

**Read:** Matthew 28:16-20

God has created us and loves us, and despite our failure and sin he has work that he calls us to do.

One way of seeing v.18 is that it spells out our vocation or calling, the fundamental task we are given in this life - making God known. Do you hear echoes of the creation story in chapters 1 & 2 of Genesis, and perhaps of Psalm 8, in Jesus' commission in v.18?

This conclusion to Matthew's Gospel is often given the title 'The Great Commission', but one popular Christian writer (Dallas Willard) has described it as the Church's 'great omission'. How should we go about being obedient to Jesus' commission in our world today?

3. Why is baptizing important in the commission Jesus gives, and why baptise in 'the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'? (Hint - think about adults being baptised, not just infants!).
4. v.20a is part of the same sentence as v.19: is this something we take seriously enough in today's church?

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

What does God want as the outcome of our obedience to Jesus' commission? Paul's conclusion to his letter to the Corinthian church, which has such potential and so many problems, gives us an example.

5. In v.11 Paul gives the Corinthians 5 final exhortations or commands. What are they, and to what extent does the final one - *live in peace* - depend on the other 4?
6. How obedient to the commands in v.11 are we in our life together as a Christian community at St Peter's?

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References:

1. David Ford (2021). *The Gospel of John: a theological commentary*. Baker. p403
2. Anthony Thiselton (2017). *Approaching the Study of Theology*. IVP. P161 (the two quotations are from the same source)

**St Peter's Anglican Church**

**Wanneroo**

*Bible Study Notes*

*~ for use by individuals or home groups*

***May 2023***

The readings for these weeks are those set by the Lectionary.

For each week the readings for the following Sunday are listed.

The reading which will be the focus of the sermon is shown as the main reading; the two additional readings for the 7.45am service are in *italics*.

**Week beginning:** 1<sup>st</sup> May, for Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May

**Main passage:** John 14:1-14

**Other readings:** Acts 7:55-60; *Psalm 31:1-5, 17-18*; 1 Peter 2:11-25

**Theme:** Jesus and the Father

**Read:** John 14:1-14

1. Context: this passage is part of the final teaching Jesus gave to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. As you read this passage, what clues do you see about the 'state of mind' of the disciples at this time?

Keeping the context in mind, what do you think Jesus was seeking to do by saying what he did to his disciples? Is this relevant to us, and if so, in what way?

Some of the statements made by Jesus in this passage are remarkable, but we can easily fail to realise that because we are familiar with them - for example, see verses 6, 7, and 9b.

2. What does John 14:1-14 tell us about Jesus? Why is what it tells us important?
3. Do these verses help you in your own Christian discipleship; and if so, in what way?
4. What do we learn about the relationship between Jesus and the Father from this passage? And about our relationship with Jesus and with the Father?

**Read:** Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 17-18; 1 Peter 2:11-25

5. In Acts 7:55-60 we have the account of the execution of Stephen following his trial before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, described in Acts 6:12 - 7:54. Stephen's situation was extreme - he was the first Christian martyr - but are there lessons in his story for us?

opinion seems to suggest".<sup>2</sup>

Here are two quotations to think about:

In the fourth century Gregory of Nyssa wrote: "The Father does not do any thing by himself in which the Son does not work jointly, or again the Son has no special operation apart from the Holy Spirit . . . Every operation . . . has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit."

In the twentieth century Jurgen Moltman wrote: "The New Testament talks about God by proclaiming in narrative (in descriptive stories) the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and open to the world." (brackets added)

**Read:** Exodus 34:1-8

Moses is allowed to experience the glory of God - and, v.8, *he bowed to the ground at once and worshiped*.

1. What do these verses tell us about the holiness of God, and about what God is like? Are there times when you find yourself bowing - literally, or in your heart - before the glory of God?

