

Seven Day Christians - Living our Faith in the Real World

Anna Brooker, Holy Trinity Twickenham, June and July 2006.

Part 1: Introducing the theme (Colossians 2:1-7; Mark 1:14-20)

In the next few weeks we'll be exploring what it means to be a Christian seven days a week- as the poet George Herbert put it in a hymn long ago: 'Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee...'
We'll look each week at a key area of everyday life and see how faith makes a difference. These areas are:

- Rest and Recreation
- Work Family
- Community
- Money
- The Environment
- Global Issues

Today is also Trinity Sunday, a special day for this church, and very appropriate as we look at our whole lives in relationship with God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Last week Mike brought along a cardboard cut-out of Billy Graham and we thought about how a 2D image was not alive, but that God's gift of the Holy Spirit means we can live in 3Dimensions.

We can be fully alive through the Holy Spirit, the life-force of God, first poured out on the Day of Pentecost, and active energising Christians ever since.

- When Paul wrote his letter to the young church in Colossae, his fervent prayer was for them to have this same life in 3D, with Christ at the very centre. He calls Jesus 'the mystery of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'
- Our faith in Jesus takes us right to the heart of God himself- the one who created all things, the source of all life and love in this world and beyond. It's rather like peeling an onion- in reverse! As we get to know Jesus and allow him into our lives and hearts, so our hearts are enlarged with the knowledge of God the Father too, and with the life-force of God the Holy Spirit.
- Everything follows from that one central relationship with Jesus Christ. He calls us, like he called those fishermen, to centre our lives in him. We are called, not driven.
- Paul says: 'I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.' He knows that their and our faith in Christ must stay firm if it is to remain the centre from which everything else flows. And he knows from his own experience that then, whatever problems and challenges they are facing, and he's in prison as he writes, there will be a sense of order.
- Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, says: 'Christianity is Christ. Put him in the centre of the world, and the world will stop spinning in incomprehensive circles and begin to make sense.'

Word for the Week: Colossians 2:6-7. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Part 2: Rest and Recreation - The Sabbath Principle (Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 11:28-11)

A change is a good as a rest... or maybe not! Human beings need rest.

Sabbath: God's way of ensuring we take time off and time out. One day in seven, following his pattern when he rested on the 7th day of creation. Holidays (originally Holy Days) intended as regular seasonal times when everyone could stop for worship, rest and recreation. In our 7 day a week world we now need to make our own patterns for rest and recreation - society won't do it for us... Leisure is not the same as rest: beware 'leisure pursuits', the 'tourist industry' etc.

REST involves past: reflection on what has been achieved and happened.

Present: enjoying the present moment, appreciation of people, places, etc.

Future: being recreated, renewed in preparation for what is to come.

Worship involves the same elements and has a similar effect as we allow God to refresh us spiritually.

REST needs time and space- but even a very little can make a huge difference

REST is a gift: in order to receive it we must admit our need and make it a priority.

Word for the Week: Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.' Matthew 11:28-30

- God understands and cares- Jesus has been here before!
- Rest is God's gift to us – we need only ask
- If we take on God's yoke and walk in step with him, at his pace, then we will find true rest.
n.b. Jesus the carpenter makes every yoke individually, to fit perfectly and lighten the load.
- Jesus knows we must come apart and rest awhile, or else we may just plain come apart... (Vance Havner)

Part 3: World of Work - Faith on Monday Morning (Ephesians 2:4-10; Matthew 25:14-30)

God is a God of work, just as he is a God of rest. Our God-given work provides:

- fulfilment to the worker
- benefit to the community
- glory to God

But many people find work boring, exhausting, demoralising or stressful. Some have far too much work, whilst others long for a job. Why? Britons in 2006 work between 3.5 & 5 hours longer per week than any other nation in Europe. In a recent survey of Christians at work, asked whether their hours were acceptable, too long or too short, 40% said acceptable, 60% said too long and none said too short! As a recent article put it, we live in a 'slave new world' We each need to discover our God-given work, which may not be the same as our job!

