

*Neither the one  
who plants  
or the one  
who waters is  
anything, but only  
God, who makes  
things grow.  
1 Corinthians 3:7*

# **GR O W T H I N C H R I S T**

## **Parish Church of the Resurrection**

### **Session 1 Christ at the center**

#### **1 Getting to know one another**

*How do you feel  
about your name? If  
you could change it,  
would you? What  
names do you value?*

#### **2. Looking at the Bible together**

*See the Key Bible  
Passage and follow  
the bullets.*

- **Key bible passage Matthew 16 verses 13-25**

This is a crucial passage in the gospel of Matthew and marks a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry and mission. Jesus is explicitly identified as the Messiah ('the Christ') to the disciples. It is also the moment where Jesus sets his face 'towards Jerusalem', accepting the suffering and rejection that he must face to be faithful to his calling from God

Jesus is blessed by Simon Peter as he declares him to be the Messiah, and in turn Jesus blesses Simon Peter declaring him to be a rock on which the church will be built. Yet, almost immediately, this rock attempts to be a stumbling block to Jesus' mission! For a community that endeavors to make Jesus the centre there is much to reflect on.

#### **In this lesson...What disturbs? What comforts?**

After listening to the reading break into pods and consider these two questions one at a time during a few moments of quiet. Share your thoughts within the pods. Then open the different aspects of the passage choosing one or more of the sections and questions below. Feel free to raise points and questions which seem more appropriate to your setting.

#### **Who do you say that I am?**

The populace had trouble seeing Jesus as the Messiah, the long-awaited answer to their nation's prayers. What they had seen or heard did not fit with their expectations of what a Messiah should be or do. It needed divine inspiration to open the first disciples' eyes to the truth of Jesus, and it still does today.

- *Spread out a paper sheet and write on it words which express who Jesus is, or has been, to you. The words need not be 'religious'.*
- *How has Jesus reshaped your own expectations and understanding of God and his actions?*
- *Thinking about the Church, who do people say we are? How are we recognized as Jesus' disciples?*

## **You are and you will be**

Jesus sees in Simon-Peter what Simon would not recognise in himself. The Lord sees what he can and will be as he steps out in faith. The misunderstandings and failures are all part of his learning and growing.

- *How do you think Simon Peter felt towards Jesus in the light of his reactions? First he is blessed and then he is firmly rebuked!*
- *How do you receive praise and reprimand? How do we encourage and bless one another? How do we rebuke? Is the balance right?*
- *What have been the turning points in your own commitment to following Jesus?*

**Canon Michael Cole tells of the time he received a ministry-transforming rebuke from the Lord. As he was in the church building praying for the people who would be coming the next day he had a vision of Jesus approaching him. “Michael,” the Lord said, “Will you let me into my church?”**

## **Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**

Jesus gives Peter an awesome responsibility and freedom which is extended to the whole community founded around Christ (see Matthew 18: 18). Although this does not imply that the Church can 'do its own thing', Christ clearly delegates a remarkable level of permission giving or with-holding to his followers.

- *How do you feel about being given such responsibility?*

## **And suffer many things**

Faithfulness to God as the Messiah required Jesus to face opposition and rejection. It was the religious leaders, who were trying to preserve their identity in the teeth of pagan culture, who were most threatened by Jesus words and deeds. Despite all they saw of God's activity in him they refused to acknowledge it.

- *Is suffering an inescapable part of our calling as modern disciples?*
- *How might we grow in influence through suffering? Try and think of specific examples, perhaps in the workplace or family, as well as the church?*

## Supplementary questions

- *We live in a consumerist society which influences our attitudes and behaviour. How might we be presenting a Messiah who fits our desires and needs, rather than a God who reshapes them?*
- *How do we respond to the perceptions of others, whether they are accurate or false? How do we influence the communities and society of which we are a part?*
- *Have there been turning points in the life of your local church? What about in other groups or communities you are involved with that have changed people's relationships with one another for the better (eg at work, in the family)?*
- *How are we handling the authority we have been granted in the Church today? What about in the world? Are we overly hesitant or rushing in where angels fear to tread with prohibitions or permissions? What helps our authority to be received in your locality and what hinders it?*
- *Where have you or someone close suffered out of faithfulness? How might Jesus threaten us today so that we are tempted to deny him?*

### 3. Prayer and reflection

Listen to the passage again.

Take some time to sing together 'Lord prepare me to be a Sanctuary'. Please consider what Jesus is saying to each of us about keeping him at the centre.

Write the words on a sticky note to take home and keep somewhere which will be a regular reminder for several weeks.

End with the prayer of St Richard of Chichester:

*Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits which thou hast given us,  
for all the pains and insults  
which thou hast borne for us.  
O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,  
may we know thee more clearly,  
love thee more dearly,  
and follow thee more nearly,  
now and evermore. Amen*

### 4. Preparation for next session

Jesus said he had come to bring 'abundant life' or 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). What do you think makes for 'life in all its fullness'? Write a list of the key things for an abundant or full life and bring it to the next session.