

## Talk 1 - We belong to Christ

Romans 7.4 *So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.*

1. Back to the dawn of time, to the creation of all things. Genesis 1.27 - *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them...* [NIV]
2. God created the human race [humanity] of which each one of us is a part. We are created together, as parts of a whole humanity. God created a community of people.
3. Reminder: *motho ke motho ka batho.*
4. Then, the Fall = a breaking down of the God-given character of humanity, in which each of the pieces is pulled away from the other:
  - a. Enmity, struggle, division [Cain and Abel], a confusion of language [Babel] → tribalism...
  - b. Before the Fall, we are defined in relation to each other: humanity, male and female, a shared stewardship of the earth.
  - c. After the Fall, we define ourselves against each other, bigger, better, different, in/out, the 'Law'.
5. The Salvation project described in the rest of scripture is an account of how God begins to rebuild 'humanity' - 1<sup>st</sup> through the creation of the children of God/people of Israel, and then in NT through the formation of the new people of God/Israel, the church.

6. Romans 7.4 So, *my people...* Paul makes it clear that we are brought back into his humanity project by being reconnected, one by one, to Christ.
7. This bringing back is described by Paul as a ‘belonging’ – a ‘belonging to Christ.’ What does this look like?
  - a. A repurchase or ransom – Hebrews 9.15 Christ *has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*
  - b. An adoption – Galatians 4.5 *to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship* – i.e. full status in the family, available in the Roman Empire only to males.
  - c. An acceptance – of our createdness and creatureliness, of the Lordship over us of God himself.
  - d. A submission – we no longer belong to ourselves. To be baptized is to be given to Christ [Romans 6].
8. It’s easy to jump to Talk 2 – we belong to each other – but the primary belonging, the repurchasing and reconstituting of the creation, is to God in Christ: 2 Corinthians 5.20 *We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. So the theme of the weekend: Being God’s Family, begins with ‘Being God’s Family.’*
9. Two practical actions:
  - a. The church, God’s family, is a place of celebration, of our redemption from enmity, struggle, division, and of adoption as sisters and brothers of Christ.
  - b. The church, God’s family, is a place of deep commitment, not to the clergy, not to the institution, not to the

Church of England, but to Christ. Every day, it begs the question: what does it mean to be committed to Christ?

## Talk 2 - We belong to each other

1 Corinthians 12.26

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.*

Romans 12.5 *In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

10. The restoration of God's humanity project involves the linking together of the fragmented parts of the human community broken by the Fall.

11. God does this by rebuilding a community, in the OT the people of Israel, the children of God, and in our times, in the light of Jesus Christ, through building the community of the new Israel, the church.

12. Tendency to think that Paul is dealing with a group of people who are woven together in a body to do a job. Rather, a reassembling of people to be a sign to the world of

- a. What God always intended in the creation;
- b. What God wants to accomplish in us, not just the saving of souls, but the remaking of humanity at the centre of the world that will be: Romans 8.19-21 *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

13. Belonging to each other is a sign, a sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and outward and visible sign of God at work.

14.2 key parts of this rebuilding are:

- a. **Friendship** John 15.15 *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* Ctr. The epidemic of loneliness.
- b. **Forgiveness/reconciliation** 2 Corinthians 5.18-19 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*
- c. **Giving oneself to the community** – a kind of self-sacrifice in which we lose our independence but grow up into interdependence, interconnectedness. See next 2 talks...

15. Friendship according to CS Lewis: *Friendship exhibits a glorious 'nearness by resemblance' to Heaven itself.* It is humble (I am not 'the only friend'), generous, playful, sufficient in itself and not for what we can get out of it. I could go on, but it seems to involve delight in the other without demanding, play with the other without pressure, connection that leaves room for others to join in. [Thabo Katsana e.g.]

16. Forgiveness: Mina Smallman – I have already forgiven him – Satanist.

17. Both friendship and forgiveness are supernatural ways of relating to other people that are enabled, nurtured and built up by the Holy Spirit in collaboration with us. Really important to understand that the gifts of the Spirit are not

about show and spectacle, but in some senses about hard graft and stickability. That's what I want God to give me: stickability.

### Talk 3 - As the Body of Christ, we serve

Romans 12.7 *If your gift is serving, then serve.*

Romans 12.10-13 *Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

18. Foot-washing at the NT Church of God.

19. Our model for serving is Jesus himself - rooted in the nature of God, who 'serves his creation' and built into the humanity project a character of mutual service.

20. In that service we

- a. Serve God
- b. Serve one another
- c. Serve the world

21. We don't serve with an end in view, but because that is who we are. [My diaconal ministry in part is to help everyone to understand that this is what being a Christian is, a servant by nature and definition.]

