussion

1. How were each of these women’s lives changed through their encounter with Jesus?
2. When Jesus’ approach to women was so transformational, why do we still struggle to see women leading in some of our churches?
3. How many times in a year do you have a woman preach in your church?
4. What could you do to raise up young women as leaders?

Pray

- If this is relevant for you, seek forgiveness for your attitude to women in ministry
- Pray for women leaders that you know, both ordained and non-ordained
- Pray for young women to be raised up as leaders in your church

How did Jesus offer welcome?

Watch Video 4 Disabled people and Baptist churches: An interview with Rev Martin Hobgen

https://youtu.be/3DYntPgE_EM

THURSDAY – Welcoming disabled people in our churches

In Martin's video he talks about the fact that his relationship with God is above all else, that is above relationships with family, work colleagues and others and certainly far above the fact that he is a man in a wheelchair. He longs for a society and a church which sees the woman or man and not their disability or what may even be a unique ability but perceived as a disability.

He reminds us that while churches have often overcome physical barriers for those who are disabled to access their buildings and facilities, there is still some way to go to take down the social and psychological barriers in order to make a genuine welcome in our churches.

For Reflection

Luke 9:10-11

John 5:1-8

Matthew 11:28

Jesus invites all to enter the Kingdom of God, he does not place any restrictions on anyone and does not judge those who are disabled by the standards of the society in which he lived. In Luke 9 it is said that he healed those that 'needed to be healed', this does not mean all. In John 5 he heals one man of many, but I am sure he equally valued the others he was among at the time. Jesus places equal value on all human life and draws all people to him, those who were traditionally powerful and those who may have been considered weak and insignificant, he raises them up.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what way might you be challenged by Jesus only healing one man at the Pool of Bethesda?
2. Are there people with certain disabilities whom you find it easier to welcome than others? Why might this be?
3. Does your church have any disabled people in positions of leadership?
4. How can your church extend a greater welcome to people with disability?

Pray

- If this is relevant for you, seek forgiveness for your attitude to disabled people
- Pray for at least one disabled person you know, this may not be a visible disability, disability comes in many forms.
- Pray for the full diversity of humanity to be embraced in our churches.
- Pray for ordained Baptist ministers, such as Martin Hobgen, to find a welcome as leaders in our churches.

How did Jesus offer welcome?

Watch Video 5 Children and Young People: Charlotte Dove interviews some children and young people <https://youtu.be/jN2wKrLCXk0>

FRIDAY – Welcoming Children and Young People

In the video Charlotte interviews some of the young people and children who she works with, and a number of things struck me:

- The importance of **community**: For these young people, the importance of being and spending time together was an essential part of church life.
- **Reality**: When talking about teaching, they were interested in how they can live their lives as Christians, on life skills and how to talk about their faith.
- **Valuing one another**: The importance of listening to each other. These young people were clearly enthusiastic, and their faith and church and I wonder of part of the reason why is that they can participate and be involved in services.
- **Fun** was mentioned a number of times!

For Reflection

Mark 10.13-16: The disciples tried to stop people bringing children to be blessed by Jesus. Jesus responded by saying that ‘the Kingdom of God belonged to such as these’ and that we need to receive the Kingdom of God like little children.

John 6.8-9: The feeding of the 5000 starts with a boy being willing to share his loaves and fishes

Luke 8.40-56: Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead

Questions for Discussion

1. If we need to become more like children to enter the kingdom of God, why don’t we spend more time listening to and learning from them about faith?
2. Thinking about the importance of community, reality, valuing and fun in the lives of young people, how prominent are these things in the life of our churches? Are these some of the things we need to learn from children so we can discover more of what following Jesus means?
3. Are we willing to let young people and children share what God has given them, whether it is loaves and fishes, talents and gifts, hope, the importance of friendships etc?
4. We don’t know the name of Jairus’ daughter. Jesus values her so much but the disciples either hadn’t remembered or weren’t told her name and so it wasn’t recorded in the gospels. How can we value our children and young people more?

Pray

- Do we need to repent of our attitude towards children & Young people in church? Have we seen them as people to get out of the way so we can enjoy a proper service rather than people we need to learn from and be inspired by?
- For our young people and children as they try to live out their faith in a complex world.
- That God would help us to see ways that we can let children and young people have a say and provide leadership in our churches.