



CROOKWELL UNITING CHURCH

“To Know Christ and to Make Christ Known”

HOME PRAYER PACK FOR JUNE 2022

As we continue to worship from home, please find enclosed materials to assist.

If you are unsure where to start, perhaps the following is a useful guide (with thanks to *A Sermon For Every Sunday*):

- If you are with your spouse, partner, and/or family, gather around a table. If you are on your own, find a place that is quiet and comfortable.
- Light a candle to symbolise the presence of the Holy Spirit, and that you are entering sacred time.
- Start with a simple opening prayer, acknowledging that Jesus promised to come to wherever people gathered in His name.
- Read through the weekly readings, as outlined in our newsletter. If in a group, take turns on reading out loud to the group.
- Follow up with a discussion based on the readings.
- Enter into a time of prayer. This can be as simple as “What am I thankful for?” and “What am I concerned about?”

If you need a bible at home, please call the church on 4832 1026, and one can be provided. If you are interested, *Songs of Praise* airs on ABC TV at 2:30pm each Sunday, and can also be watched any time at <https://iview.abc.net.au/collection/2016>

Stay safe. God bless.

June 5, 2022

Van de Laar, *Connecting With Life*, "Sacredise"

05 June 2022

As what I call the "God's Story" part of the Liturgical Calendar begins to draw to a close, we are prepared for the second half of the year – the "Our Story" part which happens in Ordinary Time. And that preparation is in the form of a gift – the Pentecost gift of God's Spirit, God's community and God's call. It is easy, after all of the work of the calendar so far to just breathe a sigh of relief and just get through the last few weeks with as little effort and stress as possible. But, the Pentecost event needs our best efforts – and some new ways of thinking about it. Which I hope I'm helping to stir up in this post.

May your eyes be opened and your heart be filled as you celebrate the ever-present Spirit of God this week, and as you receive the empowerment of God for the journey ahead.

READINGS:

Acts 2:1-21: The believers are filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and they start to praise God in various languages.

Or **Genesis 11:1-9:** Humanity seeks to build a tower that reaches the heavens, but God confuses their language and they scatter over the earth.

Psalms 104:24-34, 35b: The world and all its creatures depend on God for provision and breath – which leads the Psalmist to commit to praise God.

Romans 8:14-17: God has given us God's Spirit by which we know we are God's children, sharing both in God's glory and God's suffering.

OR **Acts 2:1-21:** See above.

John 14:8-17, (25-27): Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to be an advocate for his followers, and to lead them into truth.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

Perhaps the oldest mistake we make with the Pentecost event is to speak of it as the Spirit's "coming" – as if God's Spirit was absent from the world before this. Jesus gives us a clue to a different understanding, though, when he says that "the world cannot receive him because it isn't looking for him..." Pentecost is essentially a breakthrough in our human capacity to apprehend and experience God's activity which is (and always has been) active in all of creation (including us). At Pentecost we learn to look for God's Spirit – and the readings for today make it clear that God's Spirit can be seen and found anywhere and everywhere we look. It is this awareness that there is nowhere that God is not that breaks down Babel's walls of division. In receiving the new awareness of God's Spirit we find that we all speak a common Spirit-enabled language – the language of God-imagined, Spirit-filled, humanity. Once our eyes are opened to see God's Spirit in all things (including those who are different from us, who are hostile toward us, and who are most repulsive to us), everything changes.

We know ourselves (and all creatures) as St. Francis did – as God’s children and siblings of one another – and we willingly share Christ’s suffering (as Paul says) to bring God’s creation into awareness of this unity and community in God’s Spirit.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: Across the globe human beings suffer from a blindness to the Spirit’s presence and activity. When we use the earth as nothing more than a resource to enrich ourselves, we have failed to recognise the Spirit. When we justify killing, exploiting, marginalising or dehumanising others, we have failed to see the Spirit in them. When we embrace a rampant individualism and consumerism, we have failed to recognise God’s Spirit and the community of all things in God’s Spirit. Pentecost is a wake up call for our world – how different might our politics, economics and environmental policies be if we recognised God’s Spirit in all things, and if we took time to really learn our common language? How would this consideration impact how you pray, speak, act, vote, spend, advocate and play? How can you and your community participate in the Spirit’s work and help others to recognise God’s Spirit in all things?

