



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, ‘it’s the sharing that enables the caring!’) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

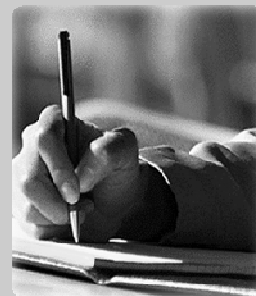


HG68: Transforming Presence (1/6)
Transforming Promise

Genesis 9:8-15

Home Group Study Notes

22nd April 2012 - Shirley Jeffery



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

There was no evidence of rain when Noah built the Ark. Despite his warnings, those around him would have said: *“How foolish to build an ark on dry ground with the sun shining!”* Have you ever done anything that seemed really foolish to others – and perhaps to yourself? Were you proved right or wrong?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) If it is true that we ‘without claim or merit are freely forgiven by God’ does it really matter how we live our lives? (*you might also like to look at Romans 6: 1-11*)

2) Noah ‘walked in close fellowship with the Lord’. What (more) might you do to do the same?

3) What are you doing to share your faith with others?

What more could you/we do?

Covenant is not a word we use very much in our day, but it occurs often in the bible. Perhaps the one we remember best is Jesus saying at the last supper “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”. The disciples would have known just what he meant. The biblical idea of a covenant was familiar to them where humans offered their allegiance, no matter how flawed, to God in exchange for his mercy.

So what was the covenant given to Noah? When God had destroyed the whole earth, with the exception of those on the ark, he restated his intention that the earth be filled with his glory and so he promised – covenanted – that he would never do the same again, and as a guarantee of this promise he put his bow, the rainbow, in the sky. Whenever after the rain the rainbow appears it is an assurance that God has remembered that promise and his commitment to his people.

We cannot earn our own salvation, any more than could the people of Noah’s time, so God in his power, love and mercy takes the initiative, he makes the covenant, which is to all living creatures, and which is a powerful statement of God’s love and grace poured out for all his creation. We of course, know the sequel to this story – God in his love and mercy made the ultimate covenant with his people. He came to our rescue himself in the person of Jesus. It is by his blood that we are saved, and will be eternally saved when the final judgement comes.

This is the message God calls us to take out to the whole world. This is what Bishop Stephen is reminding us of when he calls us to be a Transforming Presence. Over the next now **13 years**, we, with God’s help and with the other Anglican churches around us, will be working to be a vibrant witness of the Good News of Jesus in our parish and across the diocese as we let God transform us.

Many of you will know this covenant prayer of John Wesley, used at the beginning of each year by the Methodist church:

**I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.**

So, Transforming Presence is the challenge facing the diocese and each one of us over the coming years.

A finally quote from Bishop Stephen: “Without this inner transformation, we will simply carry on managing our decline as gracefully as possible”. I pray that with God’s help that will not be our future. **Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits. (*It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda*)

Third God provides full employment for all: we are all grateful to those who give their time to ensure that our church runs smoothly – clergy, wardens, readers, service leaders, council members, office staff, youth workers, housekeeping, gardening and hospitality teams, stewards, welcomers, etc. etc. etc. but God has a job for **everyone**. Yes, we know that most, but not everyone, are able to help physically. But those who are on active service need the prayers, encouragement and support of others. We can all dream dreams, say thank you, pray.

The old saying ‘many hands make light work’ is one we should be striving to achieve; and yes, I do know that it is also said that ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’, but I am suggesting that we should each look to undertake one or two different tasks that we can do well not all compete to do the same things. Look around, is there something that needs doing that you could do? If so why not speak to Paul, Linda or Don – they would be delighted. This was the vision Paul set out for Emmanuel and Bishop Stephen set out for the diocese. So how does today’s reading relate to this vision?

The reading takes us to a time after the flood has happened - but let’s look before that. At the beginning of Genesis we see how the earth that God created and saw was good, was spoilt by the sin and disobedience of humans.

This disobedience to God continued across the generations - Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, lying, cheating, killing - until we read in Genesis Ch. 6 “The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. And the Lord said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.”

God sees the wickedness and reasons that there is nothing to be done about it except destroy the whole of his creation – his patience comes to an end and his judgement is that the sinners deserve to be destroyed. This judgement is real and horrid, an American evangelist, Revd. John Hoeldtke said “Noah and the ark is not a children’s story, it is one of the most terrifying and tragic stories of God’s wrath in the whole bible.”

But, thankfully, even then God is looking for a way to continue to accomplish his purpose in his creation that as we read in Numbers 14:21: “*All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*”. And so we see that God found one worthy man: “*Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.*”

God told Noah that he would destroy the earth and he gave Noah instructions to build a boat and to fill it with his family and every kind of living creature. Then Noah took his family and the creatures he had gathered in to the ark and God saved them from drowning as he flooded the earth. After the flood water subsided Noah took some of the clean animals and birds, built an altar, and sacrificed them as a thanks offering to God.

We realise that Noah, like us, was not perfect but he tried, he “walked in close fellowship with the Lord”, so when the flood subsided, even though God knew human nature would not change God established a covenant with Noah. The same Noah, who after the flood planted a vineyard, drank the wine, became drunk, lay uncovered in his tent. Yes, God knows our weaknesses but still he makes this covenant not to destroy all creation again.

