

“ARE YOU SERIOUS?”

10. Called to a life of fulfilment

John 10:10

This series about discipleship is drawing to its close: we’re going to be looking at some other topics as we move towards Easter. You will remember that this is something that, at the church vision day last autumn, many people felt should be at the top of our agenda as a church. If we are to involve ourselves in all the other things we do as a church, if we are truly to fulfil the mission we believe God has given us to be “*A church at the heart of the city with Christ at the heart of the church*”, then we need to ensure that we ourselves are living as God wants us to. We worship, work and witness together, but we must not forget that we relate to Jesus Christ on a personal level, too – men and women who are being changed by him and whom he has called to be his disciples, to follow him, to commit ourselves to him.

So we’ve seen that we are called **by Jesus**, called **to Jesus**, called to **give of our resources**, called to **live in community**, and called to a **particular lifestyle**, a set of attitudes and a worldview that shape our words and behaviour. It’s hard stuff, really, because it seems there’s a lot of commitment involved. But we take heart from the fact that Jesus has also **called us to be his friends** – he has let us in on the amazing mystery of God’s grace and given us a glimpse of what life can be like in his Kingdom, under God’s righteous and benevolent rule. But there’s one other thing it’s right to reflect on, something that I hope will be an encouragement rather than yet another apparent demand on our lives, and there’s where we’re going to focus our thoughts today. The starting point is those wonderful words with which our reading finished this morning – “*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*” God want us to live lives that are “*full*”, that are satisfying and fulfilling, that help us be who we were meant to be.

If you drive along the road by the power station in Rugeley you cannot fail to notice that opposite the power station there is a huge warehouse with a constant stream of lorries going in and out, all bearing the same logo and full of goods from Mr Jeff Bezos’ global corner shop. It’s the Amazon warehouse. Except they don’t call it a warehouse: they call it a “fulfilment centre”. Under the name on the side of this massive shed is the single word “*Fulfilment*”. That, of course, does not refer to the fulfilled lives of the workers – nor, indeed, to the dreams of the aforementioned Mr Bezos. It refers, I believe, to the purpose of the enterprise. And that is to get things from where they are to where they are meant to be. We are, as disciples, called to a life of fulfilment: following Jesus is all about getting where we are meant to be, to where God wants us to be so that we can get the very best from the life that he’s given us.

You see, underlying all this, the thread that runs through the whole Bible, that winds its way through the history of this world, that gives the Church and the disciples within in it their *raison d’être*, is God’s great project of transformation. Call it grace, call it mercy, call it righteousness – it’s about transforming a

world that is currently not how God intended it to be. God put together an amazing creation: the vast, unimaginable starfields and galaxies, black holes and supernova that stretch out beyond anything we can imagine, let alone experience; the intricate systems of DNA and clusters of micro-organisms that form the smallest building blocks of life in the universe; the colours and sights and smells and sounds and textures and tastes of this world, this little corner of the universe in which we reside; the beauty of a world filled with so much that is awe-inspiring and wonderful. And when God made it, however you want to interpret those opening chapters of *Genesis*, it was good. God said so himself.

Into that perfect environment God placed human beings – men and women at one with each other, at one with creation and at one with God. It was amazing! Everything was perfect. Humanity lived as God wanted them to – fulfilled in their task of co-stewarding creation with him and satisfied with all that he had provided for them. Wordsworth wrote a poem about the French Revolution, a human event seen through very human eyes, but what he said about that could more properly have been written about that new, unspoiled creation: *“bliss was it in that dawn to be alive”*.

And then things started to go wrong. Somehow – and philosophers and theologians down through the centuries have pondered how and why it happened – somehow evil started to leak into that paradise. Deep within humanity’s heart the first stirrings of what we now call sin began to make themselves felt. The powers of evil, however you envisage them, cast their evil spell over that world and things were never, ever the same again. It led to violence, to selfishness, to broken relationships, to environmental exploitation, to war, to greed, to poverty of body and spirit, to disease and illness, to frustration and decay and despair.