LOCAL APPLICATION: It is all too common among Christians to speak of God’s Spirit being “with” us and “not with” others who believe differently from us. We speak of churches and people where God’s Spirit has “left” and we talk about places where we think God is no longer present. Whenever we fall into this trap, we have missed the gift of Pentecost, and have made our God too small. But, when we realise that God’s Spirit is everywhere – although we and/or others may not be looking for or able to recognise God’s Spirit for whatever reason – we find our view of these others changes. We suddenly discover that God can be encountered in every person, and every place – from a untouched places of breath-taking natural beauty to slums and disaster areas. And, once we have seen this, we discover that, like Jesus, we would rather suffer than inflict suffering on these Spirit-filled ones. We would rather sacrifice than exploit Spirit-filled people and the Spirit-filled world for personal gain. We would rather listen for the language of our common humanity than deny the humanity of a single person – even if they deny ours. What would it mean for you and your community to take Pentecost seriously? What defences might have to come down? What hands might have to be offered to others? What beliefs might have to be released? What actions might have to become obsolete? What people might have to be welcomed and embraced?

June 12th, 2022

John Van de Laar, *Connecting With Life, "Sacredise"*

This week, instead of celebrating a biblical event or a characteristic of God, the lectionary leads us to celebrate a doctrine – the Trinity. In the face of this “theological” theme, it can be tempting to avoid the lectionary altogether, but, if we have the courage to embrace it, the doctrine of the Trinity can be an exciting and creative playground in which to worship.

May you be inspired as you prepare, and transformed as you worship this week!

READINGS:

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31: Wisdom sings of being with God at the creation of the world, and of humanity.

Psalms 8: A song of God’s majesty, and the honour God has given to humanity.

Romans 5:1-5: In Christ God has given us peace and a place of privilege, and has also strengthened us by giving us the Spirit.

John 16:12-15: Jesus promises the Spirit who will lead us into truth, and teach us all that belongs to Jesus and the Father.

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The theme this week is clear – the nature of God as Triune. This “difficult” doctrine of the Church is a tough one to address in a sermon or in worship, which tempts us either to treat it as an academic exercise, or to skip over it completely. However, the very mystery of this doctrine – and of the texts that are wrapped around it this week – provide a wonderful array of options. There is the opportunity to acknowledge again the limitations of our language and thinking about God, and to embrace God’s glorious, infinite mystery. There is the chance to recognise how God has chosen to reveal God’s self to humanity in flesh and Spirit, and how Jesus and the Spirit really do show us what God is like. There is also the chance to recognise the work of all three Persons in the life of every woman and man. There is also the opportunity to explore God’s nature as community, as Love, as relationship, and what this means for us. Ultimately, though it is wise to bear in mind Richard Rohr’s words: “Trinity leads you into the world of mystery and humility where you can not understand, you can only experience.” And perhaps the heart of that experience is ‘mutuality’ – of God within God, and, miraculously, of God with humanity.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: One of the massive challenges facing our world is competing ideas about God. This does not only apply to religions in conflict, but also to the way God is viewed from the perspective of the sciences – physics, anthropology, sociology and psychology. Within these competing visions of the divine lies the problem of human arrogance, and the need to impose our visions on others. Ultimately when we believe that

God is on our side (who or whatever that God may be – from the warrior of a fundamentalist to the science of a Dawkins), we easily deny the humanity, the wisdom and/or the worship of others. As followers of Jesus, though, we are offered a vision that denies us this arrogance. It makes our speaking and thinking about God hesitant and humble, because we are forced to acknowledge the mystery behind the words. It also calls us to allow God's relational image within us to shine forth, leading us to seek connection, mutuality and love with all. These are not two separate attitudes. Humility and mutuality are based on each other, and are a necessary ingredient for any work of reconciliation, peace-making and problem-solving in a world where the struggles we face are bigger than any one person or group.