22. In particular, as the church, we serve:

- a. to help the world to understand what kind of a God God is.
- b. to transform the world into the Kingdom of God.
- c. to be true to ourselves, for that is what makes us tick.

23. The church serves with a spirit of humility:

- a. Small is beautiful, and we don't have to be bigger than we are to serve God's purposes.

- b. Insignificant is OK in an institutional church where only certain kinds of church seem to feature as important. How do you measure success as a PCC? Or is that the wrong question?
- c. What does it mean for the church to be a self-emptying church?

- 24. The church serves with a spirit of generosity - the Rasta in Mt D'Or. The 'foreigners' in the England team: Seven of England's starting XI have parents or grandparents born overseas.
- 25. The church serves with a spirit of hospitality - Angola. Do risk assessments make us kingdom averse?
- 26. The church serves with a spirit of risk - the Cathedral.
- 27. Being served
- 28. Invoking the Holy Spirit as the giver of gifts is fundamental, but how do you lay hands on a church community?

## Talk 4 - As the Body of Christ, we are sent

Ephesians 4.7-8 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:*

*When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”*

Psalm 67.1-2 *God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.*

---

### 1. At ordination:

*God's Spirit is in my heart,  
He has called me and set me apart.  
This is what I have to do,  
what I have to do.*

*He sent me to give the Good News to the poor,  
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,  
Tell blind people that they can see,  
And set the downtrodden free  
And go tell everyone the news that the Kingdom of God has come...*

### 2. The church is called to be a community of story-tellers.

- a. Testimonies of changed lives
- b. Biblical stories of the plan, purpose, love and grace of God – we need greater biblical literacy, and I don't mean fundamentalism.
- c. Stories of faith that works in dark places, and through struggle. No pie in the sky when you die, or thorns into roses...

*In the mansions of our King,  
Sweets abound without a sting;  
Thornless there the roses blow,  
And the joys unmingled flow.* [John Newton, *Olney Hymns*]

- d. Story-tellers are deep listeners.
  - e. Where do we do our storytelling? On the street. Rachel and the ‘force field’.
3. The church is called to be a place where people feel at home.
- a. Hospitality without conditions. ‘My seat in church’ stories, pew rents and ‘come sit next to me’. The slave gallery in St George’s Bermuda.
  - b. At home on the street, like Jesus. At home with the idea of a living, loving, active God. We need to avoid privatising the church.
  - c. A place – a shrine – a thin place – danger of undermining the idea of holy places just as the world is discovering them e.g. at sites of RTAs.

*Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.*

4. The church is called to be leaven in the lump.
- a. Martin and Russell at Christ Church
  - b. ‘Go down to Holy Trinity; they’ll look after you.’
5. The church is called to be a community of outward-facing prayer.

- a. Prayer transforms communities, not just people. When the church is a place of division, its community is dark indeed: Donegal... The slogan on the school and the healing service.
  - b. 'I shall be praying for you' rather than 'I shall be thinking of you.' Christ Church's poster is a bit cheesy, and I don't know if people read posters any more than they read T-shirt slogans, but there's something about making prayer an intensely public, extrovert, out-there activity.
6. The church is called to be a community of holy people, but that's for tomorrow: 'Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.'

*Make our churches  
cells of radical discipleship  
and signposts to heaven.  
Then, in us, through us,  
and if needs be, despite us  
Let your kingdom come. Amen.*

## Talk 5 - Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 6.19 *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.*

1. Hands up all those who are not sinners!
2. The image of the temple helps us to understand holiness as a shared enterprise. *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.*
3. HT Barnstaple's fundamental flaw. The tower needed a total rebuild or a demolition. We are not demolition experts; as the church we are in the redemption business and are rebuilding experts. The only question is how, not whether!
4. We can't amputate a part of the body in order to make it holy. Nor can we have strict rules of inclusion that allow only certain people to join the church.
5. So it seems we are stuck with one another, with shared weakness that shows itself in some parts, with shared failure. My image of the grumpy driver and the domino effect. Then we can all condemn the murderer.
6. This is not to say that sin doesn't matter. But it is a shared journey of holiness that God invites us on as the church.
7. So what is holiness?
  - a. Closeness to God i.e.
    - i. Worship that is not indulgent;
    - ii. An honest and dynamic relationship with God
    - iii. God taking centre-stage rather than the church

- b. Closeness to one another i.e. the family of God
  - i. Respect, not worship
  - ii. Honesty and faithfulness
  - iii. The ability to express ourselves honestly but not abusively
  - iv. Recognizing that we are not the fixers; God is.
- c. A long journey in the right direction
- d. An ability to repent and forgive

8. Guilt doesn't create holiness, nor do lists of sins.