2 KEYS to a Christian View of Work (whether paid/unpaid, full/part-time): **WORKMANSHIP & STEWARDSHIP**

WORKMANSHIP - who we are

Identity: is found in relationship, not in a role. We are 'God's workmanship', says Paul. God made us in his image and wants us to become fully ourselves.

Value: we're 'created in Christ Jesus'- not about salary or status but about the value God places on us – he loves us enough to give Jesus to die for us. We are of infinite value to him, 'more than many sparrows...' as Jesus says.

Purpose: to climb the ladder? Maybe. In any case, God has 'good works for us', which will be satisfying, creative, good for us and for other people. These are all true whatever job we do or don't do.

THOUGHT: Some may need to work a 60-hour week at times, or they may be doing so because work has become the only source of their identity, value and purpose...

STEWARDSHIP - what we do

Jesus' story of the talents suggests that God gives us each different gifts, material and personal, and we have a responsibility to him for how we use them. The third servant was punished for acting out of misplaced fear, for not 'having a go'. The other servants prioritized; got organized; took responsibility and used time effectively. (P-O-R-T – characteristics of good stewardship). Martin Luther King said: Find out what you were made to do, then give yourself passionately to the doing of it

Word for the Week: Ephesians 2:10 For you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Part 4: In for a penny - Money Matters (Acts 4:32-5:5; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-2)

We all receive material blessings from God all the time, without realising/ acknowledging they are gifts from God. That's why saying thank you, e.g. grace before meals, is important...

Acts 4:32- 5:5:

Early Christians shared everything they had (not suggesting we do that, but think how sharing affected people who did it, changed priorities, freed & encouraged them...)

They were freed to give; & open to receive from others- allow God to meet their needs, rather than independent self-sufficiency which is norm for us. These Christians knew God had given them much; he wanted them to share all they had with others, not be held prisoner by their material possessions, but be freed to give and receive joyfully. As they did so, great grace was upon them all, we read. They'd learned

TWO WONDERFUL TRUTHS ABOUT GOD

Everything belongs to God

God is generous

which transform our attitude to everything we have -time, work, decisions, relationships and money, which is important because

TWO HARD TRUTHS ABOUT OURSELVES

If we aren't thankful we will be fearful. If we don't give we will be greedy

What made Ananias and his wife Sapphira lie?

- they wanted public recognition & status- topical in the week when the cash for honours scandal resurfaced! Very human to want to be thanked, made a fuss of, for giving- as if what we have is ours to give, rather than gifts from God to be shared. Jesus tells us to give in secret, so only God knows, otherwise we risk giving for completely the wrong motives.
- Ananias and Sapphira lied because they were fearful; unable to trust/receive. Kept back half the money so they didn't have to rely on anyone else or risk being in need.
- They weren't thankful, so they were fearful & they didn't give, so they were greedy. God's judgement on their lies is dramatic and startling. Clearly this money stuff matters!

Gratitude and Giving free us from the tyranny of money & possessions to see clearly that all we have is God's, a gift from him, that material things are temporary, whilst he gives us not only all the blessing of this life, but treasure in heaven, the treasure of eternal life with him.

If we just keep taking or even trading, we will squander ourselves. If we give, we will regain ourselves as fulfilled individuals and flourishing communities. Miroslav Wolf

THOUGHT: For whom is your money good news? (*Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury*)

Word for the Week: Matthew 6:20-21

Jesus said: '...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

Part 5: All things Bright and Beautiful - The Environment (psalm 104:1-24; Luke 6:1-43-45)

A reminder of the Person behind creation (Psalm 104) and a challenge as to how we live out what we believe about God and his world.(Luke 6)

1.THE REMINDER

Two schools of thought about the world, how it came into being, how it's sustained, not so much creation versus evolution as personal or impersonal

Either we believe there is a Person behind the creation of the world, its beauty, rationality, order, or we don't. As Christians , we do!! This means, says theologian Michael Lloyd,

Because there is a Person behind Creation, there can be a purpose for creation.