LOCAL APPLICATION: In the Western culture of individuality and self-interest, we too easily lose our sense of connectedness and responsibility for others and for the collective. In the Eastern and African cultures of community and social responsibility, we too easily lose our sense of self-determination and accountability. In both cases, the vision of God that is offered to us in the Trinity gives us what we lack, and enables us to lean into the paradox which values both individuality and mutuality. In our communities and churches, then, we recognise God's call to hold individuals accountable – those in leadership, and those who follow – and to challenge each one to take responsibility and live faithfully and justly (there are no grand children in faith!). But, we also recognise God's call to bring people into humble, respectful, compassionate and generous relationships of mutuality and sharing, in which grace and respect and mercy triumph over judgment, exclusion and partisanship. The Trinity reveals to us both God's confrontation of our human weakness, sinfulness and injustice, and God's invitation to share in God's love and mutuality in communities of faith. The glory is that justice can only truly be enacted when the trust of mutuality is assured, and mutuality can only be maintained when justice is upheld. We are called both to live this truth, and to proclaim it to the world.

June 19th, 2022

Rev. Fiona Reynolds, Church of Scotland

1 Kings 19:1-15a

The Lectionary suggests missing out verses 5-7, but it makes much more sense to keep them in. This part of prophet Elijah's story is all of a piece: from the threats made by Jezebel, to Elijah's despairing thoughts, through to his encounter with God on mount Horeb. This whole section marks the turning point from Elijah's prophetic ministry to the appointment of his successor, Elisha.

Elijah has just proven that it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who is the one true God, who has humiliated and killed the false prophets of Baal. Now Israel's three-year-long drought has been broken and the rains have come. But, when King Ahab tells his wife, Jezebel, she promises to have Elijah killed within 24 hours. Elijah is understandably afraid,

and so he flees into Judah with his servant, before heading into the wilderness by himself. It is there that he begs God to let him die. In many ways, it is an extraordinary moment. Elijah has just accomplished something astonishing and yet, he feels as though he cannot take it anymore. The help he receives from an angel gives him enough strength and motivation to journey on to mount Horeb (note that 'forty days and forty nights' is not literal but means 'a really long time', a bit like our phrase, 'a month of Sundays'). It is there that God asks Elijah the same question twice, and Elijah gives an identical answer each time. Not a mountain-splitting wind, nor an earthquake, nor a fire, nor sheer silence can change Elijah's mind. So God sends Elijah on his way.

There is a powerful reminder in this story about the sheer humanity of even God's greatest prophets. Elijah needs food, water, rest and someone to care for him, even as (or perhaps because) he vanquishes those against God. We are people of creation. All of us. We each need certain things to survive and even more to thrive. Running away from Jezebel kept Elijah 'safe' in the very immediate sense of the word. But then he wanted what she was promising anyway! It was love, care and the meeting of basic needs that helped Elijah take the next step. Moreover, even God understands that sometimes "just praying harder" and "having more faith" is not enough. Elijah met with the full force of God on mount Horeb, yet life was still as tough as it always was. Let this be a warning to all of us, not to deploy glib statements about how things will be better; instead, may we meet the very real and human needs of each person in distress, hurting, facing abuse or neglect. Let us offer refuge, a listening ear, understanding, nourishment – for body and mind, as well as soul.

Psalms 42 and 43

It is not usual to have two psalms suggested as part of the readings, but this selection reflects the belief amongst many that this was originally one psalm. There is a continuity of theme and a repetition of a refrain at 42:5, 42:11, and 43:5. Now, whilst this is all very interesting, and could be a source of discussion and debate around how the Bible was brought together and presented, you would need a good reason to make this the central theme of your worship. But you could be creative with this psalm, using the repeated refrain as a call and response, during prayer or even the sermon.

Verses 42:9-10 are interesting to reflect upon as part of Safeguarding Sunday. Who are the people who might oppress us or others? Whose side should the Church be on, if on any side? What are the wounds carried by those who have faced harm or abuse? Are there ways we can bind them up tenderly without causing more pain? What is the role of spiritual abuse in different settings? How might abusers use someone's faith to mock them and magnify their pain?

These passages, whether they be one psalm or two, are a powerful reminder that faith in God is not a fix-all. It is not just people 'out there' in the wider world who faced harm or abuse, it is also people within our church and congregations. Having in place policies and procedures, and knowing what to do to prevent harm/abuse – and indeed how to respond well when it is revealed – is part of our faithful response to God ... the God who is always at the side of the oppressed.

Galatians 3:23-29

Verse 28 from our reading from Galatians is the high point of Paul's letter. He wants to shout his message from the rooftops; the message that we are all "children of God through faith." There are no longer distinctions between differing groups, male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free, as we are all "one in Jesus Christ." All gaps in commonality can be filled by the power of Christ to reconcile. There are no differences which cannot be overcome by the reconciling love of Christ.

