

Yes

Part 5, Revelations 21:1-6

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. (Revelation 21:1-6)

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. (Revelations 21:6b)

This Sunday we attempted to unpack church and give a simple explanation and challenge about becoming a Christian. So let's reflect on this exercise. (we have included the script and the message on following pages as some of the questions are about what was said in the service.)

1. Is CHURCH all that strange and mysterious to the uninitiated?
2. How difficult would it be for someone with limited or no knowledge of church to follow a service?
3. What do you think might be the most mystifying part of coming to church for the first time?
4. Do you think our attempt to help guide people who are unfamiliar with what Christians do – was helpful or unhelpful? Would you do it another way?
5. We were trying very hard to use plain language and avoid Christianese, how do you think we went in that area? What in your opinion are the words in the Christian lexicon that would most mystify the uninitiated?
6. What would be some helpful things we could do to help people coming to church for the first time?

We also made an appeal for people to commit their lives to Jesus in this service.

7. Are altar calls still an important part of what we do in church? What might be the pros and cons?
8. How would you judge the effectiveness of the appeal on Sunday? What could be done to make it more effective?
9. What are some of the key ways that we can encourage our friends and families to consider Christ?
10. Take some time to pray about some of those friends and family members.

Church Unpacked Script

Explanation: Years ago we were in the Solomon Islands at a feast and in the centre of the feast was this big table full of giant coconut crabs. We had no idea how to eat these things until one of our hosts tapped us on the shoulder, grabbed a crab and a couple of stones and showed us how to crack the crabs open with the stones. The crabs were utterly delicious but our host helping us navigate an unfamiliar setting; that was gold.

We are trying to do something a bit the same this morning with church unpacked. This is a time when we invite friends and family who are not very familiar with Christianity and we just going to try to guide you through what it is Christians do and why we do them.

Call: The purpose of a Sunday service like this, is to help a community of people personally to encounter God. It usually begins with, a call to worship, which is a reminder that what we are about to do in reaching out to God is going to require our focus.

What normally happens after the call to worship is that we sing. Christians have always sung, we find it a powerful way to engage with God and to speak to God. We also generally stand as we sing as a sign of honouring God and it also frees our bodies as we reach out.

So – the Bible says – That when we draw near to God, He will draw near to us – will you stand with us as we sing?

Prayer: Christians daily reach out to God through personal prayer, but when we are together someone will generally lead the community in prayer. There is a rhythm or a pattern to our prayers sprinkled throughout a service. We generally begin with thanks and praise to God, we then acknowledge God's impact on our lives, we pray for others and the world and finally we ask God to make us a force for good as we go out into the world.

So let us pray: *Dear God, we thank You for Your great love. The universe is a very big and lonely place and we are extremely grateful that you have reached out to us. We are particularly grateful to know your son Jesus, not as our judge but as our friend, as someone who opens your world to our world.*

We are stunned that you Jesus, would enter into the darkest and most evil dimensions of our life. You were arrested, accused falsely, tortured and put to death on a cross. You did this to save us from our own evil, you did this so there is a power in this world that can transform our heart. We thank you for the cross, and we call upon its power right now to change us from empty to purposeful, from selfish to serving, from hating to loving. We thank you that your cross means we are forgiven and that every day is new. We thank you, in Jesus name we pray. Amen

Community Life: While most of a Christian service is about our relationship with God, it also about our community. So in every service we stop and talk about what's going on in our church and in people's lives and service to God. To speed the process up this morning we prepared a sheet which will tell you some of the things that are happening at the moment.

Giving to God: Part of this community time also involves a time of giving. For over 4,000 years God's people have given some of what we earn to God. We do this as a way of acknowledging that everything comes to us as a gift from God. If God hadn't created life, there would be nothing. So we give back and we are going to do that now.

There will be some giving bags coming around but do not be under any obligation to give, this is one of the ways that believers honour the goodness of God. As we take up our giving we will also have a time of meditating on the goodness of God in song, we will remain seated.