**Read:** Psalm 8

This is a psalm of praise - contemplating the glory of creation, seen especially in 'the heavens', in the 'moon and the stars' (vv.1, 3), the psalmist reflects in wonder that God created human beings, men and women, (vv.4-5), and that we have been given such a special place in God's creation (vv.6-8).

We live at a time when we are almost bombarded with new developments in technology and with new knowledge about the world, from the minutest of particles to the vastness of space. Psalm 8, with the psalmist's simple reflection and prayer of praise, can put this into perspective for us.

2. Are there times when you find yourself uttering words that reflect those of the psalmist in v.9?

7. In v.7 Pauls emphasises that the 'manifestation' of the Spirit given to a person is *for the common good*. What do you consider Paul to mean here by 'the common good'?
8. If a person is given a particular spiritual gift, how should they view this in the light of v.11?
9. In v.12 Paul introduces his analogy of the church as the body of Christ, a body with many different parts, all equally important for the functioning of the body - an analogy he develops in the rest of the chapter. You might find it helpful to read the rest of 1 Corinthians 12 at this point.

The example of the church being a body, with all the parts being important is one we are familiar with - but as with all familiar ideas relating to our faith, it is helpful to pause and think about it from time to time. For example:

- (i) how much have we at St Peter's taken that teaching about the nature of the church seriously? How is it reflected in the way we treat each other in our church community? Are there aspects of our church life that we might need to review in the light of Paul's teaching in this chapter of 1 Corinthians?
- (ii) if we think about the church in a broader sense, not just our own church community at St Peter's, does this chapter have anything to teach us?

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> May, for Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June

**Main passage:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Theme:** The Trinity

**Other passages:** Exodus 34:1-8; *Psalm 8*;  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

This coming Sunday is Trinity Sunday, the day when we celebrate the Trinity - an aspect of Christian teaching described by one theologian as: ". . . much more practical and simple than popular

How might Jesus' words in John 14:1-14 have been a help to Stephen in the plight he found himself in?

Are there situations we face where, although less dramatic than Stephen's situation, we could in a similar way find help from Jesus's words in John 14:1-14 ?

6. 1 Peter 2:11-12 gives general instruction about how to live as Christians in a pagan society in a way that is honouring to God. But Peter seems to be under no illusion that this will result in an easy life - even though living good lives, Christians can still expect to sometimes be criticised or attacked. Have you have experienced this, and if so how did you find yourself reacting?

In 1 Peter 2:16 there appears to be a contradiction: *Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves*. What do you think Peter means by this? Are we given a clue in 1 Peter 2:18-25?

7. The Psalms have been described as 'the prayer book of the Church', and vv.1-5 of Psalm 31 can be seen as prayer that is relevant to Jesus' words in John 14:1-14, and to the experience of the Christian living in a pagan society that is addressed by 1 Peter 2:11-25. Are there situations where these Psalm verses might have been an appropriate prayer for you?

**Return to John 14** and spend a few moments in quiet reflection on these words from Jesus.

vv.5-6: *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life.*

v.7: *If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.*

v.9 *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*

What do they mean to you? What prayer arises for you from these verses?

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> May, for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May

**Main passage:** John 14: 15-21

**Other readings:** Acts 17:22-31; Ps 66:7-19; 1 Peter 3:8-22

**Theme:** The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit

**Read:** John 14:15-21

As last week, the context of this passage from John's Gospel is Jesus talking to his disciples shortly before he is betrayed and crucified. The disciples are probably both confused and anxious.

1. v.15: *if you love me, keep my commands*. What are the commands Jesus is telling his disciples to keep? What does v.21 tell us about the link between love and obedience in the Christian life? Christians are sometimes accused of being 'wowsers', of being legalistic - is that a fair criticism?
2. In v.16, Jesus tells his disciples that the Father will give them another 'advocate'. Some other translations use the word 'helper', 'counsellor', 'encourager', or 'comforter', and in *The Message* Bible paraphrase, Eugene Peterson uses the term 'friend'. Which of these words strikes a chord with you as a description of the Holy Spirit in your life, and why?
3. *You will know him, for he lives with you and will be in you* (v.17) - words about the Holy Spirit we are probably familiar with and can easily take for granted. But - how would you respond if a friend, who knows little or nothing about the Christian faith, asked you: Who is the Holy Spirit? And how can you know if, or when, the Holy Spirit is 'with you' or 'in you'?
4. In v.18 Jesus tells his disciples *I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you*. How do you think the disciples understood this? How should we understand it - what does it mean for us today?