4) How is our church a blessing to the community we serve?

What more could you/we do?

5) What are you/we doing to nurture and develop the ministry of Emmanuel?

What more could you/we do?

6) What are we doing to ensure our church is a place of safety and welcome for all ages and for people of all backgrounds?

What more could you/we do?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG68: Transforming Presence (1/6) Transforming Promise

Genesis 9:8-15

Home Group Sermon Notes

22nd April 2012 - Shirley Jeffery

Introduction: On 21st January 2012 nearly 1000 people from across the diocese, ordained and lay, men and women, young and old and representing every shade of churchmanship gathered at the Brentwood Centre to think, to pray, and to discuss the question posed by Bishop Stephen at the beginning of his paper Transforming Presence – “What will the diocese of Chelmsford look like in 2025?” As the Bishop says “*For too long strategic planning in the church has been limited to time scales too short to initiate meaningful change -we have expected too much, too soon and end up either disappointed or disillusioned.*” I am sure there are some amongst us who will know only too well what that feels like. Bishop Stephen sets out some strategic priorities for us:

Our Passion:

Our Passion is **Jesus** – Proclaiming and Living out God’s love for all people

Our Aspiration:

To be a Transforming Presence in every Community
Open and welcoming to all and serving all

Our Resources:

Faithful people, Prayer and worship, Visionary leadership, Liberating gifts.

The discussion day at Brentwood was just the start of a wide consultation to reimagine what the church could look like in 2025. Whilst the Bishops, Clergy and Synods have responsibility to lead the church, it is recognised that this reimagining is too important not to be shared with the whole church. That means us!!

So what issues should we address, what dreams should we dream, if we are serious about shaping a church for the future that is radically different? See what Bishop Stephen has to say at: <http://www.transformingpresence.org.uk/video.html> Bishop Stephen sets out 4 key themes:

Inhabiting the world distinctively: *the way we inhabit the world should be ‘different’. This doesn’t mean we are better than others but that there should be something distinctive and attractive about the way we live our lives. If our lives are no different from others what does this say about our faith and our priorities?*

Evangelising effectively: *for far too long we in the Church of England have shied away from evangelism, considering it a **strange** thing that other churches became involved in. But the bible clearly tells that God expects us to “make disciples of all nations” and that includes you and me talking to our family, friends and neighbours about God’s great love for the world shown in Jesus Christ.*

Serving with accountability: *can we agree a set of ministries that we should expect to find being carried out in every Christian community across our diocese and then help each other to achieve them – being accountable to one another?*

Re-imagining Ministry: *47% of our clergy in the diocese will retire in the next 10 years. We will need to look at new ways in which every person who is able, whether ordained or lay, has a ministry and participates in the life of the church.*

On the day those of us attending were seated in groups of 10 and asked to complete a series of worksheets, the results of which have been summarised. The first question was ‘what are our best experiences of being church?’ and the key conclusions: If we want church at its best, we’ll set God’s people free to discover and use the gifts he has given them. Also ensure that churches grow through evangelism, encounter God in worship, are places of mutual support, offer a warm welcome and serve their communities.

The second exercise was entitled ‘The Essential Ingredients of Church’ The things coming out of this included worship mentioned by 63 groups; fellowship or community (43); mission (30); love (26); evangelism (22); relationship with God (21); discipleship (20) and service (11).

Next came ‘Imagining the future’. Here we were asked to write newspaper headlines for the next 15 years. Notable headlines included: The difference was everyone pulled together; ten more martyrs; Churches transformed into showroom for God’s kingdom; and Million feet washed: “because you walked with us, we want to walk with God.”

The final task was ‘How will we get there?’ It was noted that lay people appear willing, know what they need to do, both within the church and outside of it, but many feel under-resourced to do it and want more training. Reassuringly public worship is highly valued!

I wonder what your thoughts would have been had you been at Brentwood that day? Do the answers here reflect what you think is important? You will have the opportunity to think about this and discuss it in your home groups over the coming weeks.

Whilst I would not want to claim that we have got everything right at Emmanuel (sorry Paul!) I don’t think we are doing too badly - although there is always room for improvement. Some of what I have been saying may have a familiar ring about it.

Just a few weeks ago at our ADCM Paul spoke on a passage from Nehemiah under the title of “Building Walls, Restoring Lives”. I want to revisit some of the points he made:

First Focus on the purpose of the work: as the Transforming Presence mission statement I have just referred to says, ‘Jesus is our passion’ – he is the centre of our lives – a life shaped by prayer, worship and discipleship. We need to be sure that everything we do is to the glory of God, and that is as important in our daily lives as we work, shop, learn, and play as it is Sunday by Sunday as we meet here for worship. All we do should be for him.

Second Leaders set the example: we have the greatest role model for this – Jesus, our servant king. On our day at Brentwood we arrived to find all the bishops, including Bp. John who had not yet officially joined the team, directing us to parking spots, and the Archdeacons greeting us at the door, welcoming us in. Servant hood in action! - Seen to be done.