Creation itself, is valued by the Creator, just as we, his creatures, are valued.

When we believe that Creation, the Environment, is Personal, we respond to it personally, as in Psalm 104, by wondering, enjoying, meditating, exploring, ruling and caring for it.

2. THE CHALLENGE

In Luke 6, Jesus used a tree to talk about people. We can tell if the tree is good by looking at its fruit. So with people - our words , actions, lifestyles, show what we are like on the inside.

We cannot truly love and serve our neighbours if at the same time we are destroying their environment, or acquiescing in its destruction, or even ignoring the environmentally depleted circumstances in which so many people are condemned to live.

John Stott

Doing nothing is not an option. So what can we do? Lots! A few ideas:

- 49p in every £1 spent in supermarkets Every trip make a few purchases on basis of the environment.Your till receipt is like a voting slip, (The Good Shopping Guide).
- Support fair-trade stall at church- nearly always environmentally friendly too!
- Buy local - or grow your own. Be aware of food miles! Farmers' market in Twickenham.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Effective - LBRUT may halve collections of rubbish to landfill.
- Charity shop clothes rather than always new - or buy good quality that will last longer.
- Car journeys - could we walk, cycle or use public transport?
- Join a Christian environmental organisation such as A Rocha
- Tear Fund and other aid agencies increasingly aware of green issues
- Energy audits of our home/work place/ church

We need to ask ourselves whether, if anyone looked at our homes, our lifestyles,& our direct debits, they would be able to tell that we believed in the intrinsic value & purposefulness of creation. Or do we in practice live as if there were no Person behind it, and no purpose to it? As if it were not there for God and for itself, but just for us?

Michael Lloyd

Word for the Week: Psalm 104:24

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Part 6: The Global Village - World Issues (Isaiah 40:21-26; Matthew 25:31-46)

1. GOD IS INCOMPARABLY AND ETERNALLY POWERFUL

Isaiah was written in the context of the Babylonian Empire, which ruled Judah and had transported 2 of her kings into exile. But who is really in charge?

Sarajevo - historic spot of the murder that led to the First World War- the statues and memorials changed 4 times in 92 yrs since it happened! 'World powers' come and go...

2. GOD JUDGES EVERY INDIVIDUAL

Jesus' story of the sheep and goats is a universal metaphor for judgement on those who live selfishly, ignoring the needs of others. It's also a powerful reminder that each person can make a difference. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will judge, but he also shows us how to love.

- However unjust life is in today's world (and always has been), there will be justice.
- Aren't the problems too big? Yes, but that's not a reason to stop trying...

"Rich countries have failed to use the World Trade Organisation talks (which collapsed recently after 5 years) to bring about justice in trade. Their actions will only compound the acute hardship and frustrations of the poorest farmers. The refusal by rich countries to take seriously the development mandate in the negotiations is a gross betrayal of millions of poor people across the world."

Mari Griffith, Senior Trade Policy Officer for Tearfund

- Things CAN change: % of world population with clean water is rising; life expectancy increasing despite threat of AIDs, but still only 35 in several African nations...
- Why bother? Because God made us to live in relationship with others, not as isolated individuals, however much our society wants us to view ourselves this way. It's hard work, but it makes a huge difference!

"When you give yourself to people, you become closely drawn into their lives and their hardships, and that can be quite demanding..."

Dr Karin Martin, founder of Asha craft cooperative, in the slums of Delhi.

- We don't have to be perfect/holy/ experts to help! There will always be the paradox between the beauty and goodness of God's world and people made in his image, and the world's violence, pain and mess. But Jesus came as a baby in a stable and identified with all of that, even though he was God all-powerful.
- What can we do? PRAY, GIVE, BE INFORMED, CAMPAIGN, LOVE.

THOUGHT: The Christ who identifies with the naked and the prisoner, with the famished and the thirsty, with the weak, estranged and despised, is the Christ who will be subjected to all this himself.

John Proctor

Word for the Week: Matthew 25: 40

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.