The problem is that most of us like to compartmentalise people and stick to what we know. It is so much easier to be associated with people who think like us, dress like us, speak like us and worship like us. It is when we compartmentalise people that others can feel sidelined, left out, vulnerable and even perhaps victimised. It is proven that the more someone is seen as vulnerable, the more likely they are to be abused in some way. Paul is exhorting us to leave this mindset and venture out. The differences can be smoothed over by the overwhelming power of Christ to reconcile all things.

A foundation of our faith is that everyone is precious to God, and everyone is loved by God. The work of the Safeguarding Service is to ensure that the Church is a safe place to be for **all** where we **all** work together to ensure that **all** are safe.

Luke 6:26-39

After crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat and calming the storm *en route*, Jesus and the disciples arrive in the Gentile land of the Gerasenes. There they meet a vulnerable man – demon possessed, naked, cast out from the town, living alone among the tombs. He doesn't ask for help or healing, rather, Jesus unprompted commands the evil spirit to leave the man. The evil spirit objects, recognising Jesus as the Son of the Most High God, and asks Jesus to leave it alone. And it admits it is not one spirit but many, a legion.

Whatever we think of demons, they were intensely real to this man and the people of Gerasa. This man was suffering from violent mental illness, he was too dangerous to be among people, he could break free of all the restraints they placed on him. People were terrified of him, but Jesus faced him calmly. Who are the people we are scared of? Who do we choose not to associate with because of our fear?

When Jesus cast out the demons into the pigs, the man sees visible evidence that he is freed. He regains his right mind, he dresses in clothes, and he sits calmly at Jesus' feet – adopting the posture of a disciple. When Jesus freed the man from the spirits that possessed him, he also freed the people from the threat the man had posed to them. But they still weren't happy.

Why do we find it difficult to believe in the possibility of change and redemption? One of our less pleasant human attitudes is the willingness to continue to condemn people because of what has happened previously. To keep them locked up in our perceptions of the past. Think of the difficulty convicted prisoners have on release from prison to convince people that they have changed.

This story is not just a healing miracle; Jesus comes with cosmic power. He has just calmed the powers of nature, calming the wind and the raging waves; here He casts out the demons, the powers of evil. Jesus comes to challenge and cast out every power that prevents people living fully and freely. This challenges us to think of the powers that destroy a human life today. Think of those enslaved by addictions. Think of those who are haunted by the past, tortured by their memories – survivors of abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional – the abuse continues in the mind long after the physical act has ceased.

The people of the neighbourhood do not celebrate when the man is restored to full health; their fear continues to hold them captive. Jesus sends him back to live among his former neighbours to witness to them of what God has done for him. The man, knowing who has healed him, goes about proclaiming what Jesus has done for him, witnessing to Jesus, the Son of God. Do we?

June 26th, 2022

Church of Scotland

This week the scriptural exegeses come from a different perspective than one we may be used to, and challenge us to think differently about our view of the world through the lens of scripture.

Amira Abdulgader Musa, originally from Sudan, has been in Egypt since May 2017. She is the Deputy Director of Operations at St Andrew's United Church of Cairo Refugee Services (StARS).

Gadaet Machar is South Sudanese and arrived in Egypt in 2000 at the age of 10, with his mother and two siblings, and started his education at a refugee school known as African Hope. Gadaet is a Church Council Member at St Andrew's United Church of Cairo and Senior Staff Officer of the operations team at StARS.

Sabine Chalmers, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees Co-Ordinator, spoke to Aimee, Glory and Ronke, who have lived experience of the asylum system in Scotland and are part of the Poverty Truth Community.

Rev Linda Pollock is Minister of Aberluthnott and Laurencekirk and has written the sermon ideas and further scriptural explorations.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

[Gadaet Machar]

I came to know the Lord JESUS intimately in the year 2011, and that was my greatest U-turn, the beginning of an interesting life for me and a starting point through which God began to show me the genuine things of or the things that do matter in Life.

Looking at this passage I approached it from the following perspectives:

- **Gilgal** – The Place of the Beginning
- **Bethel** – The Place of the Altar
- **Jericho** – Where one meets the Holy Spirit
- **Jordan** – The Place of Confirmation

I would like to share the perspective from Bethel and Jericho. I perceive my Life as an Altar where the Lord receives praises, adoration and honour, which always challenges me to live a life worthy of the Lord. As we all know, this is sometimes hard to live up to, even though we love to pray, "Oh Lord, help me live a life worthy of Your name".