It was not the way God wanted it. The lives of his much-loved creatures were spoiled and marred by this evil. He wanted humanity to return to that blissful dawn. And right from the very outset, God promised that he would do something about it. He would transform things so that we could enjoy life as he intended us to. He wanted to **renew his creation**, which we referred to last week. Paul told the Corinthians that in Jesus there would be *“a new creation”*. Things would all return to their factory settings as God **returned all things to what he intended**. And central to that was his desire to **restore our humanity**, to make us what we were meant to be, to make us once again obviously creatures made in his image, taking us from where we are to where we are meant to be. It is, as Jesus said to Nicodemus, like being born all over again, starting afresh.

To bring about that transformation God eventually sent Jesus into this world, this Jesus who calls us to be a part of his Kingdom, to be his disciples. Jesus is God’s means of getting us back from where we are to where we are meant to be, of restoring in us his image, our authentic humanity. He came proclaiming this

message of transformation, this call to allow him to change us back to what God intended, to return to a life that is satisfying and in line with what God wants for us, so that we can enjoy *“life to the full”*. He pointed to it in his teaching, in his discussions and debates with supporters and opponents alike, in his stories and riddles, and prophecies and parables, in his conversations with his friends and disciples, in his defence at trials and tribunals.

And he came not only proclaiming it, but demonstrating what this life could look like as he healed the diseased and disabled, as he fed the hungry and gave hope to the hopeless, as he raised the dead and cast out the demons, as he encouraged the despairing and challenged the complacent. These glimpses of the life in the Kingdom of God pointed towards the fulfilment that was on its way.

Then he went to the cross, *“emptying himself of all but love”* to make possible this transformation. As he hung there between heaven and earth, his prayers going up to the Father and his blood dripping down onto the earth, he confronted those powers of evil that had caused so much havoc for millennia, that had ruined God’s good creation and tarnished the image of God in humanity: and drawing them all into himself, he neutralised them, rendering them ultimately powerless and opening up the way to God once again. Now humanity had the opportunity to return to that relationship with God that he wanted when he first out this world together, a relationship that means fulfilment and satisfaction for all eternity – and starting now.

You see, that is what we are truly called to. God, through Jesus Christ, is inviting us back to that blissful dawn, giving us the opportunity to experience life in all its fullness, life as it is meant to be. We all have times when we feel frustrated, when we feel we’re going nowhere, when we feel we have no hope, when we just wonder what it’s all about. Although defeated, the forces of evil are still at work in our world, doing as much damage as they can before they are eventually consigned to the oblivion of eternity; still thrashing round like a criminal captured by the police but still doing all he can to hurt those around him and wreck his cell before he’s sent off to court and prison. We are still affected by that, but we can have the sure and certain hope that there is something beyond this, something that will truly allow us to be free for eternity in the presence of God, that these troubles are just for a time.

That life in all its fullness that Jesus promises, that he came to make possible, can start to be a reality now. As we answer that call, as we accept Jesus’ invitation to be his disciples, he puts us back into a **right relationship with God**. We get to enjoy God as Father, the perfect Father who cares for us and watches over us and encourages us and protects us, the God who gives us a reason to live and hope for the future. We can put behind us the difficulties and problems of the past, the regrets and remorse that can weigh us down, the resentments and grudges that distort our judgement, as we receive his forgiveness.

We can experience God's guidance and encouragement in the ups and downs of the present as we pray for his help and plead for his protection. We can be filled with a hope and a sense of anticipation about the eternal future as we recognise that when we stand before our Creator and Judge at the end of this life, Jesus will be there to speak up for us. That is mind-blowingly, gob-smackingly good news. How can anyone not want to try it?