Prayers for the world: God does not call us to live in isolation but to live compassionately engaged with the world that God loves. We believe that God has the power to transform people and nations so each week we pray for others

Dear Loving God , nations and peoples come and go amidst the eternity of your good purposes, governments and dictators, presidents and prime ministers, military juntas and civilian administrations, all are weighed in the balance of your history, tested by your justice, and found wanting. For our planet is not always well governed and a lot of evil happens to people that really shouldn't happen.

We pray for families trying to keep track of one another amidst chaos and war.

We pray for those who tremble in fear of what this new day might bring.

We pray for those who find their businesses burning and their bodies broken.

We pray for the dying and those who mourn for a loved one.

We pray for police and army who have taken sides and now find themselves tested by the spirit of their neighbours.

We pray for leaders watching from behind the gilded cages they have built for themselves.

We pray for those who have great power behind the scenes, that they might be touched by the deep longings of their people for a better life and let change be.

We pray for the United Nations in its faltering watch over our world; may its corridors and meeting rooms be the places for urgent conversation that averts violence and brutality.

We pray for our government, that we might be part of a better dawn for people of a distant land.

We pray for ourselves, that we might be more than watchers of news.

*God of the nations and all their peoples, hear our prayer, **Amen***

The Bible reading: Our best knowledge about God comes from the Bible and because of this when we get together the Bible is always read and then someone will try to help the community understand what God is saying through the Bible to us today and to apply that understanding to our daily lives.

Message

What I want to briefly talk about today is what it means to become a Christian



There are really only two explanations for the meaning of life.

Either; life is created, and its meaning is found in its creator, the one who is in the beginning and in the end and therefore in our beginning and in our end.

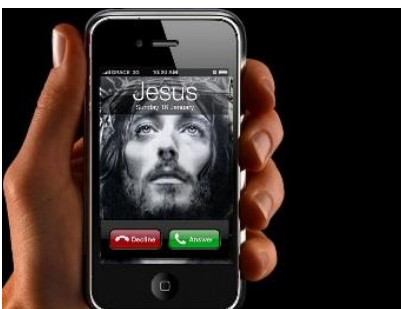


Or life is merely the product of physical forces and there really is no meaning.

Christians believe that life was created, that there is a God and because there is a God there is a rational reason for everything, including our existence.



But it would make no sense for a rational God to create rational beings and then not communicate with them.

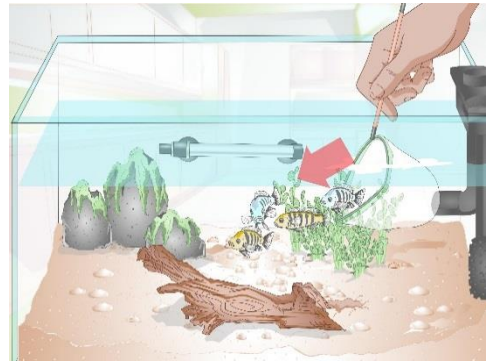


Which brings us to Jesus, Jesus is God's communication, his call out to us

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
(Colossians 1:15)

When we meet Jesus we meet God, when Jesus speaks, God is speaking, when Jesus explains, God is explaining, when Jesus loves us, God is loving us. It's a good plan when you think about it.

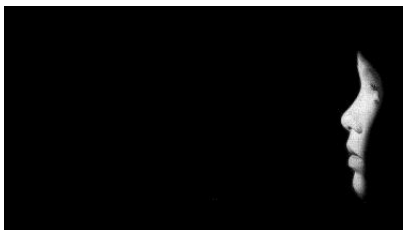
I once had a fish tank but from time to time my fish would get sick with a thing called fin rot. So I spoke to the pet shop guy and he told me to catch the fish with a net and dose them with some medicine. The only trouble was that the fish would not cooperate, they would be terrified by the giant hand with the net suddenly appearing in their world and they would swim frantically around the tank, smacking into the glass and into the fake pirate ship. I did not want to terrify the poor little fish but I needed to save their life, but we were such different creatures that communication was practically impossible. If only there was a way that I could communicate with my fish that would not freak them out.



What I needed was a Nemo – someone who could communicate with my fish.