**Read:** Acts 17:22-31; Ps 66:7-19; 1 Peter 3:8-22

5. A first glance, this account of Paul preaching in Athens seems to have little connection with the passage from John's Gospel -

3. John 20: 23 puzzles many people. This is the first mention of forgiveness by John in his Gospel, and coming at this point it makes forgiveness central to the disciples' mission (v.21), and central to the new life brought by the Holy Spirit (v.22).

It is important to note the passive tense '. . . are forgiven / not forgiven . . .' - that is, the disciples are responsible for proclaiming the message about forgiveness, but God does the forgiving, and the way people respond to the disciples' message decides whether or not they receive God's forgiveness.

Christians are sometimes accused of focusing the Gospel message on sin and forgiveness, rather than on God's love. Do we need to talk about sin and forgiveness before we can talk about God's love? Or does forgiveness sometimes only make sense after a person has begun to understand something of God's love for them?

4. Acts 2:4 tells us that the disciples *began to speak in other tongues*. In v.8 those who heard them said *how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?* and in v.11 *we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!* Were the disciples speaking in one 'heavenly' tongue, which all could understand regardless of whatever language they usually spoke, or did the disciples speak in a wide range of contemporary languages? What do you think, and how does this fit with your understanding of the spiritual gift of 'speaking in tongues'?

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

5. In 1 Cor 12:3, do you think Paul is referring merely to the actual words 'Jesus be cursed' and 'Jesus is Lord', or does he have in mind more than that - perhaps something about the person's relationship with God?
6. In vv.4-6 Paul stresses that spiritual gifts, service and working in the church community all stem from the one source - *the same Spirit distributes them, and it is the same God at work*. What do you think Paul's aim is stressing this at the start of a chapter where he seeks to have his readers informed about the gifts of the Spirit (v.1)?

**Date:** May 22<sup>nd</sup>, for Sunday May 28<sup>th</sup>

**Main passages:** John 20:19-23, and Acts 2:1-21

**Theme:** The reality of the Holy Spirit's presence

**Other readings:** Acts 2:1-21; *Psalm 104:25-36*;  
*1 Corinthians 12:1-13*

Today is the Feast of Pentecost in the Christian Church. Pentecost is sometimes referred to as 'the birthday of the Church' - which captures something of what Pentecost is about, but glosses over other important aspects of Pentecost, such as the gift of the Holy Spirit being the fulfilment of God's promises - promises made through the Old Testament prophets as well as by Jesus.

**Read:** John 20:19-23 and Acts 2:1-21

1. John and Luke, author of Acts, give us two apparently different accounts of the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit. What do you see as similarities and differences in the two accounts?
2. We do not need to see the two accounts as being in conflict, one 'right' and one 'wrong', but as describing different aspects of the same experience. What does each account contribute to our understanding of the Holy Spirit?

One commentator<sup>1</sup> writes of these verses from John: '

"Opening is a good description of what Jesus does here. The disciples are locked in and afraid. Jesus opens them up to himself, crucified and risen, and to his peace and joy in place of fear. He opens them out towards the future and toward the whole world by sending them as he was sent. He opens his mouth to speak and to breathe into them as God breathed life into Adam (Genesis 2:7), and to share the Holy Spirit. He gives authority to open up the past to a new future through forgiveness. And there is no closure to the scene, no departure of Jesus."