A few years ago, I felt the Spirit of Lord was asking me – "What are some simple practices that could help you live the life you're always asking my help for?" and that got me thinking a lot and made me realise that in most cases we tend to ask for things that we see as hard and complicated, but which to God are simple and easy to do only if we allow God into the situation.

Our lives can only be Altars if we live in the Fear of God or in respect to God. Revealing and living in the Fruit of the Spirit is essential so that Christ is witnessed, irrespective of what others may say about or throw on us, just as what the Sons of Prophets did to Elisha. When we know the direction of our life and are aware that God is the one leading us, we can easily embrace the external challenges and keep walking till we meet our blessings and the promises of God which await us, and when that happens, those who once said all sort of negative stuff will be amazed, accept and praise God for our life.

The main message for me from this text is about being patient for the promises of God.

Psalms 77:1-2, 11-20 and Galatians 5:1, 13-25

[Sabine Chalmers]

The approach for both these bible passages was to meet with a group of women who have lived experience of the asylum system in Scotland and explore these passages in conversation together. The women talked about what the passages mean to them and how they relate to their experience of seeking refuge. The women involved in the study were

Aimee, Glory and Ronke, with support from the Poverty Truth Community. Most striking was their incredible resilience and deep trust and faith in God, regardless of their circumstances.

The vast majority of asylum seekers in the UK are forced into destitution as they have no right to work while they wait for their claim to asylum to be processed. They have no choice over where they live and receive just over £40 a week to survive on.

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

Aimee and Glory were immediately able to relate to this Psalm on a deeply personal level. The Psalmist expresses utter despair – they are so distressed that they can't sleep and are too troubled to utter words (v4). The writers appeal to the Lord, their cries for help seem to be unending (vv1-2) and yet they find no comfort. Surrounded by darkness and not being able to see the light, questions about God's faithfulness and love plague them. The writer feels rejected, abandoned, as if God has withdrawn God's love (vv7-9). It is in this context that Aimee and Glory share these words: "I used to think that God has rejected me, I used to think that his love had vanished. I used to ask God: 'Why am I going through this, why should I go through this? Have I taken a wrong step?' I felt forgotten by God and everyone. But now I have come to realise that God's ways are not our ways."

"Asaph is trying to acknowledge his feelings in his trials and tribulation. I feel this way, but the reality is that God is good and God is faithful."

"I was very angry when I started this journey of seeking sanctuary. I was very, very angry. I was angry because I was focussing on what the Home Office was doing, so I wasn't looking at what others were doing, and I wasn't thinking of God. At that point I realised that I lost my joy, who I was. But gratitude helped me. Seeing what I have, seeing how people were loving."

Verse 10 introduces a change of perspective in the Psalmist's mind. They refocus on who God is, recalling how holy, faithful and mighty God is.

Whilst these three resilient women had been treated as 'less than human' by the Home Office and people around them, had spent time in detention, and faced severe poverty, their attention swiftly shifted to the second half of the Psalm. They spoke powerfully of their own experiences of going through difficult times and God's word as 'spirit and truth' changing their perspective.

Aimee noted: "I connect with a lot of refugees and asylum seekers and to most of us, no matter the difficulty, God has been the one to give us strength to carry on. Faith is central to what we have been through. Like Asaph says, I will remember God's goodness. We have been facing challenges but we were reminding ourselves that the reason we are here is because God wanted us to be here. And the same God who brought us here will see us through. God's ways are holy and higher than our ways, even in trials (v13). It wasn't easy,

but faith gave us hope. Seeking asylum is a good way to know God because you see God's faithfulness."

In the midst of hardship, Aimee, Glory and Ronke are able to see God's blessing in the midst of it as God moulds them and strengthens their faith and trust in God.

Glory highlights that in the midst of feeling abandoned, feeling that God is not there for you, "we need help to understand that God's timing is the best. Help will come, and it comes at its own time. Can we trust God's timing for helping us? For knowing what we need?"

"Verses 11 and 12 strike me. Although we might feel a certain way, God has never changed. God was faithful in the past and is continuing to be faithful. There is one passage in the bible that says that God delivers us to speak about God's goodness and great deeds. This is how I walk my life. I want to thank God, to recognise His deeds, that He is God, who does everything. Nothing is bigger than God. I want to live to talk about God's goodness and mighty power."