Jesus is God’s Nemo = God becoming a human being in order to communicate with human beings and that communications pretty urgent because just like the fish in my tank we human beings are sick.



When it makes good sense that we should love and care for our children it makes no sense that we have a lot of children who are harmed rather than loved. When it makes good sense to work together to build a life on this planet it makes no sense that we have wars and that we kill each other. When it makes good sense to share what we have with each other, it makes no sense that we keep stuff for ourselves, often stuff we don’t use. When it makes good sense to help people it makes no sense that we end up hurting others. When it makes good sense to love and value ourselves it makes no sense that we struggle with guilt and self-loathing and sometimes we harm ourselves. We do this because there is a sickness in us, God calls it sin and because God loves us he desperately wants to talk to us about it and so God sends Jesus to plead with us, to beg us, to use the cure that will heal us from the darkness of sin.



That is what the cross is, God’s cure for what is wrong with us. The innocent son of God dying to cure our sin.

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. (1 Peter 3:18 NLT)

But a loving God wants to do more than just call out to us and cure us he also wants to care for us, to heal us and help us to become whole, happy joyous people.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28, NIV)

And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT)

So Christianity is the belief that through Jesus we hear Gods call, we receive Gods cure and we benefit from God’s care.

And to receive all that - all we need to do is make Jesus the centre of our life. That’s what I did when I was 18, I said yes to Jesus, I made a decision that He would be the centre of my life. That was the biggest and the best decision I ever made, but it was not the easiest decision. I really struggled with that decision.

At the time there was something about making Jesus the centre of my life that didn’t seem right, it didn’t look right it didn’t feel right.

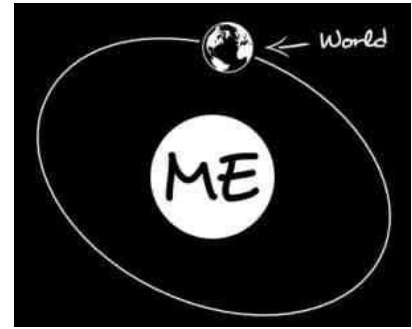


It has taken me a long time to realise that those difficult feelings came from my own culture. Culture, is like your family, it provide us with values and we often don’t realise how powerful an influence those values are.

My wife Deb and I lived in the Solomon Islands for a while. In that culture when you are with friends, men hold hands with men and woman hold hands with women. Which is fine until a Solomon Islander friend of mine took hold of my hand as we were walking around – and inside I freaked out a little bit. It felt wrong but only because my culture had taught me that wasn’t what you are supposed to do.



When Jesus asked to be the centre of my life I felt there was something wrong with that because my culture had taught me that the only person who should be the centre of my life was me or my one true love. My culture had given me the idea that my only chance for happiness was for me to be in the centre and to be in total control of my own life. Over time I've discovered that kind of thinking is not helpful. I was never so miserable than when I was completely in charge of my own life and my happiest moments are when I have completely surrendered my life to Jesus.



But the thing about Jesus is that it really doesn't matter how we feel, it doesn't matter if we don't quite understand, it doesn't matter if our life is brilliant or a disaster, because Jesus is alive in the world today and he is taking the initiative to know you, to have a relationship with you. Jesus says: *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.* (Revelation 3:20). Jesus has knocked on the door of your life a number of times and he will continue to do so but you will not be able to experience his fullness, to hear His call, to experience His cure and to enter into His care unless you say yes to him.



The reason we challenge people to make a commitment is because without a commitment Jesus remains on the other side of the door and it is so much better when Jesus is with us. So if you are ready to say yes to Jesus, simply hand over control of your life to Jesus. If that's what you are ready to do then pray this prayer with me.



Jesus, I have heard your knock on the door of my heart and now I am saying yes to you. From this moment on I want you to be the centre of my life. I invite you to call me, to cure me of the darkness of sin and to cover me with your care. I ask you to teach me your ways, to fill me with your love and with your Holy Spirit. Amen

If you said yes to Jesus this morning then you might like to come down the front and talk to Paul.