And as we move closer to God by accepting his gracious invitation, so we move closer to each other, because accepting Jesus' invitation to be his disciples also puts us back into a **right relationship with each other**. Much of our frustration and dissatisfaction with life comes from our circumstances, but, let's be honest, a heck of a lot of it comes from the way we relate to other people, the way we feel we are treated by them, the ways they respond to us and seem to annoy us – or worse. Even in a church we find the biggest problems are often to do with the way we interact with each other. As the powers of evil are dealt with in our own lives, so we find ourselves becoming more patient, more loving, more accepting of each other. We find the strength to forgive and receive forgiveness. We find the courage to take the initiative in putting things right with others. We find the humility to admit when we're in the wrong. If Jesus calls us to be a part of a community, he gives us the means to make that community work, he fills us with the love we need to try and live together as we were originally intended to live.

Then, as we start to accept that our fulfilment comes from living as we were originally intended to live, so we come closer to being those good stewards that we were created to be. Accepting Jesus' invitation to be his disciples also puts us back into a **right relationship with creation**. We see our responsibility to ensure that we do not use our call to stewardship as a means to exploit what God has created and surrounded us with for our own selfish reasons. Our current environmental problems are the result of humanity's refusal to accept the truth about God's creation and all that springs from that. If we do not spend all our time trying to drag from that creation things that we weren't meant to, that God did not intend, then a lot of our frustration disappears and we are left able to enjoy what we have, and lived fulfilled lives ensuring that we keep this world sustainable and share its benefits with others rather than appropriating it all for ourselves.

So that is what we are called to as disciples of Jesus. God wants us to enjoy his world and our lives within it as he originally intended. Jesus has made that choice possible through his life, death and resurrection. And it is a choice. The offer is there, but you have to take it up, you have to reply to the invitation. Being a disciple of Jesus is the single most fulfilling thing you could choose to do – ultimately the only truly fulfilling thing you can choose to do. Again this morning, Jesus offers you life in all its fullness – an eternal life in his Kingdom, under God's all-wise and gracious rule – and you can start to

enjoy that life here and now. If we are to reach out to this community, to this city, we need to do it as people who experience and model a life of fulfilment. Are you serious about that?

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As disciples, we are called **by Jesus**, called **to Jesus**, called to **give of our resources**, called to **live in community**, and called to a **particular lifestyle**. Jesus has also **called us to be his friends** – he has let us in on the amazing mystery of God's grace and given us a glimpse of what life can be like in his Kingdom, under God's righteous and benevolent rule. This week we focus on Jesus' words, "*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*" We are, as disciples, called to a life of fulfilment: following Jesus is all about getting where we are meant to be, to where God wants us to be so that we can get the very best from the life that he's given us.

Underlying all this is God's great project of transformation. God put together an amazing creation and into that perfect environment God placed human beings – men and women at one with each other, at one with creation and at one with God. And then things started to go wrong. Deep within humanity's heart the first stirrings of what we now call sin began to make themselves felt. The powers of evil, however you envisage them, cast their evil spell over that world and things were never, ever the same again.

It was not the way God wanted it, but he promised that he would do something about it.

- He wanted to **renew his creation**.
- God intended to **return all things to what he intended**.
- Central to that was his desire to **restore our humanity**, to make us what we were meant to be.

To bring about that transformation God eventually sent Jesus into this world. He went to the cross, "*emptying himself of all but love*" to make possible this transformation. Now humanity had the opportunity to return to that relationship with God that he wanted when he first put this world together, a relationship that means fulfilment and satisfaction for all eternity – and starting now.

That is what we are truly called to. God, through Jesus Christ, is giving us the opportunity to experience life in all its fullness, life as it is meant to be.

As we accept Jesus' invitation to be his disciples, he puts us back into:

A right relationship with God.

A right relationship with each other

A right relationship with creation.

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Questions for reflection & discussion

- 1) What do you understand by "*Life in all its fullness*"?
- 2) What do you think prevents us from enjoying that fulfilled life?
- 3) What are the signs of a right relationship with God? with each other?
- 4) If God is going to renew creation himself, why should we bother taking care of it now?

5) Is there anything in this series that has really caused you to make changes in your life? What are you going to do about your own walk of discipleship?