"God's word is spirit and truth. Before, I couldn't appreciate what I have because I was taking everything for granted. Going through the asylum process had made me a better person who appreciates things and who puts God first in everything I do. I understand now that it is all grace, it is all God. We get everything from God. For me to reach this understanding I had to leave my country and come here. If I had stayed in my country, I don't know if I would have understood how everything comes from God. You think I can get this and that, but when you lose everything you have to start from scratch. You don't know anyone apart from God – even to achieve small things, you are dependent on God because you have nothing. Even to meet a single good person, it takes God."

Aimee, Glory and Ronke shared their faith with depth and authenticity. It reminded me of the quote from Corrie Ten Boom: "You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have." All three of them are keen to share the hope they have found in clinging to God in hard situations with others. They were very aware of the fact that we need to remind each other of God's goodness and faithfulness in the hard times.

"Meeting people who are facing challenges should be one of our priorities. It's not all about giving money or giving food, it's the word of God that is food. When you are there to tell this person: "It will be well, be calm, God will answer you, has not rejected you, is there for you", those words mean a lot to people who are undergoing challenges and it gives them hope, it gives them the reassurance that things will be better. It gives them the will to be patient. This is really important. We need the nourishment of God's word and we need people around us to speak it into our lives in the dark days."

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

One of the women's final remarks on Psalm 77 was: "What has been really helpful for me is when people were living out what they were saying. I've met a lot of people in this country who were just blocking me, but I've also met people who were there for me, they were loving and supportive and I could see God in them. We weren't sitting talking about the Bible, but in the way they were acting you could see that the word of God has transformed them and they wanted to give this love back. And this has been very helpful. And now I am ready to go out and share what I have received from them."

This ties in perfectly with this passage in Galatians, which declares the freedom we have in Christ. Whilst the Galatians are free from the law's requirements, they are encouraged to live out the law's essence: loving your neighbour. We are no longer under the slavery of the law so that we can choose to serve one another. It includes a call to live by the Spirit and not the flesh (v16).

Aimee highlights that we can sometimes misunderstand the freedom we have in Christ (v1). "Paul is encouraging us to live in this freedom, but in the verses, he has also given us some guidance – to love and to be a servant. Sometimes you think 'I am free, so I can do whatever I want'. But Paul is saying you have freedom, but there is also a way to live out this freedom: love our God in everything you do. You are not free to walk by your flesh. You are free to walk by the Spirit, according to the word of God."

Referring to the command in v14, the women shared their experiences on the love received from neighbours after seeking refuge here. And their reflections were most poignant – when is it easy to show love, when do we expect it, when do we take it for granted? Aimee adds: "When you are in your country you take love for granted because you think these are my people. But when you leave your country and you come into another country, this is where you understand what love means. Here I had no connection with anyone but I've seen this love, I have seen this support. People are there for you, they listen to you, they accept you with your weakness, I wasn't judged. I come with my story and people trust you – that is how I experienced love. When the Home Office tells you that you are a liar, and sees you as someone else, you lose your confidence but then you find other people who trust you, treat you with respect. They see you as you are."

Ronke added: "We came from Africa and our way of life, our tradition, and our culture are different. People look at us and see a different skin colour, everything is different. But when we came here at least we are able to find some, not all, that really accept us, who are ready to relate to us and listen to us. This gives us courage and inner peace. They love us and accept us, and even if we face challenges it gives us confidence to move on. It is really good that we have people in our lives who show us that love. Not only saying it, but showing it."

What does it look like to extend love to others in our communities (v14)? Especially those who might feel isolated and marginalised by institutions and the hostile asylum system? Is inherent trust, practical love, and genuine acceptance part of our response?

When asking Aimee, Glory and Ronke what spoke to them from verses 16-21 in the passage and how it related to their own experience, one might have expected them to recall situations when people have shown hatred and displayed these acts of the flesh towards them. The way we know people who are in the asylum system are often treated, it probably wouldn't have surprised us at all. And yet, they did the exact opposite.