Another theologian suggests that a better translation of v.23 is not 'receive' but '*welcome* the Holy Spirit'.

why has it been selected by the Lectionary! But is there perhaps a link: look at vv.27-29 in light of John 14:15-21.

6. In vv. 15 and 21 of John 14, Jesus linked love of him and obedience to his commands. One way of seeing the passage 1 Peter 3:8-22 is that it is a commentary on Jesus' call for obedience - it spells out at least some aspects of what it means for a disciple of Jesus to be obedient to him in a pagan culture.

Looking through 1 Peter 3:8-22, what 'commands' or instructions requiring obedience can you find? How are these relevant for us today - not just as a matter of principle, but in actual practice in our lives? Can you share some examples, including perhaps instances where you realised with hindsight that you were not obedient?

7. What can we learn from vv.13-17 about personal witness and evangelism?
8. Psalm 66:7-19 speaks of the psalmist praising God after having experiencing God's testing in difficult circumstances - it's worth reading the whole Psalm, not just starting at v.7!

In vv.10-12a the psalmist writes about being 'tested' and 'refined . . . like silver', and then at the end of v.12 describes being brought to a place of abundance. We like the idea of God's abundance in our materialistic culture - hence the attraction of the so-called 'prosperity gospel' - but we find it more difficult to think of God allowing us to be 'tested' and 'refined' so that we can grow spiritually. Do you have experiences that you can share of being 'tested' or 'refined', and then experiencing God's blessing in your life as you grow through that testing?

**Date:** May 15<sup>th</sup>, for Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May

**Main passage:** John 17:1-11

**Theme:** Unity in the Body of Christ

**Other readings:** *Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35;*  
1 Peter 5

Thursday of this week is Ascension Day – a major Christian festival that is often overlooked since it falls on a weekday.

**Read:** John 17:1-11

This passage is part of the prayer of Jesus before his betrayal and crucifixion. In these verses Jesus speaks of his glory, the glory he will soon take up again, foreshadowing his Ascension.

1. In vv.1-4, Jesus speaks of God giving him authority over all people *that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him*. In v.3 Jesus seems to define 'eternal life': how do you understand what he is saying about eternal life in this verse?
2. We live in a world organised around chronological time - minutes, hours, days, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia - which makes it difficult to think about 'eternal life' other than in terms of time - think of the last verse of the hymn Amazing Grace: "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days, to sing God's praise, than when we've first begun". But chronological time is itself, however, part of this created world (see Genesis 1:5, 8, 14).

Does Jesus' prayer in this passage open up a different way for you of thinking about eternal life?

3. In vv.5-11, Jesus prays for his disciples. How would you summarise his prayer in vv.5-10? In v.11, what specific request does Jesus make for his disciples, and what are we to learn

from this?

**Read:** Acts 1:6-14

4. In vv.7-8 are another reminder that we are called to obedience and have been given a task to do, but also that there are limits to what we can know and understand about God's purposes – see also John 21:20-23 and Mathew 24:36-39. Yet we sometimes come across Christians who believe that they can find clues in contemporary events about 'the times or dates' when Jesus will return. Why do you think God has not told us 'the times or dates'?
5. Do you consider the Ascension important in the overall story the New Testament tells us about Jesus, and if so, why? How does it help you in your Christian journey?

**Read:** 1 Peter 5

Peter is giving his final instructions to the Christian community, and this inevitably reflects the qualities he longs to see in their life together.

6. As you read vv.1-11, what features of life in a Christian community can you identify? Are there links to Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:1-11?
7. What practical lessons are there for us in our local church community at St Peter's, and in our life as part of a wider Christian community, in these verses from 1 Peter?

**Read:** Psalm 68:1-10

8. This is a psalm of praise, possibly sung as the Ark of the Lord was carried in procession to the Temple in Jerusalem (v.24: *Your procession, God, has come into view, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary*). It celebrates the victory God has given his people over their enemies; but in vv.3-10 what does it tell us about how God wants his people to live?