Reflecting on these verses they simply started talking about the times where selfishness, greed or hatred had entered their own lives. From a human perspective they had all the right to complain, to first point the finger and identify the sin in other people's lives. One young woman in the asylum system told me that her life sometimes felt like she was in a deep dark pit. Not receiving a warm welcome, sympathy and a comfy bed where one can heal from their wounds of trauma, but instead being treated less than human. And I think here is the beauty and power of the gospel and the spirit living within us. Despite people's circumstances the Spirit is at work, weeding out discontent and frustration and enabling people to live out the fruit of the Spirit. These women were such a testimony as they humbly apply this passage to their own lives first and let the Holy Spirit help them.

One of the women said: "In terms of hatred, jealousy, envy, the fruit of the flesh – coming here has been a blessing. Why? Because these are the things I didn't know when I was back home. I didn't know jealousy, hatred or envy. But when I came here, the way the Home Office was treating me, and the way other people were looking at me, treating me like less than a human, I started to be angry, I started to envy other people, I wanted to be like them, I wanted to have this and that. I just had £30 to live on a week. It started creating bad emotions in me that I didn't know before, and yet I was a Christian. I was experiencing all these negative feelings although by nature I am a very happy person. It wasn't a good feeling. This made me stop and ask myself: The person I am seeing now, is not the person I am, and I needed to find my way back. I wanted to come back to the person who displays the fruit of the spirit. And I saw other people showing the love that I was lacking. So, I thought: Why not accept this love and give back this love?"

The women reflected on all of our need for the Spirit to lay off the works of the flesh in our own lives and display the fruit of the Spirit. "Without the Holy Spirit we can't live a life that pleases God. Doing the work of the flesh, is in our endemic nature. So, we need the Spirit of God. Some people don't want to do it [works of the flesh], but because of our nature we find ourselves doing these things. But by allowing the Holy Spirit help us in our lives, then you will be able to do the opposite. How can we get that? By reading the word of God, meditating on the word of God and trying to live the life that pleased God. That way we will show love, joy, endurance."

At the same time, Aimee and Ronke were sharing about their call to love those who do make life difficult for them. "With love you can help change people. What people don't have, they cannot give. It's our duty to show love. It requires patience. The way some people treat me, it makes me think I am not even a human being, but at the same time we remember the people that show us love. And we must show the same love to others, even if they don't love us".

How do you deal with works of the flesh in your life and what role does the Holy Spirit have? How do you encounter people who show you anger or hostility? How can we encourage each other to show the fruit of the Spirit?

Luke 9:51-62

[Amira Abdulgader]

What comes to your mind when someone tells you follow the Lord? How does it sound? How do you want to follow Jesus? When the time of His cross had come or His time on earth had come to an end, Jesus was heading to Jerusalem and had to pass through the village of Samaritans. But He was not accepted, because He was heading to Jerusalem (vv51-52). Many of us might not be accepted because we are heading towards Jesus, but Jesus said the world will not accept you because it did not accept Him. As long as we are following and heading towards Jesus, the world will not accept us. But will you stop there because it did not accept you, or will you continue as Jesus continued to Jerusalem?

Jesus' disciples asked Him to bring fire from heaven to burn the people of the Samaritan village because they refused to accept Him, but Jesus replied to them: "don't you know the Spirit in you?" referring to the Holy Spirit which is a Spirit of peace. The Lord Has come to save people's lives and not to destroy them. This is teaching us that when our enemies do us wrong, we cannot do the same against them. The Spirit of the Lord teaches us peace. We cannot take an eye for an eye. We, the followers of Jesus, have to be full of love, care and peace to others and especially to our enemies – those who do us wrong.

A certain man asked to follow Jesus but he did not know the reality of following Jesus (vv57-61). He did not know that he has to carry his cross and follow Him every day. It's not about going to the church every week but it's about doing the will of God: each must carry his cross – we must show peace, love and compassion to others.

Jesus asked two people to follow Him, but they wanted to do other things first. They were very busy with other stuff and they were not ready yet to follow Jesus. This teaches us that we have to make a decision whether to follow Jesus or do other stuff.

A lot of us are busy with other stuff and have not given our heart, body, mind, family and even wealth to Jesus yet. We cannot serve two masters. It's either Jesus or other stuff. We have to submit to the Lord. The Lord doesn't accept us when we are divided between God and the world. Jesus said to the last person (v62) "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God". The Lord wants us to do greater things; winning souls to the Lord. Are you doing this? Are you winning souls to the Lord? Think about it and start acting on it.